

RELATIONSHIPS AND SEXUALITY EDUCATION POLICY

Banbridge Academy is a co-educational and non-denominational grammar school which seeks to provide a happy environment in which pupils and staff strive to achieve their full potential.

Rationale

RSE is a lifelong process which encompasses the acquisition of knowledge, understanding and skills and the development of attitudes, beliefs and values about personal and social relationships and gender issues.

Sexuality includes all aspects of the human personality and has biological, cultural, psychological, social and spiritual dimensions and should be taught in the context of relationships.

RSE is a statutory element in the Northern Ireland Curriculum. Our school's policy is in line with the school's ethos and DE circulars 2001/15, 2010/01, 2013/16, 2015/22, 2016/27, 2017/14, 2024/01 and CCEA's Guidance for Post Primary Schools (2015), which makes reference to The Equality Act 2006 and the relevant sections of UNCRC.

In 2015, CCEA disseminated teacher guidance on RSE (DE Circular 2015/22). More recently, in 2019 CCEA issued the document - 'Relationships and Sexuality Education Guidance, An Update for Post Primary Schools'. This updated the previous guidance issued in 2015 and outlines a contemporary approach to the delivery of RSE. It states that "Effective Relationships and Sexuality Education is essential if young people are to make responsible and well-informed decisions about their lives. It should provide them with the opportunity to develop the skills to build healthy and respectful relationships, stay safe and develop their own moral thinking and value system and up-date, accurate and accessible information about reproduction, sex and sexual health matters."

The document highlights the importance of RSE as it:

- Respects the rights of children and young people;
- Promotes a better understanding of diversity and inclusion;
- Helps young people keep themselves safer in the digital world;
- Helps young people to recognise and challenge inappropriate behaviour and touch;
- Provides reliable, accurate and age-appropriate information; and
- Increases young people's awareness of sexual health.

Our school's RSE policy is intended to provide a framework through which young people can develop the skills, attitudes and values necessary to deal with the challenges which they will meet in this very sensitive area. We recognise the significant role which we play in helping and encouraging our young people to make informed, responsible decisions about their relationships and sexual health.

Aims

The aims of RSE are to:

- Enhance the personal development, self-esteem and well-being of the pupils.
- Help the pupils develop healthy and respectful friendships and relationships.
- Foster an understanding of, and a healthy attitude to, human sexuality and relationships in a moral, social and spiritual framework, appropriate to the level of maturity of the pupil.
- Promote responsible behaviour and the ability to make informed decisions within a moral framework.
- Help the pupils to come to value family life and marriage.
- Appreciate the responsibilities of parenthood.
- Promote an appreciation of the value of human life.

Objectives

The RSE curriculum should enable pupils to:

- Form values and establish behaviour within a moral, spiritual and social framework.
- Develop the skills to form and enjoy healthy personal relationships and friendships which are based on responsibility and mutual respect.
- Make safe, positive, responsible choices about themselves, others and the way they live their lives.
- Make informed decisions regarding health and well-being based on age appropriate, comprehensive and scientifically accurate information on sexual and reproductive health and rights
- Assist in the development of emotional maturity and positive self-esteem.
- Develop skills for coping with peer pressure, conflict and threats to personal safety;
- Develop strategies to protect themselves and others from various forms of abuse;
- Acquire a knowledge and understanding of the law as it relates to sexual behaviour.
- Develop communication, decision-making, problem-solving, inter-personal and leadership skills

Morals and Values Framework

In Banbridge Academy, RSE is taught in a sensitive manner in conformity with moral and religious principles and the ethos of the school.

Emphasis is placed upon:

- The importance of permanent loving relationships.
- The responsibilities of parenthood and the value of a stable family life.
- The deferral of sexuality activity until young people are physically and emotionally mature.
- Abstinence as an achievable option.

It is important that RSE should enable pupils to distinguish between right and wrong, to take responsibilities for their own actions and understand the consequences of these actions for themselves and others.

The School's RSE Policy takes account of the Equality Act (Sexual Orientation) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2006 and the guidance subsequently issued by the Equality Commission in 2009 on eliminating sexual orientation discrimination in schools in Northern Ireland. This legislation demands that all pupils have the right to learn in a safe environment, to be treated with respect and dignity and not to be treated any less favourably on grounds of their actual or perceived sexual orientation.

It is important that RSE is inclusive of all differences regardless of SEN, race, age, disability, ethnicity, religion, gender and sexual orientation.

Responding to sensitive issues

It is recognised that, on occasion, certain sensitive issues may require consideration. When attempting to deal with these issues the following procedures will be adopted:

1. Pregnancy

The school aims to support any young woman who may become pregnant whilst enrolled here. Following consultation and agreement with the young mother to be, referral may be made to the Education Authority's SAM (School Age Mothers) project. Where possible, the school will liaise closely with the parents of the pupil.

In the event of a young woman informing the school that she is pregnant, it will be considered whether Child Protection is an issue. Advice will initially be sought from the school's designated teacher for Child Protection and follow its Child Protection procedures.

2. Confidentiality and disclosures

The foundation for the effective delivery of RSE is the building of secure, trusting, respectful relationships between teacher and pupil. Pupils should feel reassured that their teacher cares

about their wellbeing and be aware that there are adults whom they can talk to and confide in. Pupils must also know and understand that the promise of confidentiality is never an option in the classroom or school setting. Whilst teachers will offer support, they are obliged to notify the Designated/Deputy Designated Teacher if they are concerned that a pupil may be 'at risk', in line with the school's Safeguarding policy.

Independent counselling sessions are also available once a week during which individual pupils may discuss issues of concern, and receive support and help. Referrals may be made by pupils, parents or members of staff.

3. Gender Identity and Sexual Orientation

All pupils have the right to learn in a safe and secure environment, to be treated with respect and dignity and not be treated any less favourably on grounds of their actual or perceived sexual orientation or gender identity.

Bullying of a gender or sexual nature is as unacceptable as it is in any other situation where someone is mistreated or bullied because of their differences from those who are perceived to be the majority. All issues related to bullying on the grounds of gender identity or sexual orientation will be dealt with in line with the school's Anti-Bullying Policy.

4. Recording and referral

Clear and concise records will be kept pertaining to all issues outline above.

Parental Partnership

It is recognised that parents have the prime responsibility for bringing up their children and Banbridge Academy therefore seeks to ensure that the RSE programme complements and is supportive of the parents' role. It is paramount that partnership with parents exists, particularly in relation to the sensitive issues outlined above.

There is no statutory right to withdraw a pupil from general RSE classes. However, the School will take account of any parental concerns expressed to it and will try, as far as possible, to make alternative provision for any pupil whose parent wishes him/her to be excused from particular, or all, RSE classes. Where issues of a sensitive nature arise with individual pupils, teachers will encourage the pupils to discuss these with their parents.

According to the Dec 2023 regulations, at the request of a parent, a pupil at Key Stages 3 and 4 may be excused from Article 5(1A) education*, or specified elements of it. Following DENI Circular 2024/01 a pupil may be excused if a parent makes a written request to school, where the parent considers the education is against their wishes. For pupils in Years 8-11, when a parent makes such a request by confirming which elements from Article 5(1A) education or specified elements of it, the pupil will then

be excused. For pupils in Year 12, where a parent makes such a request, the school will also confirm that the pupil does not object to being excused.

All requests should be made in writing and addressed to the Principal. The request should specify whether it relates to all Article 5(1A) education or specified elements of that education and confirm which elements or elements are contrary to their wishes. Parents are not required to provide a reason to the school.

The school will contact the parent, and as appropriate, the pupil to discuss the request. This would ensure that the wishes of both the parent, and their child are understood. A record will be kept of the request. All excusals will remain in force until the end of the school year in which the request was made or in the case of a specified element, until that education has been completed.

*Article 5 (1A) education- The Relationships and Sexuality Education (NI) (Amendment) Regulations 2023 in respect of Learning for Life and Work (LLW) ensure that pupils at key stages 3 and 4 have the opportunity to “receive age-appropriate, comprehensive and scientifically accurate education on sexual and reproductive health and rights, covering prevention of early pregnancy and access to abortion”

Procedures for the involvement of outside agencies

Outside agencies bring specialist knowledge, expertise and experience into the classroom. If an outside agency is delivering a RSE support session in school, they will-

1. receive a copy of the school’s RSE and Safeguarding Policies
2. be required to agree with the ethos of Banbridge Academy
3. be made aware of the issues around confidentiality
4. be appropriately vetted
5. be asked to complete a service level agreement (Appendix A)

Information on the RSE programme including external speakers will be accessible to parents via the school website and calendar.

Co-ordination of RSE

The Vice Principal (Pastoral) is the member of Staff responsible for co-ordinating the RSE programme throughout the School. His/her role includes ensuring that an RSE programme is in place, in line with the policy and appropriate to the age and maturity of the pupils. He/she is responsible to the School Principal for the oversight of the programme.

Delivery/Programmes

The delivery of RSE will take place within a caring moral context, stressing the importance of stable, loving personal relationships, parental responsibilities and family life. The teaching will, at all times be appropriate to the maturity and level of understanding of the pupils concerned. Account will be taken

of pupils with Special Educational Needs. Aspects of positive relationships are reinforced by the ethos and life of the school.

Many elements of RSE will be delivered in a cross-curricular manner within the Science, Religious Studies, English, Home Economics, Computing, Citizenship and Physical Education departments, and also through the Learning for Life and Work and Personal Development programmes. Some issues are dealt with in Assemblies and through the wider pastoral programme via Year Heads and Form Teachers.

A variety of teaching methods is employed which reflect a framework of thinking skills and personal capabilities e.g. working with others and decision-making.

As part of the teaching programme, sessions will be taken by outside speakers and qualified professionals. These contributions are an integral part of the programme and help fulfil the aims.

The issues discussed at Key Stage 3 include:

- Growth and development during puberty
- The biological aspects of human fertility and conception
- Child development and birth
- Stages of development
- Sexuality, uniqueness and responsibility
- Health of the whole person
- Forming and maintaining relationships
- Self-esteem, stereotyping, media influences
- Appropriate use of Social media

The issues developed at Key Stage 4 include:

- Safer sex and health risks
- Values and attitudes about sexuality and sexual relationships, including media messages
- Family issues, parenting, maintaining a stable family life

The programme is supported by external agencies, such as 'Love for Life' who deliver workshops on personal health issues, relationships, decision-making and safety. Further details about the RSE programme can be found in Appendix B.

Monitoring and Evaluation

The school recognises and accepts the importance of on-going monitoring and evaluation of the RSE programme. To this end a programme of self-evaluation is employed, including sampling the views of staff, pupils and parents. Current and relevant information and research on RSE issues will be used to inform planning and ensure relevance.

This policy will be reviewed regularly and updated as necessary.

Related school Policies

This policy is set within the broader school context of Pastoral Care and as such should be read in conjunction with the following school policies:

- Pastoral Care Policy
- Safeguarding Policy
- Anti-bullying Policy
- Positive Behaviour Policy
- E-safety Policy
- Misuse of substances Policy

Approved by Board of Governors April 2024

APPENDIX A: SERVICE LEVEL AGREEMENT FOR USE WITH EXTERNAL AGENCIES WORKING IN SCHOOL

I/We have read the school ethos and policies of Banbridge Academy and agree to formally adhere to them:

- in working with young people and
- in the delivery of the programmes outlined below:

I am/ we are willing to provide **full** details of material content to:

Senior Management, Teachers, Parents, Governors and other Appropriate Bodies

and agree to fully implement any changes deemed necessary by the above representatives.

I/we accept the right of the school to withdraw the invitation issued to support the school in the education of our young people.

I/we formally accept the above terms of reference and in so doing I/we will acknowledge the agreement made.

Signed _____ (External Agency)

Dated _____