



ED0049 - Relationships & Sex Education Policy



Introduction

Esland provides education for children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) and social, emotional and mental health (SEMH) needs. Many of our pupils have an Education, Health and Care (EHC) plan, have experienced trauma, adverse childhood experiences or disrupted education, and may be more vulnerable to abuse, exploitation and unhealthy relationships. High-quality relationships and sex education (RSE) is therefore central to keeping our pupils safe, helping them to understand themselves and others, and preparing them for adulthood.

This policy sets out how our schools provide relationships education, relationships and sex education, and the related personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education that supports it. It explains what is taught, how it is taught, how we adapt it for pupils with SEND and SEMH needs, and how parents and carers are involved.

Throughout this policy, "parents" means parents and carers, including those with parental responsibility and those acting in a corporate parenting role for children who are looked after

Legislation and Statutory Guidance

As an independent school, our duty to provide RSE arises from the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014 (the "Independent School Standards"). Paragraph 2A of Part 1 of the Schedule requires that the proprietor:

- ensures every pupil receiving primary education is provided with relationships education;
- ensures every pupil receiving secondary education is provided with relationships and sex education, except where the pupil is excused from sex education at the request of a parent;
- has regard to the statutory guidance issued under section 80A of the Education Act 2002 when making these arrangements;
- makes and keeps up to date a separate written policy for relationships education and RSE;
- consults parents before making or revising that policy; and
- publishes the policy and provides a copy free of charge to anyone who asks for one.

Health education is compulsory by statute only for academies. As an independent special school we are not separately required to provide health education, but we deliver health and wellbeing content through our compulsory PSHE provision (paragraph 2(2)(d) of the Independent School Standards) and have regard to the health education content of the statutory guidance as good practice, because it is essential to the safety and wellbeing of our pupils.

In developing and delivering this policy we have regard to the following:

- *Relationships Education, Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) and Health Education* statutory guidance (DfE, July 2025), issued under section 80A of the Education Act 2002 and section 403 of the Education Act 1996, coming into force on 1 September 2026;
- The Independent School Standards Guidance for Independent Schools (DfE, current edition);

- Keeping Children Safe in Education (statutory safeguarding guidance, current edition);
- The Children and Families Act 2014 and the SEND Code of Practice: 0 to 25 years;
- The Equality Act 2010, including the school provisions in Part 6 and the duty to make reasonable adjustments for disabled pupils;
- The Education Act 1996 (including section 403) and the Education Act 2002 (including section 80A);
- The UK General Data Protection Regulation and the Data Protection Act 2018 (as amended by the Data (Use and Access) Act 2025).

Aims and Guiding Principles

Our RSE provision aims to help pupils to:

- build and maintain healthy, respectful and safe relationships of all kinds, now and in the future;
- understand their own bodies, feelings, boundaries and rights, and respect those of other people;
- recognise safe and unsafe situations, relationships and behaviour – online and offline – and know how and where to seek help;
- develop the knowledge, language, self-worth and skills to make informed and safe decisions and to prepare for adult life;
- understand and challenge prejudice, misogyny, harmful stereotypes and abuse, and treat others with kindness and respect.

Consistent with the statutory guidance, our teaching takes a positive approach that builds healthy norms and skills, and avoids language that might normalise or glamorise harmful behaviour. It is part of a whole-school approach and is closely linked to our safeguarding, behaviour, online safety, PSHE and preparation-for-adulthood work rather than delivered in isolation. Nobody is stigmatised, and no group is singled out or shamed.

Meeting the Needs of Pupils with SEND and SEMH

This is the heart of our approach. RSE is especially important for our pupils, who may be at greater risk of harm and who may find relationships, communication and emotional regulation more difficult. We plan RSE around each pupil's developmental stage and individual needs rather than simply their chronological age or year group, and we personalise, differentiate, sequence and regularly revisit content so that key messages are understood and retained.

A trauma-informed and relational approach

- We teach sensitive content in a safe, predictable and supportive environment, in small groups or one to one where this is appropriate.
- Staff are attuned to pupils' histories and possible triggers, and adapt pace, content and grouping accordingly, working closely with our therapeutic and pastoral teams.
- We take particular care with topics that may be distressing for pupils affected by trauma, abuse, neglect, bereavement, self-harm or suicidal thoughts, and we involve the designated safeguarding lead (DSL) in planning where needed.

Accessible teaching and communication

- We use concrete, multi-sensory and visual approaches, and communication supports such as symbols, social stories, visual timetables, Makaton or other aids where appropriate to the pupil.
- We check understanding carefully, use clear and unambiguous language, and reinforce learning across the school day and in the wider curriculum.
- Reasonable adjustments are made for disabled pupils in line with the Equality Act 2010, and provision is linked to EHC plan outcomes and to preparation for adulthood.

Personal safety, autonomy and protection from harm

Because our pupils can be more vulnerable to abuse and exploitation, we give strong emphasis to:

- public and private (places, behaviour and body parts), using accurate terminology for body parts, including genitalia, as recommended by the statutory guidance to support safeguarding and the reporting of concerns;
- appropriate and inappropriate touch, personal boundaries, privacy and bodily autonomy;
- consent, and the skills and language to say “no”, to ask for help and to identify a trusted adult;
- recognising safe and unsafe relationships and adults, and understanding that being a victim of abuse or exploitation is never the pupil’s fault;
- awareness of exploitation, including child sexual exploitation, child criminal exploitation, county lines and online grooming, and how to seek help.

Where pupils require support with personal and intimate care, this is provided with dignity and in line with our separate Intimate Care Policy; RSE supports pupils’ understanding of privacy, dignity and bodily autonomy in that context.

SEMH-specific focus

- emotional literacy, self-regulation, managing conflict and repairing relationships;
- understanding the difference between healthy and unhealthy or controlling relationships, including online;
- self-worth, resilience and identity, and challenging negative self-talk in a supportive way;
- mental health and wellbeing, including where and how to get help, taught sensitively and with safeguarding oversight.

Curriculum Content

Content is delivered at a level appropriate to each pupil’s developmental stage and is revisited and extended over time. In line with the July 2025 statutory guidance, we do not apply fixed age limits to topics; instead, staff use professional judgement, informed by safeguarding, to decide when content is appropriate and respectful for the pupils concerned. Any planned teaching of additional (non-statutory) sex education is set out for parents in advance, and any necessary deviation from the published curriculum is communicated to parents beforehand.

Relationships education (all pupils)

- families and people who care for us, including a range of family arrangements (such as single-parent, adoptive, foster, kinship and same-sex-parent families), taught without stigma;
- caring friendships, respectful relationships and kindness, including managing disagreements and peer influence;
- being safe: boundaries, privacy, consent, trusted adults and how to report concerns;
- online relationships and online safety, including critical thinking about what pupils see online, the risks of AI-generated and manipulated content (including deepfakes) and sharing of images.

Relationships and sex education (secondary/as developmentally appropriate)

- intimate and sexual relationships, including consent, respect, sexual ethics beyond consent, and healthy versus unhealthy or coercive relationships;
- recognising and challenging misogyny, harmful stereotypes and the links between sexism, misogyny and violence against women and girls, and exploring positive masculinity and femininity;
- the influence of pornography on attitudes and behaviour, and the harms associated with sharing nude or semi-nude images and with subcultures such as “incel” communities;
- puberty, menstrual and gynaecological health, contraception, sexual health, and how to access healthcare and trusted sources of information and support;
- keeping safe from sexual harassment, sexual violence, abuse and exploitation, and knowing how to report and seek help.

Health and wellbeing (delivered through PSHE)

- mental wellbeing, emotions, and grief, loss and bereavement, taught in an age- and stage-appropriate way;
- physical health, sleep, healthy routines, and the effects of drugs, alcohol and tobacco;
- basic first aid and how to seek help in an emergency;

- suicide prevention, taught safely to secondary-aged pupils where developmentally appropriate. We have a planned and safe approach to this topic, staff receive appropriate support and training, and delivery is overseen by the DSL and mental health leads. Content never includes information about methods and is always paired with clear signposting to help.

Definition

RSE is about the emotional, social and cultural development of students, and involves learning about relationships, sexual health, sexuality, healthy lifestyles, diversity and personal identity.

RSE involves a combination of sharing information and exploring issues and values.

RSE is not about the promotion of sexual activity.

Inclusion, Equality and Sensitive Topics

Our RSE is inclusive and reflects our duties under the Equality Act 2010. We ensure teaching is accessible to all pupils, encourages respect for others, and pays particular regard to the protected characteristics, in an age- and stage-appropriate way. We avoid language and activities that repeat or reinforce gender stereotypes.

Where topics are contested, we teach the relevant facts and the law and encourage balanced, respectful discussion, and we are careful not to endorse any particular contested view or to present it as established fact. In relation to biological sex and gender reassignment, teaching reflects the facts and the current law. Staff seek advice from senior leaders and the DSL where a topic is sensitive or a pupil raises a personal matter.

Schools with a particular religious or cultural community context deliver RSE in a way that is sensitive to that context while still meeting the requirements of the statutory guidance and the law.

Safeguarding and Confidentiality

RSE is closely linked to safeguarding. Effective RSE can lead to pupils disclosing harm, abuse or exploitation. All staff follow the school's Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy and Keeping Children Safe in Education.

- Staff create a safe climate for discussion, using ground rules and distancing techniques (for example, scenarios rather than personal questions) so that pupils are not put at risk of disclosing in an unsafe way.
- Staff cannot promise confidentiality. If a pupil discloses something that indicates they or another child may be at risk, staff follow safeguarding procedures and report to the DSL without delay.
- Teaching about staying safe makes clear that a pupil who is a victim of any form of abuse or exploitation is never to blame, and always signposts sources of help.

Working in Partnership with Parents and Carers

We recognise that parents and carers are the primary educators of their children, and that partnership is particularly important for our pupils. In line with paragraph 2A of the Independent School Standards and the statutory guidance, we:

- consult parents before this policy is adopted or revised, and make the policy available to them;
- are transparent with parents about the content and materials used in RSE, including materials from any external organisations, and provide opportunities for parents to view them;
- proactively engage parents so that they understand what is taught, when and how, and can support learning at home;
- communicate in advance any planned additional (non-statutory) sex education and any necessary deviation from the published curriculum.

Right to be Excused from Sex Education

Parents have the right to request that their child is wholly or partly excused from sex education delivered as part of RSE. This right does not extend to relationships education, to health education, or to the sex education that forms part of the statutory science curriculum, from which pupils cannot be withdrawn.

- Requests should be made in writing to the headteacher. A parent requesting to be excused will be offered a discussion so that the school can understand the request and explain the benefits of, and content of, the sex education provided.
- The pupil will be excused from the relevant sex education until the request is withdrawn, unless (and to the extent that) the headteacher considers that the pupil should not be excused – for example, where excusing the pupil could increase a safeguarding risk given their needs and circumstances. Any such decision is recorded with reasons.
- There are specific arrangements for pupils approaching the age of 16: from three school terms before their sixteenth birthday, if the pupil themselves wishes to receive sex education rather than be excused, the school will make arrangements to provide it during one of those terms.
- Where a pupil is excused, the school will document the request and arrange appropriate alternative supervision or purposeful activity. A template request form is provided at Appendix A.

Roles and Responsibilities

The proprietor and governing body

- Ensure the school meets its duties under paragraph 2A of the Independent School Standards, that this policy is in place, kept up to date, consulted on with parents and published, and hold school leaders to account for its implementation.

The headteacher

- Ensures RSE is taught consistently and safely across the school, decides on requests to be excused from sex education, and ensures staff are supported and trained.

The RSE / PSHE lead

- Leads on curriculum planning, sequencing and resources, ensures content is developmentally appropriate and accessible, and monitors and evaluates provision.

The designated safeguarding lead (DSL) and SENCO

- Advises on safeguarding aspects of RSE, supports safe teaching of sensitive topics, and responds to any disclosures or concerns that arise.

Teaching and support staff

- Deliver RSE in line with this policy, model respectful relationships, make reasonable adjustments, and follow safeguarding procedures. Staff who have concerns about teaching any content raise these with the RSE lead or headteacher.

Staff Training

Staff receive training and support to deliver RSE confidently, safely and inclusively, including on adapting content for pupils with SEND and SEMH needs, trauma-informed practice, safe teaching of sensitive topics (including suicide prevention and self-harm), online harms, and recognising and responding to disclosures. Training needs are reviewed regularly and form part of staff development.

Assessment, Monitoring and Evaluation

Pupils' understanding is assessed in ways appropriate to their needs so that teaching can be adapted and reinforced. The RSE lead and senior leaders monitor and evaluate provision, drawing on pupil voice, staff feedback and parental feedback, and use this to improve the programme. This policy and the curriculum are reviewed at least annually, and sooner if statutory guidance or the needs of our pupils change. Parents are consulted on any revision.

Links to Other Policies

- Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy
- Online Safety Policy
- PSHE Policy
- Curriculum Policy
- Behaviour Policy
- Anti-Bullying Policy
- Data Protection Policy
- Privacy Notices

Policy Review

Date	Action (s)
13/07/2026	Review policy in line with 2026 DfE Guidance. No changes made.

Appendix A – Request to be excused from sex education

Please complete this form and return it to the headteacher if you wish to request that your child is excused from some or all of the sex education delivered as part of relationships and sex education (RSE). This right does not apply to relationships education, health education, or sex education within the statutory science curriculum.

Pupil name	
Class / group	
Parent / carer name	
Relationship to pupil	
Aspects the request relates to	
Reason for request (optional)	
Signature	
Date	
School use only	
Discussion held with parent (date)	
Headteacher decision	
Reasons / safeguarding considerations	

Alternative arrangements for pupil	
Signed (headteacher) and date	