

Ascend Learning Trust

Relationships, Sex and Health Education Policy

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Contents

Version Control

| Version | Details | Author | Date |
|---------|--|------------------------|---------------------------|
| 1.0 | Policy formation | Emma Howarth Barnes | 31 st Jan 2025 |
| | Updates: Reference 2026 statutory guidance Updated definition Included defined sequenced curriculum model Include expanded safeguarding content (online, misogyny, exploitation) Show skills-based learning approach Strengthen parent engagement model Include QA + impact evidence expectations Align governance explicitly to Para 61 | Emma Howarth Barnes | May'26 |

Related Policies

Policy Statement

This policy reflects the updated statutory guidance: *“Relationships Education, Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) and Health Education – for implementation from 1 September 2026 (DfE, July 2025)”*

It sets out our approach to relationships and sex education Across the Ascend Learning Trust (hereafter referred to as the Trust).

This policy aims to:

- Provide a framework in which sensitive discussions can take place
- Prepare pupils for puberty, and give them an understanding of sexual development and the importance of health and hygiene
- Help pupils develop feelings of self-respect, confidence and empathy
- Create a positive culture around issues of sexuality and relationships
- Teach pupils the correct vocabulary to describe themselves and their bodies
- Teach pupils to apply learning in real-life situations to keep themselves safe.

RSHE is a core element of the Trust's safeguarding curriculum. It equips pupils to:

- Recognise harm, exploitation and unhealthy relationships
- Understand risk in both **online and offline contexts**
- Know how to report concerns and seek support

The curriculum is aligned with:

- Keeping Children Safe in Education (KCSIE)
- Behaviour and online safety policies

Legislation and Statutory Requirements

In our primary academies, we must provide relationships education to all pupils as per section 34 of the Children and Social Work Act 2017. This legislation also requires us to provide RSE to all pupils at our secondary academies.

We do not have to follow the National Curriculum but we are expected to offer all pupils a curriculum that is similar to the National Curriculum including requirements to teach science. This would include the elements of sex education contained in the science curriculum at primary level. In teaching RSE, we're required by our funding agreements to have regard to guidance issued by the secretary of state as outlined in section 403 of the Education Act 1996.

We also have regard to legal duties set out in:

- Sections 406 and 407 of the Education Act 1996 · Part 6, chapter 1 of the Equality Act 2010
- The Public Sector Equality Duty (as set out in section 149 of the Equality Act 2010). This duty requires public bodies to have due regard to the need to

eliminate discrimination, advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between different people when carrying out their activities

- The Relationships Education, Relationships and Sex Education and Health Education (England) Regulations 2019
- DfE (2013) 'Science programmes of study: key stages 1 and 2'
- DfE (2025) 'Relationships Education, Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) and Health Education'
- DfE (2021) 'Teaching about relationships, sex and health'
- DfE (2024) 'Keeping children safe in education 2024'

At Ascend Learning Trust we teach RSHE as set out in this policy.

Policy Development

This policy has been developed in consultation with staff, pupils and parents/carers. The consultation and policy development process involved the following steps:

1. Review – a member of staff or a working group of staff from each school/central trust education team pulled together all relevant information including relevant national and local guidance
2. Staff consultation – staff across all schools were given the opportunity to look at the policy and make recommendations
3. Parent/stakeholder consultation – parents/carers and any interested parties were invited to attend a meeting about the policy at their respective schools
4. Pupil consultation – we investigated what exactly pupils want from their RSE
5. Ratification – once amendments were made, the policy was shared with local governors and the board of trustees for ratification

Definitions

Relationships, Sex and Health Education (RSHE) is a planned, developmental programme of learning through which children and young people acquire the knowledge, skills and behaviours needed to:

- Stay safe and healthy
- Develop positive, respectful and healthy relationships
- Make informed, responsible decisions about their wellbeing, relationships and health

RSHE supports pupils to understand:

- Their physical, mental and emotional development
- Relationships of all kinds, including family, friendships and intimate relationships (secondary)
- How to recognise risk, harm and exploitation, including online
- How to access help, support and services

RSHE is a core part of the safeguarding curriculum, helping pupils to identify when something is wrong and to seek help effectively, applying learning in real-life situations to keep themselves safe.

RSHE develops pupils' knowledge and skill in:

- Decision-making
- Boundaries and consent
- Communication and resilience
- Recognising harm
- Preventing abuse
- Knowing how to report

RSHE recognises today's complex world, sees online life as part of real experience, and helps students manage exposure to:

- Harmful content
- Misinformation
- Exploitation

Curriculum

Our Academy's RSHE curriculum is set out as per Appendix 1-3, but we may need to adapt it as and when necessary. The Trust ensures a **fully mapped and sequenced RSHE curriculum from EYFS to KS4**.

The curriculum takes a skills-based learning approach and is:

- **Carefully sequenced** to build knowledge and skills over time
 - Structured to move from: Awareness → Understanding → Application
- Designed so pupils are prepared for risks **before they encounter them**
- **Includes expanded safeguarding content around online safety, misogyny and exploitation**

Our Academies demonstrate clear **curriculum maps across all year groups**, with explicit progression in:

- Safeguarding understanding
- Online safety
- Relationships and consent
- Emotional wellbeing

The primary curriculum includes enhanced statutory content in:

- **Online safety and digital risk**, including scams and manipulation
- **Personal safety**, including road, rail and water safety
- **Mental health**, including bereavement and emotional resilience
- Use of **accurate anatomical language** to support safeguarding

The secondary curriculum includes expanded statutory content in:

- **Online harms**, including AI, deepfakes, exploitation and harmful content
- **Misogyny and harmful ideologies**, including their impact on relationships
- **Pornography and media influence** on expectations and behaviour
- **Sexual harassment, violence and coercion**
- **Exploitation**
- **Accessing health services and making informed decisions**

We have developed the curriculum in consultation with parents/carers, pupils and staff, and taking into account the age, developmental stage, needs and feelings of our pupils. If pupils ask questions outside the scope of this policy, teachers will respond in an appropriate manner so that pupils are fully informed and don't seek answers online.

We will share any curriculum resources and materials with parents and carers upon request. Primary sex education is not compulsory in primary schools. As a trust we will always consider any contextual need in our schools to determine whether there is a need for individual schools to cover any additional content on sex education to meet the needs of pupils. If it is determined further coverage is necessary, the following statement supports any curriculum adaptations.

Primary sex education will focus on:

- Preparing boys and girls for the changes that adolescence brings
- How a baby is conceived and born

For more information about our curriculum, see our curriculum maps in Appendix 1 & 2 for our primary academies and Appendix 3 for our secondary academies.

Delivery of RSHE

RSHE is delivered as a skills-based curriculum, ensuring pupils can:

- Communicate effectively
- Set and respect boundaries
- Understand and apply consent
- Make safe and informed decisions

Teaching approaches include:

- Scenario-based learning
- Structured discussion
- Real-life application

RSHE is taught within the personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education curriculum. Biological aspects of RSE are taught within the science curriculum, and other aspects are included in religious and worldviews education.

Across our primary schools, relationships education focuses on teaching the fundamental building blocks and characteristics of positive relationships including:

- Families and people who care for me
- Caring friendships
- Respectful relationships
- Online relationships
- Being safe

For more information about the RSHE curriculum, see Appendices 1 and 2.

Across our secondary schools RSHE focuses on giving young people the information they need to help them develop healthy, nurturing relationships of all kinds including:

- Families
- Respectful relationships, including friendships
- Online and media
- Being safe
- Intimate and sexual relationships, including sexual health

For more information about our RSHE curriculum, see Appendices 1 and 2.

These areas of learning are taught within the context of family life taking care to ensure that there is no stigmatisation of children based on their home circumstances (families can include single parent families, LGBT parents, families headed by grandparents, adoptive parents, foster parents/carers amongst other structures) along with reflecting sensitively that some children may have a different structure of support around them (for example: looked after children or young carers).

Across our trust, we will also be mindful of the law and legal requirements, taking care not to condone or encourage illegal political activity, such as violent action against people, criminal damage to property, hate crime, terrorism or the illegal use of drugs.

6.1 Inclusivity

Our academies will teach about these topics in a manner that:

- Considers how a diverse range of pupils will relate to them
- Is sensitive to all pupil's experiences
- During lessons, make pupils feel:
 - Safe and supported
 - Able to engage with the key messages

They will also:

- Make sure that pupils learn about these topics in an environment that's appropriate for them, for example, in:
 - A whole-class setting
 - Small groups or targeted sessions
 - 1-to-1 discussions
 - Digital formats

Give careful consideration to the level of differentiation needed.

6.2 Use of Resources

Our academies will consider whether any resources they plan to use:

- Are aligned with the teaching requirements set out in the statutory RSE guidance
- Would support pupils in applying their knowledge in different contexts and settings
- Are age-appropriate, given the age, developmental stage and background of our pupils
- Are evidence-based and contain robust facts and statistics
- Fit into our curriculum plan
- Are from credible sources
- Are compatible with effective teaching approaches
- Are sensitive to pupils' experiences and won't provoke distress

Use of External Organisations and materials

Across our trust, we will make sure that an agency and any materials used are appropriate and in line with our legal duties around political impartiality.

We remain responsible for what is said to pupils. This includes making sure that any speakers, tools and resources used don't undermine the fundamental British values of democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty, and mutual respect and tolerance of those with different faiths and beliefs.

Our academies will:

- Make appropriate checks and engage with external agencies to make sure that their approach to teaching about RSHE is balanced, and it and the resources they intend to use:
 - Are age-appropriate
 - Are in line with pupils' developmental stage
 - Comply with:
 - This policy
 - The Teachers' Standards
 - The Equality Act 2010
 - The Human Rights Act 1998
 - The Education Act 1996
- Only work with external agencies where they have full confidence in the agency, its approach and the resources it uses
- Make sure that any speakers and resources meet the intended outcome of the relevant part of the curriculum
- Review any case study materials and look for feedback from other people the agency has worked with
- Be clear on:
 - What they're going to say
 - Their position on the issues to be discussed
- Ask to see in advance any materials that the agency may use
- Know the named individuals who will be there, and follow usual safeguarding procedures for these people
- Conduct a basic online search and address anything that may be of concern to the school, or to parents and carers
- Check the agency's protocol for taking pictures or using any personal data they might get from a session
- Remind teachers that they can say "no" or, in extreme cases, stop a session
- Make sure that the teacher is in the room during any sessions with external speakers
- Share any external materials with parents and carers

Our academies **won't**, under any circumstances:

- Work with external agencies that take or promote extreme political positions
- Use materials produced by such agencies, even if the material itself is not extreme

Roles and responsibilities

The Board of Trustees

The board of trustees will approve the RSHE policy, and hold the headteacher to account for its implementation, through the local governing bodies and the CEO.

Trustees will ensure that:

- The RSHE curriculum is compliant with statutory guidance
- A policy is in place and published
- Parents have been appropriately consulted
- The curriculum is effectively delivered and monitored

Chief Executive Officer

The CEO will work with Headteachers to make sure they can implement the policy in their schools and report to the board of trustees any issues with its implementation across the trust.

Local Governing Bodies

Local governing bodies are responsible for supporting the implementation of the policy at their school and reporting issues to the board of trustees and the CEO, if they occur.

Headteachers

The headteacher is responsible for ensuring that RSE is taught consistently across their school, for making sure that resources and materials are shared with parents and carers, and for managing requests to withdraw pupils from non-statutory science or non-science components of RSE (see section 9).

Staff

Staff are responsible for:

- Delivering RSE in a sensitive way
- Modelling positive attitudes to RSE
- Monitoring progress
- Responding to the needs of individual pupils
- Responding appropriately to pupils whose parents/carers wish them to be withdrawn from the non statutory science or non-science components of RSE.

Staff do not have the right to opt out of teaching RSE. Staff who have concerns about teaching RSE are encouraged to discuss this with the headteacher.

Pupils

Pupils are expected to engage fully in RSE and, when discussing issues related to RSE, treat others with respect and sensitivity.

Parental Engagement

The Trust adopts a **continuous model of parental engagement**, not a one-off consultation.

Our academies:

- Consult parents when developing and reviewing policy
- Provide **accessible curriculum overviews**
- Share **teaching materials on request**
- Offer multiple opportunities for engagement (e.g. meetings, online platforms)

Engagement is always:

- Transparent
- Ongoing
- Evidenced

Parent's right to withdraw

Across our primary academies parents/carers do not have the right to withdraw their children from relationships education.

Parents/carers have the right to withdraw their children from the non-statutory science or non-science components of sex education within RSHE.

Requests for withdrawal should be put in writing using the form found in Appendix 3 of this policy and addressed to the headteacher of the school.

Alternative work will be given to pupils who are withdrawn from sex education.

Across our secondary academies parents/carers have the right to withdraw their children from the non-statutory science or non-science components of sex education within RSHE up to and until 3 terms before the child turns 16. After this point, if the child wishes to receive sex education rather than being withdrawn, the school will arrange this.

Requests for withdrawal should be put in writing using the form found in Appendix 3 of this policy and addressed to the headteacher of the school. The headteacher will share this information with the Secondary Education Director and CEO.

A copy of withdrawal requests will be placed in the pupil's educational record. The headteacher will discuss the request with parents/carers and take appropriate action.

Alternative work will be given to pupils who are withdrawn from sex education.

Training

Staff are trained on the delivery of RSHE as part of their induction and it is included in our continuing professional development calendar.

The headteacher may also invite visitors from outside the school, such as school nurses or sexual health professionals, to provide support and training to staff teaching RSHE.

Monitoring Arrangements

The delivery of RSHE is monitored by the RSHE Lead and Headteacher in each school through:

- Curriculum planning scrutinies, learning walks and staff and pupil conferencing.
- Pupils' development in RSHE is monitored by class teachers as part of our internal assessment system.
- Evidence of **sequenced and progressive curriculum delivery across phases**

Quality Assurance and Impact

The Trust ensures that RSHE is:

- Regularly monitored
- Evaluated for impact
- Consistently delivered across all schools

Monitoring includes:

- Lesson visits and learning walks
- Pupil voice
- Staff voice

Impact is evidenced through pupils' ability to:

- Recognise risk and unsafe situations
- Apply learning to real-life contexts
- Demonstrate understanding of healthy relationships

Appendix 1: Curriculum map completed by each individual academy

Relationships and sex education curriculum map

You can view a copy of the curriculum map here in the Parent/carer Zone: <https://www.1decision.co.uk/resources/parent-carer-zone>

Appendix 2: By the end of primary school pupils should know

| TOPIC | PUPILS SHOULD KNOW |
|---------------------------------------|---|
| Families and people who care about me | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • That families are important for children growing up because they can give love, security and stability • The characteristics of healthy family life, commitment to each other, including in times of difficulty, protection and care for children and other family members, the importance of spending time together and sharing each other's lives • That others' families, either in school or in the wider world, sometimes look different from their family, but that they should respect those differences and know that other children's families are also characterised by love and care • That stable, caring relationships, which may be of different types, are at the heart of happy families, and are important for children's security as they grow up • That marriage represents a formal and legally recognised commitment of two people to each other which is intended to be lifelong • How to recognise if family relationships are making them feel unhappy or unsafe, and how to seek help or advice from others if needed |
| Caring friendships | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How important friendships are in making us feel happy and secure, and how people choose and make friends • The characteristics of friendships, including mutual respect, truthfulness, trustworthiness, loyalty, kindness, generosity, trust, sharing interests and experiences and support with problems and difficulties • That healthy friendships are positive and welcoming towards others, and do not make others feel lonely or excluded • That most friendships have ups and downs, and that these can often be worked through so that the friendship is repaired or even strengthened, and that resorting to violence is never right • How to recognise who to trust and who not to trust, how to judge when a friendship is making them feel unhappy or uncomfortable, managing conflict, how to manage these situations and how to seek help or advice from others, if needed |

| TOPIC | PUPILS SHOULD KNOW |
|--------------------------|---|
| Respectful relationships | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The importance of respecting others, even when they are very different from them (for example, physically, in character, personality or backgrounds), or make different choices or have different preferences or beliefs • Practical steps they can take in a range of different contexts to improve or support respectful relationships • The conventions of courtesy and manners • The importance of self-respect and how this links to their own happiness • That in school and in wider society they can expect to be treated with respect by others, and that in turn they should show due respect to others, including those in positions of authority • About different types of bullying (including cyberbullying), the impact of bullying, responsibilities of bystanders (primarily reporting bullying to an adult) and how to get help • What a stereotype is, and how stereotypes can be unfair, negative or destructive • The importance of permission-seeking and giving in relationships with friends, peers and adults |
| Online relationships | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • That people sometimes behave differently online, including by pretending to be someone they are not • That the same principles apply to online relationships as to face-to face relationships, including the importance of respect for others online including when we are anonymous • The rules and principles for keeping safe online, how to recognise risks, harmful content and contact, and how to report them • How to critically consider their online friendships and sources of information including awareness of the risks associated with people they have never met • How information and data is shared and used online |
| Being safe | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What sorts of boundaries are appropriate in friendships with peers and others (including in a digital context) • About the concept of privacy and the implications of it for both children and adults; including that it is not always right to keep secrets if they relate to being safe • That each person's body belongs to them, and the differences between appropriate and inappropriate or unsafe physical, and other, contact • How to respond safely and appropriately to adults they may encounter (in all contexts, including online) whom they do not know |

| TOPIC | PUPILS SHOULD KNOW |
|-------|--|
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How to recognise and report feelings of being unsafe or feeling bad about any adult • How to ask for advice or help for themselves or others, and to keep trying until they are heard • How to report concerns or abuse, and the vocabulary and confidence needed to do so • Where to get advice e.g. family, school and/or other sources |

Appendix 3: By the end of secondary school pupils should know (completed by each individual academy)

| TOPIC | PUPILS SHOULD KNOW |
|---|--|
| Families | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • That there are different types of committed, stable relationships • How these relationships might contribute to human happiness and their importance for bringing up children • What marriage is, including their legal status e.g. that marriage carries legal rights and protections not available to couples who are cohabiting or who have married, for example, in an unregistered religious ceremony • Why marriage is an important relationship choice for many couples and why it must be freely entered into • The characteristics and legal status of other types of long-term relationships • The roles and responsibilities of parents/carers with respect to raising of children, including the characteristics of successful parenting • How to: determine whether other children, adults or sources of information are trustworthy: judge when a family, friend, intimate or other relationship is unsafe (and to recognise this in others' relationships); and, how to seek help or advice, including reporting concerns about others, if needed |
| Respectful relationships, including friendships | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The characteristics of positive and healthy friendships (in all contexts, including online) including: trust, respect, honesty, kindness, generosity, boundaries, privacy, consent and the management of conflict, reconciliation and ending relationships. This includes different (non-sexual) types of relationship • Practical steps they can take in a range of different contexts to improve or support respectful relationships |

| TOPIC | PUPILS SHOULD KNOW |
|------------------|--|
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How stereotypes, in particular stereotypes based on sex, gender, race, religion, sexual orientation or disability, can cause damage (e.g. how they might normalise non-consensual behaviour or encourage prejudice) • That in school and in wider society they can expect to be treated with respect by others, and that in turn they should show due respect to others, including people in positions of authority and due tolerance of other people's beliefs • About different types of bullying (including cyberbullying), the impact of bullying, responsibilities of bystanders to report bullying and how and where to get help • That some types of behaviour within relationships are criminal, including violent behaviour and coercive control • What constitutes sexual harassment and sexual violence and why these are always unacceptable • The legal rights and responsibilities regarding equality (particularly with reference to the protected characteristics as defined in the Equality Act 2010) and that everyone is unique and equal |
| Online and media | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Their rights, responsibilities and opportunities online, including that the same expectations of behaviour apply in all contexts, including online • About online risks, including that any material someone provides to another has the potential to be shared online and the difficulty of removing potentially compromising material placed online • Not to provide material to others that they would not want shared further and not to share personal material which is sent to them • What to do and where to get support to report material or manage issues online • The impact of viewing harmful content • That specifically sexually explicit material e.g. pornography presents a distorted picture of sexual behaviours, can damage the way people see themselves in relation to others and negatively affect how they behave towards sexual partners • That sharing and viewing indecent images of children (including those created by children) is a criminal offence which carries severe penalties including jail • How information and data is generated, collected, shared and used online |
| Being safe | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The concepts of, and laws relating to, sexual consent, sexual exploitation, abuse, grooming, coercion, harassment, rape, domestic abuse, forced marriage, honour-based violence and FGM, and how these can affect current and future relationships |

| TOPIC | PUPILS SHOULD KNOW |
|---|--|
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How people can actively communicate and recognise consent from others, including sexual consent, and how and when consent can be withdrawn (in all contexts, including online) |
| <p>Intimate and sexual relationships, including sexual health</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How to recognise the characteristics and positive aspects of healthy one-to-one intimate relationships, which include mutual respect, consent, loyalty, trust, shared interests and outlook, sex and friendship • That all aspects of health can be affected by choices they make in sex and relationships, positively or negatively, e.g. physical, emotional, mental, sexual and reproductive health and wellbeing • The facts about reproductive health, including fertility and the potential impact of lifestyle on fertility for men and women • That there are a range of strategies for identifying and managing sexual pressure, including understanding peer pressure, resisting pressure and not pressurising others • That they have a choice to delay sex or to enjoy intimacy without sex • The facts about the full range of contraceptive choices, efficacy and options available • The facts around pregnancy including miscarriage • That there are choices in relation to pregnancy (with medically and legally accurate, impartial information on all options, including keeping the baby, adoption, abortion and where to get further help) • How the different sexually transmitted infections (STIs), including HIV/AIDs, are transmitted, how risk can be reduced through safer sex (including through condom use) and the importance of and facts about testing • About the prevalence of some STIs, the impact they can have on those who contract them and key facts about treatment • How the use of alcohol and drugs can lead to risky sexual behaviour • How to get further advice, including how and where to access confidential sexual and reproductive health advice and treatment |

Appendix 4:

Parent/carer form: withdrawal from sex education within RSE

| TO BE COMPLETED BY PARENTS/CARERS | | | |
|--|--|-------|--|
| Name of child | | Class | |
| Name of parent | | Date | |
| Reason for withdrawing from sex education within relationships and sex education | | | |
| | | | |
| Any other information you would like the school to consider | | | |
| | | | |
| Parent signature | | | |

| TO BE COMPLETED BY THE SCHOOL | |
|---|--|
| Agreed actions from discussion with parents | |
| | |