



BIRKENHEAD SCHOOL

Relationships and Sex Education Policy

Aim and objectives

Birkenhead School's overarching aim is to provide an inclusive and welcoming community for all students, parents and staff, underpinned by the Christian Foundations of the School, creating a culture of zero tolerance for sexism, misogyny/misandry, homo/bi/trans phobia and sexual violence/harassment. This policy applies to all students, including those in the Early Years. All Relationships and Sex Education topics are delivered in an age-appropriate and proportionate manner.

Our Relationships and Sex Education programme values the qualities of stable relationships, marriage and family life, without bias to any particular family structure. We recognise that these aims are only possible if students feel safe and able to make safe decisions. RSE is a vital to preparing students to make these decisions. This policy follows the statutory guidance given by the government (DfE) and meets the requirements of the Independent School Standards. This policy should be read in conjunction with:

- Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy
- PSHE Policy

This policy has been developed in consultation with teachers, parents and governors.

Rationale

We define 'relationships and sex education' as learning about physical, moral and emotional development that students need in order to understand their own and others' sexuality. Whilst knowledge of biology and the reproductive system is important, RSE is concerned with attitudes and values, personal and social skills, respect for self and others, family, stable loving relationships, feelings, gender roles and decision-making. It is about the physical, emotional, social, moral and legal dimensions of human sexuality, as well as factual teaching about sex, sexuality and sexual health.

We believe it is important to address this area of the curriculum, because students have a universal entitlement to learning that will enable them to live safe, fulfilled and healthy lives. The programme contributes to protecting children and students by addressing national and local health priorities.

Recent NSPCC studies have also directly informed the programme. The programme also acts to protect children and students from concerns raised through the pastoral system in school. Aspects of RSE are a statutory entitlement for all students. It provides a comprehensive body of knowledge and understanding about sexual health to manage fertility and avoid infection.

Aims and Objectives

RSE, as part of the PSHE education curriculum, is vital to the development of the students. There is one lesson of taught PSHE per week delivered largely by Form Tutors. Elements of the programme may be supported by the bringing in of additional expertise, such as outside speakers, trained health professionals, or the use of teachers with a particular interest or knowledge in a particular area. In addition to these lessons, PSE/RSE is also delivered during the BtC programme in Year 7 and 8, and it is embedded through the curriculum.

The planned programmes are designed to help them deal with the difficult moral, social and health-related issues that arise in their lives and in society. They also help them to develop the knowledge, skills and understanding that they need to live confident, healthy, independent lives as individuals, parents, workers and members of society. Effective RSE is a key component in our approach to safeguarding our students through the curriculum.

Roles and Responsibilities

The person with responsibility for the overview and yearly evaluation of this policy is Lisa Cormack in Seniors and Natalie Brand in Prep. However, all staff are responsible for ensuring this policy is implemented and acted upon. The DSL, Graham Murdoch, is responsible for ensuring that RSE is taught consistently across the School, and for managing requests to withdraw students from non-statutory components of RSE.

The intended learning outcomes

Through the RSE Curriculum in Prep, we aim for students to:

- Develop the confidence to talk, listen and think about feelings and relationships
- Make and maintain friendships
- Understand the importance of respect, responsibility, love and care in relationships
- Understand and respect different types of families, including families with same sex parents
- Develop positive attitudes about growing up
- Explore their own and other people's attitudes and values
- Challenge and prevent discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender
- Prevent sexist, sexual, homophobic and transphobic language and bullying
- Challenge gender stereotypes and inequality and promote equality and respect in relationships
- Know the correct biological names for the parts of the body, including the male and female reproductive parts
- Know and understand about emotional, social and physical changes at puberty
- Know and understand about reproduction
- Know about human sexuality
- Discuss their concerns and correct misunderstanding they may have gained from the media and peers

- Keep safe online and offline
- Recognise when something is risky or unsafe
- Know where and how to seek information and advice when they need help

By the end of Year 9 Students will be able to:

- Manage changing relationships
- Recognise risk of personal safety in sexual behaviour and be able to make safe decisions
- Ask for help and support
- Explain the relationship between their self-esteem and how they see themselves
- Develop skills of assertiveness in order to resist peer pressure and stereotyping
- See the complexity of moral, social and cultural issues and be able to form their own view
- Develop good interpersonal skills to sustain existing relationships as they grow and change and to help them make new relationships
- Be tolerant of the diversity of personal, social and sexual preference in relationships
- Develop empathy with the core values of family life in all its variety of forms
- Recognise the need for commitment, trust and love in meaningful relationships which may manifest themselves in a variety of forms, including marriage
- Recognise the stage of emotions in relation to loss and change caused by divorce, separation and new family members and how to manage their feelings positively

Students will know and understand:

- That fertilisation in humans is the fusion of the male and female cell
- The physical and emotional changes that take place during adolescence
- About the human reproductive system, including the menstrual cycle and fertilisation
- How the foetus develops in the uterus
- How the growth and reproduction of bacteria and the replication of viruses can affect health
- How the media influences understanding and attitudes towards sexual health
- How good relationships can promote mental wellbeing
- The law relating to sexual behaviour of students
- A range of sources of advice and support
- About when and where to get help, such as genito-urinary medicine clinics

Students will have considered:

- The benefits of sexual behaviour within a committed relationship
- How self-concept affects their self-confidence and behaviour
- The importance of respecting differences in relation to gender and sexuality
- How it feels to be different and be discriminated against
- Issues such as the possible effects of early sexual activity
- The unacceptability of prejudice and homophobic bullying
- What rights and responsibilities mean in relationships
- The risks of sexual exploitation, sextortion and deepfakes (from September 2026)

By the end of Upper 6th Students will be able to:

- Recognise the influences and pressures around sexual behaviour and respond appropriately and confidently seek professional health advice
- Manage emotions associated with changing relationships with parents and friends
- See both sides of an argument and express and justify a personal opinion
- Have the determination to stand up for their beliefs and values
- Make informed choices about their sexual identity and behaviour
- Have the confidence to assert themselves and challenge offending behaviour
- Develop qualities of empathy and sympathy and the ability to respond emotionally to the range and depth of feelings within close relationships
- Work co-operatively with a range of people who are different from themselves
- Recognise attributes of positive and negative relationships

Students will know and understand:

- The way in which hormonal control occurs, including the effects of the sex hormones
- Some medical uses of hormones including the control and promotion of fertility
- The defence mechanisms of the body
- How sex is determined in humans
- How HIV and other sexually transmitted infections affect the body
- The possible risks of early sexual activity and the link with the use of alcohol and drugs
- The link between eating disorders and self-image and sexual identity
- How different forms of contraception work and where to get advice
- The role of statutory and voluntary organisations
- The law in relation to sexual activity for students and adults
- How their own identity is influenced by their personal values, those of their family and of society
- How to respond appropriately within a range of social relationships
- The qualities of good parenting and its value to family life
- How to access the statutory and voluntary agencies which support relationships in crisis
- The benefits of a stable partnership in bringing up children, including same-sex relationships
- The way different forms of relationships, including marriage, depend for their success on maturity and commitment

Students will have considered:

- Their developing sense of sexual identity and feel confident and comfortable with it
- How personal, family and social values influence behaviour
- The arguments around moral issues such as abortion, contraception and the age of consent
- The individual contributions made by partners in a sustained relationship and how these can be of joy or benefit to both

- The consequences of close relationships, including having children and how this will create family ties which impact on their lives and those of others.

How will we assess this learning?

As with any learning, the assessment of students' personal, social and emotional development is important. We will assess students' learning through in-class question and answer, discussion, group work, peer assessment, self-assessment and marking. RSE sessions will be observed by Heads of Year, the Head of PSHE, the Assistant Head Pastoral and the Deputy Head.

Inclusion and differentiation

Our RSE programmes recognise that students will bring prior learning and real-life experiences to their learning. Our programmes respect and build on these, providing programmes that reflect both the universal and unique needs of our students. In this way, the programmes recognise and respect students' different abilities, levels of maturity and personal circumstances; for example, their own sexual orientation, faith or culture (which may, depending on their age and maturity, not be something they have yet considered or may be emerging) or the sexual orientation, faith or culture of their immediate family, close friends and wider community. Our programme respects all protected characteristics, including sexual orientation and gender reassignment. From September 2026, the PSHE curriculum will include facts about the law surrounding gender reassignment.

Students with additional educational needs

As far as is appropriate, students with special educational needs follow the same RSE programme as all other students. Careful consideration is given concerning the level of differentiation needed, and in some cases, the content or delivery will be adapted. It is the school's policy not to withdraw students with special educational needs from RSE to catch up on other subjects, as we believe that these aspects of personal and social development are as important as academic achievement.

The programmes are led by the Heads of PSHE within Prep and Seniors and monitored by the Assistant Head Pastoral. Topics will be covered with sensitivity and respect for all viewpoints.

Parents' and carers' involvement

We are committed to working with parents and carers. Parents and carers are invited to contact the school directly with any queries or concerns. The resources used are also available on request. Parents and carers have a right to withdraw their children from Sex Education content in writing to the Deputy Head of Prep or Assistant Head (Pastoral) in Seniors. The parental right to withdraw students from Sex Education ends three terms before the students' sixteenth birthday, after which the student reserves the right to attend, or not. This right to withdraw does not include the content covered within the Science curriculum nor does it cover PSHE or Relationships content.

Support for children who are withdrawn from the programme

If a parent or carer requests that their child be removed from Sex Education, the school will provide support by ensuring the child understands that if they have questions, they may still speak with a member of staff directly. The school will also provide other PSHE education work on the themes of positive social relationships and managing change. This will be completed in a supervised location in school. Students who have been withdrawn from the Sex Education elements of the RSE programme may still ask questions of staff.

Training for Staff

Staff are trained on the delivery of RSE as part of our continuing professional development programme. This training could be delivered by our Head of PSHE/RSE, an external provider such as 'Brook' or 'It Happens', or as an online course.

How will we ensure that our equalities obligations are fulfilled?

We promote the needs and interests of all students, irrespective of gender, culture, ability or aptitude. Teaching pedagogy will take into account the ability, age, readiness and cultural backgrounds of the students to ensure that all can access the full RSE provision. We promote social learning and expect our students to show a high regard for the needs of others. RSE is an important vehicle for addressing both multicultural and gender issues and for ensuring equal opportunities for all. In most cases, class teachers deliver RSE to the children in their year group.

Although the majority of the curriculum is delivered to mixed classes, on occasion, the children are split into single sex groups to enable children to feel comfortable and confident to ask questions on issues such as puberty and body changes. Some aspects of the programme are delivered by the School Nurse, or external professionals. When external agencies are used, parents will receive notification of this in advance, along with the areas to be covered in the workshop. All external agencies will be approved by the Head of PSHE. Learning about relationships and sex in PSHE classes will complement learning in Science (primarily Biology) and Religious Education. For a more detailed view of where and when aspects are delivered across the School, please see the relevant PSHE education overview/curriculum document for 2025-26, which is available on request. We recognise that parents have a legal right to know what is being taught in PSHE.

We will allow students to raise anonymous questions by having scheduled lessons in which students may write anonymous questions and drop them into a box. These questions will be answered, if appropriate, during lesson time, however students are also encouraged to speak with their teacher discreetly after the lesson if they wish. If a student discloses information which is of concern with regards child protection, the procedure outlined in the Safeguarding Policy will be followed.

Dialogue between the RSE team and pastoral staff will ensure that any students who are thought to be 'at risk' are supported through sensitive discussion of topics. Students are also able to take a timeout if a topic is in anyway distressing for them. They will not be made to discuss this, rather they will be offered support if required.

Graham Murdoch 24th September 2025

To be reviewed September 2026