Relationships, Sex and Health Education (RSHE) Policy

Related documents include:

- Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy
- Behaviour Management Policy
- Anti-Bullying Policy
- Online Safety / Acceptable Use Policy
- Equality and Diversity Policy
- SEND Policy
- PSHE curriculum plan and schemes of work
- Complaints Policy

Legal Status and Statutory Framework:

This policy applies to Abbey College in Malvern as an independent school in England. It should be read alongside the College's safeguarding and child protection, behaviour, anti-bullying, online safety, equality, SEND, complaints and curriculum policies.

The policy is informed by, and must be read in the context of, the following legislation and guidance:

- Education and Skills Act 2008 and the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014 (as amended), in particular Part 1, paragraph 2(2)(d), and paragraph 2A of the Schedule.
- Children and Social Work Act 2017 and the Relationships Education, Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) and Health Education statutory guidance (Department for Education, July 2025), which came into force on 1 September 2026.
- Equality Act 2010, including the protected characteristics and the College's duties in relation to discrimination, harassment and victimisation.
- Education Act 2002 and Education Act 1996, as relevant to the statutory RSHE guidance.
- Keeping Children Safe in Education 2026 (in force from 1 September 2026).
- Working Together to Safeguard Children 2026.
- Prevent duty guidance and the relevant Teachers' Standards.

As an independent school, Abbey College is required to provide secondary-age pupils with relationships and sex education (RSE), to provide PSHE which encourages respect for other people with particular regard to the protected characteristics, and to have regard to the applicable RSHE statutory guidance when planning for RSE. The statutory health education requirements do not apply to independent schools in the same way as they apply to state-funded schools. Abbey College nevertheless includes physical health and mental wellbeing within its PSHE programme to meet the Independent School Standards and pupils' needs. The health-education section of the DfE guidance may be used as a helpful reference, but is not itself binding on independent schools.

Where the College departs from relevant recommendations in the statutory RSHE guidance, it will have a clear, recorded and reasonable justification.

Monitoring and Review

This policy will be subject to continuous monitoring, refinement and audit by the Welfare Manager.

- The next official date for review is **October 2027**

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1. Introduction

Abbey College is committed to providing a planned, age-appropriate, inclusive and carefully sequenced RSHE programme. The programme aims to give students the knowledge, understanding and skills they need to lead confident, healthy and independent lives and to become informed, active and responsible members of society.
The programme will support students to:

- develop healthy, respectful and safe relationships, including friendships and family relationships;
- understand consent, personal boundaries, privacy, mutual respect and the right to say no;
- recognise unhealthy, coercive, controlling, abusive or exploitative behaviour and know how to seek help;
- understand physical health, mental wellbeing, puberty, sexual health and the importance of seeking reliable advice;
- identify and manage risks in face-to-face and online environments;
- develop resilience, self-respect, self-worth, honesty, integrity, courage, humility, kindness, generosity, trustworthiness and a sense of justice;
- respect people with different backgrounds, beliefs, identities, abilities and family circumstances; and
- prepare for the opportunities, responsibilities and experiences of adult life in British society.

2. Curriculum and Content

RSHE is integrated with the College's PSHE programme and is supported by the wider curriculum, pastoral provision, assemblies and the College's safeguarding work. Content is planned and sequenced according to students' age, maturity, educational stage, needs and prior knowledge. The College will maintain supporting plans and schemes of work showing what is taught, when it is taught and who is responsible.

2.1 Relationships education and RSE

- Families and people who care for us; different family structures; marriage and civil partnership as recognised in law.
- Respectful relationships, friendships, kindness, trust, managing conflict and recognising unhealthy relationships.
- Consent, boundaries, privacy, personal autonomy and respectful communication.
- Bullying, prejudice, discrimination, harassment, sexual harassment, sexual violence, misogyny, coercion, exploitation and abuse.
- Intimate and sexual relationships, readiness, responsibility, contraception, pregnancy, sexually transmitted infections and sexual health, taught factually and in an age-appropriate manner.
- Online relationships and safety, including grooming, harmful content, pornography, pressure to share intimate images, image-based abuse, digital footprints, privacy and reporting concerns.
- Relevant law, including the age of consent, sexual offences, image-sharing offences and the legal protections available to children and young people.

2.2 Physical health and mental wellbeing within PSHE

- Mental wellbeing, emotional literacy, resilience, self-esteem, stress and help-seeking.
- Suicide awareness and prevention, taught safely and sensitively, without describing methods; students are signposted to appropriate support.

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- Physical health and fitness, healthy eating, sleep, hygiene and health prevention.
- Puberty and the changing adolescent body.
- Drugs, alcohol, tobacco and vaping, including health and legal consequences.
- Basic first aid and how to access medical help.

The curriculum will be reviewed to ensure that it responds to emerging risks and issues affecting students, including online harms, sexual harassment and violence, and the needs of the College's international student community.

3. Equality, Inclusion and Accessibility

The RSHE programme will be accessible to all students, including students with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND), students with English as an additional language (EAL), and students from different cultural, religious and family backgrounds. Reasonable adjustments, differentiated resources, appropriate vocabulary and additional explanation will be used where needed.

The College will teach respect for the protected characteristics in the Equality Act 2010: age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, and sexual orientation. Teaching will be age-appropriate, factual and respectful. Students may learn about differing beliefs and viewpoints, but no student should be subjected to harassment, humiliation or discrimination.

Where topics are contested or sensitive, staff will explain relevant facts and the law accurately, distinguish fact from opinion, encourage respectful discussion and avoid presenting a particular contested view as the only permissible personal belief. The College will maintain a safe, respectful learning environment for all students.

4. Teaching Approach, Staff and External Contributors

RSHE will normally be delivered by appropriately prepared College staff as part of PSHE and the wider pastoral programme. Any external contributor must be appropriately vetted and briefed, and the College retains responsibility for the content, quality and safeguarding of teaching. Staff and external contributors must have the knowledge and confidence to deliver sensitive material safely and to respond appropriately to disclosures.

Lessons will use a range of suitable methods, including explanation, discussion, scenario-based learning and opportunities for students to ask questions. Ground rules will be established. Students will not be required to disclose personal or family experiences or to participate in activities that would cause unnecessary embarrassment or distress. Staff delivering RSHE will receive appropriate guidance and training, including safeguarding procedures, responding to disclosures, managing difficult questions and signposting students to support.

5. Safeguarding, Disclosures and Difficult Questions

RSHE is part of the College's wider safeguarding approach. Teaching may lead to a student disclosing abuse, exploitation, harmful sexual behaviour, self-harm, suicidal thoughts or another safeguarding concern. Staff must follow the College's safeguarding and child protection policy and report concerns promptly to the Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) or deputy DSL.

Staff must not promise confidentiality. They should listen calmly, take the student seriously, avoid leading questions or investigating the allegation, make a factual record as soon as possible and pass the information to the DSL without delay. The DSL will decide what action and referral are required. Questions will be answered in a factual, sensitive and age-appropriate way. Staff may defer a question, explain that it falls outside the planned curriculum, or refer it

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to an appropriate member of staff. Personal questions about a student's own circumstances should be handled privately and in accordance with safeguarding procedures.

6. Parents, Consultation and Access to Materials

The College recognises the importance of working in partnership with parents and carers. Parents will be consulted before this policy is introduced or revised. The College will explain the broad content and sequencing of the programme and will make relevant curriculum materials available for parents to view on request, subject to appropriate copyright and safeguarding considerations.
Parents will be informed in advance about the sex education content within lessons. If the College needs to make a significant change to the published programme, parents will be informed and relevant materials will be made available on request.
This policy will be published on the College website and a copy will be provided free of charge to anyone who requests it.

7. Parental Requests to Withdraw from Sex Education

A parent may request that their child be wholly or partly excused from sex education delivered as part of RSE. This does not extend to relationships education or to content taught as part of the science curriculum, including relevant teaching about puberty or human reproduction.

The Principal will consider each request in accordance with paragraph 2A of the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014 and the DfE RSHE statutory guidance. The Principal will normally discuss the request with the parent and, where appropriate, the student, to understand the reasons and explain the purpose and benefits of the relevant teaching. The discussion and decision will be recorded. In secondary education, a request should be granted unless the Principal considers that there are exceptional circumstances in which the student should not be excused, for example because of safeguarding concerns or the student's particular vulnerability.

A student may choose to opt back into sex education from three terms before their sixteenth birthday, even where a parent has previously requested withdrawal. The College will ensure that students are made aware of this right. The policy does not provide for an automatic transfer of the withdrawal decision to the student on their sixteenth birthday.

Where a student is excused from sex education, the College will provide appropriate, purposeful and supervised education during the relevant lesson time. This will not be treated as a disciplinary matter.

8. Monitoring, Evaluation and Review

The Welfare Manager, working with the designated RSHE lead and the Principal, will monitor the delivery and effectiveness of the programme. Monitoring may include review of schemes of work and resources, student feedback, staff feedback, safeguarding themes and the extent to which the programme meets students' needs.

The policy will be reviewed at least annually and sooner where legislation, statutory guidance, safeguarding practice or the needs of the student body make this necessary. Parents will be consulted before revisions are finalised. The proprietor / appropriate school authority will approve the policy.

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