



Relationships, sex and health education (RSHE) policy

Independent school standards and statutory guidance	Paragraphs 2(2)(d), 2A(1), 2A(2) and 5(b)(vi) and the Relationships Education, Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) and Health Education statutory guidance (updated July 2025 for implementation by September 2026)
Last updated by senior leaders	September 2025
Last reviewed by advisory board	September 2025
Next review due	July 2026

PREFACE

- This RSHE policy has been developed to reflect the latest Relationships Education, Relationships And Sex Education (RSE) and Health Education statutory guidance (updated July 2025 for implementation by September 2026). We are developing our RSHE curriculum to incorporate both statutory and non-statutory (i.e. including Health Education) content from September 2025, with the intention to have implemented it fully by September 2026 at the latest.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES OF THE UPDATED GUIDANCE

- The updated guidance emphasises the importance of engagement with both pupils and parents, positivity, careful curriculum sequencing and skilled delivery of participative education. Throughout the updated guidance, there are frequent references to safe and effective practice — from establishing a safe learning environment to answering tricky questions; and from avoiding fear-based approaches to recognising PSHE education's vital role in educating and safeguarding young people.

OVERVIEW OF NEW TEACHING CONTENT

- As a National Nurturing School, we welcome the increased focus on mental health, and the inclusion of grief, loss and bereavement.
- For pupils of both primary and secondary age, the guidance includes the topic of personal safety, which includes fire safety and travel safety — for example around water, roads and railways. At secondary, pupils will also learn about knife crime and conflict resolution.
- There is further emphasis on helping pupils understand their bodies and changes they might experience. For example, for pupils of primary age the guidance now includes accurate terminology for body parts, including genitalia. This reflects established best practice when it comes to giving pupils the knowledge they need to stay safe, including the ability to identify and report signs of abuse. We have been teaching this at St. John's as a matter of course in science and as part of our approach to safeguarding, but this addition brings welcome clarification.
- Guidance includes more and current 'real world' content, particularly for pupils of secondary age, including AI literacy, deepfake imagery, misogyny and incel culture and their influence on attitudes towards women and girls and how they negatively affect boys and young men, as well as the potentially harmful nature of pornography. There is also a need to pay regard to financial exploitation and its impact on safeguarding – including a requirement to cover scams, fraud and extortion, including sextortion.
- Finally, for younger pupils of primary age, the updated guidance grants discretion to teach about sexual imagery and harmful online content if these issues are deemed relevant, acknowledging that inappropriate content is reaching younger children at an increasing rate. However, such coverage with our pupils at the Preparatory School will always be addressed in consultation with parents.

INTRODUCTION

This policy's content includes:

- what RSHE is, and its importance.
- how and when RSHE is taught, and who teaches it.
- subject content, including clarity on sex education for pupils attending the Preparatory School.
- information about consulting parents and how parents can request to view curriculum materials.
- information about a parent's right to request that their child is withdrawn from sex education.
- how the subject is monitored and evaluated, and training arrangements for teachers.

RSHE

- RSHE focuses on the social and emotional development of pupils, and involves learning about respectful and healthy relationships, physical and mental health, personal safety, diversity and personal identity. RSHE involves a combination of sharing information and discussing and exploring issues and values.
- RSHE is one way in which we ensure the curriculum pays regard to all the protected characteristics (as defined in the Equality Act 2010), including sex, gender reassignment, sexual orientation, marriage and civil partnership and pregnancy and maternity.
- We are committed to teaching pupils about healthy relationships, mutual respect and equality. We have a zero-tolerance approach to misogynistic 'banter'.
- Relationships education doesn't involve explaining the detail of different forms of sexual activity, but can cover sensitive topics such as sexual violence in order to keep pupils safe. The subject in no way promotes sexual activity.

HOW AND WHEN THE SUBJECT IS TAUGHT

- RSHE is predominantly taught within the school's personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education curriculum. Some biological aspects of RSE are taught within the science curriculum.
- We teach PSHE education throughout the Preparatory School and Senior School. The subject is taught weekly for each year group, with curriculum content progressively building on pupils' prior learning.
- At the Preparatory School, relationships education is taught by classroom teachers (sex education is taught by an external provider) and at the Senior School, RSHE is taught by experienced specialist teachers.
- Some aspects of RSHE are regularly complemented by assemblies and visiting speakers, workshops and events. Examples include annual travel safety workshops provided by Transport for London, healthy eating workshops

facilitated by a nutritionist, and personal safety presentations from the Metropolitan Police.

- RSHE is delivered through a varied range of age-appropriate teaching activities which promote rich discussion and reflection, such as circle time, discussion and role play.

SUBJECT CONTENT

We ensure age-appropriate and progressive coverage of the RSHE guidance, which aims to:

- help pupils develop an understanding of different types of relationships, including family relationships.
- help pupils to develop skills in forming, respecting and maintaining relationships with others, including their peers.
- help pupils develop understanding of online relationships, being safe and the media.
- teach pupils about the changes to their body that occur during puberty.
- teach pupils about reproduction, intimate and sexual relationships, including lesbian, gay and bisexual relationships, sexual health and gender questioning (Senior School).

As in all subjects at St. John's, the curriculum and teaching resources are differentiated and adapted to meet the accessibility needs of all pupils, including those with SEND and/or EAL.

PREPARATORY SCHOOL CURRICULUM CONTENT OVERVIEW

Over the course of pupils' time in the Preparatory School, they will cover the following Relationships and Health Education curriculum content. For further details, please see the full curriculum plans.

Families

- The importance of stable, caring families.
- Recognition of diverse family structures (e.g. single parents, LGBT+)
- Recognising unsafe family situations and how to seek help.

Friendship

- Skills for healthy, respectful friendships.
- Managing conflict and recognising when friendships are harmful.

Relationships

- Healthy relationships based on mutual respect.
- Setting boundaries and managing feelings.

- Challenging stereotypes and bullying.
- Respecting others' differences.

Online safety

- Respectful online behaviour and reporting concerns.
- Why age limits exist for social media.
- Risks of image sharing.
- Online privacy and recognising harmful contact.
- Screen time impact.
- Gaming and financial scams.

Mental health and wellbeing

- Recognising emotions.
- Seeking help for mental health concerns.
- Grief, bullying, and isolation.

Physical health and wellbeing

- Diet and exercise.
- Risks of an inactive lifestyle.
- Smoking, vaping, nicotine, and drugs.
- Personal hygiene, sleep, dental care.
- Vaccination, sun safety, and signs of potential illness.

First aid and personal safety

- Emergency calls and first aid basics.
- Water, railway and road safety.

Real-world safety

- Understanding personal boundaries.
- Reporting abuse or worrying behaviour.

Changing bodies

- Using correct vocabulary for body parts.
- Puberty, menstruation (including use of inclusive terminology) and body changes.

In the summer term each academic year, an external medical professional visits the school to facilitate age-appropriate sex education workshops to pupils in Years 5 and 6. Parents are advised of the timing and content of these visits in advance.

SENIOR SCHOOL CURRICULUM CONTENT OVERVIEW

Over the course of pupils' time in the Senior School, they will cover the following Relationships, Sex and Health Education curriculum content.

Families

- Legal nature of marriage (including that 'common-law marriage' is a myth) and civil partnerships.
- Parental roles and responsibilities.

Relationships

- Kind, assertive relationship skills.
- Ethical sexual behaviour beyond consent.
- Power imbalances, stereotypes, and coercion.
- Misogyny, incel culture, and harmful subcultures.

Online and media safety and awareness

- Sexting and image sharing laws.
- Deepfakes and AI-generated content.
- Risks of social media influencers and misinformation.
- Pornography's unrealistic depictions.
- Body image pressures.
- Misinformation and conspiracy theories.
- Self-harm/suicide-related content online.

Safety

- Consent and boundaries.
- Recognising abusive and coercive behaviour.
- Strangulation, sextortion, virginity testing, and hymenoplasty.
- Where to seek help and report harm.

Sexual health

- STIs, contraception (including PrEP and PEP).
- Pregnancy options, including abortion.
- Substance use and risky sexual behaviour.
- Where to access support services.

Mental health

- Common mental health issues (e.g. anxiety, depression).
- Social connection and emotional regulation.
- Gambling-related mental health harms.

Physical health

- Dangers of drug misuse (including synthetic drugs).
- Counterfeit medicines.

- Alcohol laws and safety.
- Smoking and Vaping harms.
- Infection prevention and hygiene.
- Vaccination, screening, and organ donation.
- Navigating healthcare services and understanding Gillick competence.

First aid and personal safety

- CPR and defibrillators.
- Personal safety in public and online.
- Grooming, knife crime, and gang influence.

Developing bodies

- Menstrual and reproductive health.
- Endometriosis, PCOS, fertility, and menopause.

KEY ISSUES AND AGE-APPROPRIATE TEACHING

Online safety and digital risks

Dovetailing with the school's overall approach to online safety (please see the separate online safety policy) and teaching pupils about the safe use of modern technology, RSHE content within the PSHE education programme includes age-appropriate teaching about modern digital threats, including:

- fake or AI-generated social media profiles, to help pupils learn how to recognise this kind of deception and sharpen their digital literacy.
- AI-related risks, including the malicious use of deepfakes and chatbots.
- misinformation, disinformation and conspiracy theories.
- online scams – for example, 'sextortion', where individuals are blackmailed using sexually explicit material (Senior School).
- sexual imagery and harmful online content (Senior School).

Tackling misogyny, consent and power imbalances

The updated guidance places renewed emphasis on the importance of recognising and challenging misogyny, linking this explicitly to power inequalities in relationships. The following matters are taught progressively and age-appropriately:

- an expanded understanding of consent – not just framed as 'yes' or 'no', but considering kindness, care, needs, vulnerabilities and power dynamics.
- power inequalities and how they can distort relationships.

- the impact of pornography and its role in distorting views on consent, creating a sense of sexual entitlement, and normalising harmful and misogynistic behaviours (Senior School).
- strangulation and suffocation, highlighting these as dangerous and criminal behaviours, in response to some concerning social media trends (Senior School).
- sexual harassment – including the dangers and legislation around stalking, ‘upskirting’ and ‘revenge porn’ (Senior School).

Gender identity

- We teach the facts and legal context around biological sex and gender reassignment, and acknowledge that there is significant debate on the topic (Senior School).
- We pay regard to the latest statutory guidance to schools.

How teachers will answer questions about sex education topics that the school does not cover (e.g. at the Preparatory School) or that relates to sex education from which the pupil has been withdrawn

- Teachers will respond sensitively, providing factually accurate, age-appropriate information. They will not provide additional teaching and may suggest follow-up conversations with the parents.

ENGAGEMENT WITH PARENTS AND CARERS

Consultation and engagement events

- This policy was originally published following a consultation with parents in 2021. From September 2025 and through the 2025–26 academic year, we will be consulting parents on this policy and the development of our RSHE curriculum in light of the latest statutory guidance, including via an engagement event.

Access to curriculum plans and teaching resources

- Parents have the right to view the curriculum plans and teaching materials we use for RSHE, but cannot veto curriculum content. We continue to operate transparently, informing parents in advance of when the sex education programme is being taught and always provide an opportunity for parents to view curriculum plans and teaching resources. Parents may request these from the subject coordinators (Susanna Olivelli at Prep. and Kate Brooker at Senior).

The right to request to withdraw pupils from sex education

- Parents have the right to withdraw their child/ren from some or all of sex education delivered as part of RSHE. However, parents should note that there is no right to withdraw their child/ren from relationships education.

- Requests for withdrawal should be directed in writing to the Principal or the Headteacher who will discuss the request with the parent/s in the first instance. Once these discussions have taken place, except in exceptional circumstances, the school will respect the parents' request to withdraw their child, up to and until three terms before the pupil turns 16. After that age, if the pupil wishes to receive sex education rather than be withdrawn, we will provide the pupil with sex education during one of those terms.

HOW THE SUBJECT IS MONITORED AND EVALUATED

- Subject coordinators oversee and monitor RSHE as part of PSHE education and PSHCE education. In turn, the quality of the subject is monitored in the same way as all other subjects are, by the senior leadership team. RSHE (as part of PSHE education) is also externally scrutinised by the school's advisory board as part of their regular quality checks.
- We actively seek pupils' voices through classroom feedback activities, focused discussion groups (including with advisory board members) and school council meetings, allowing pupils to reflect on what they have learned and how supported and safe they feel in RSHE lessons. Insights from pupils are used to assess the effectiveness of our curriculum, identify gaps in understanding, and shape future curriculum development. We ensure that pupil feedback is gathered in an age-appropriate and inclusive way, with particular attention to accessibility for pupils with SEND and/or EAL.

TRAINING FOR STAFF TEACHING RSHE

- Teachers are trained to teach RSHE and meet on a regular basis with other teachers and coordinators during quality link meetings and professional training sessions.
- In the 2025–26 academic year, leaders are putting in place high-quality, evidence-based training for staff involved in the teaching of RSHE in order to equip them with the skills and knowledge to address some of the new curriculum content, and to prepare them to be and feel able to safely address acutely sensitive but important topics including eating disorders, self-harm and suicide prevention.
- All teachers receive annual refresher training on independent school standard 5(d) which outlines their duty to ensure that where political issues are brought to the attention of pupils they always offer a balanced presentation of opposing views, and that the promotion of partisan views, as per the DfE's political impartiality in schools guidance, is prohibited.