

RSHE Policy

2026-27



ponthigh.org.uk

Ponteland High School

Callerton Lane, Ponteland, Newcastle Upon Tyne, NE20 9EG



RSHE Policy

1. Purpose and Definition

RSHE at Ponteland High encompasses the knowledge, understanding and skills taught to students in building and sustaining healthy and happy relationships. This is principally delivered through a structured tutorial curriculum; however it is also complemented by tutor time sessions, assemblies, and, where appropriate, links to the broader academic curriculum.

At Ponteland High School our RSHE curriculum plays a crucial role in securing our broader aims for the school.

- A foundation of safe and fulfilling relationships is central to students' happiness, both now and in the longer term.
- For students to be safe and secure, a clear understanding of what risks they could face, and how best to tackle them is needed.
- We want students to thrive and achieve exceptionally well not only academically but as individuals, family members and citizens.

Within our broader personal development curriculum, RSHE is the part of the curriculum where we address these factors directly. The curriculum covers the crucial emotional, social, and cultural dimensions of growing up, including how to form healthy friendships and family relationships; how to recognise when a relationship is harmful; how to understand and communicate consent; how to look after our physical and mental health and how to navigate an increasingly complex online world. Within our secondary context, relationships and sex education are included to give students accurate and honest knowledge about sexual health and intimate relationships so that they can make informed decisions.

We also recognise that our RSHE delivery provides students with information they may not receive elsewhere. As we seek to prepare students for a world where they may encounter pressure, complexity, or risk in their relationships and online lives, we have a crucial responsibility to equip them for this. We want to support students to face these experiences equipped with knowledge, with self-respect and the confidence to seek help when they need it.

It is also important to be clear about what RSHE is not. It is not about encouraging sexual activity or promoting a particular set of values about how people should live. It is not about replacing the role of parents as the primary educators of their children in this area.

Instead we aim to give students a foundation of knowledge, understanding and skills, and a language that makes these conversations at home easier rather than replacing them. Our aim is to



give students the knowledge and language to engage confidently with these topics. This includes supporting students to engage confidently in conversation with their families and communities..

2. Legal Framework

Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) and Health Education are compulsory in all state-funded secondary schools in England under the Relationships Education, Relationships and Sex Education and Health Education (England) Regulations 2019, made under the Children and Social Work Act 2017. This policy has been written in accordance with the updated statutory guidance issued by the Department for Education in July 2025, which takes effect from 1 September 2026.

Schools are required to have an up-to-date written RSE policy, to publish it on the school website, and to provide a copy free of charge to anyone who requests one. This policy fulfils that duty. Consultation with parents is planned for Summer Term 2026. This policy will be reviewed in light of that process, with any revisions approved by the Academy Committee. The next review is due no later than September 2026.

This policy should be read alongside our Curriculum Overview, which sets out in detail what is taught, when, and by whom. Both documents are available on the school website. Parents who would like a printed copy of either document should contact the school office.

3. Guiding Principles

RSHE is most effective when it is consistent with the wider culture of the school. The values central to this subject, of respect and compassion for others as well as oneself, are reflected in our behaviour policy, our pastoral systems, and our expectations of how students treat one another. Our RSHE is not separate from the rest of school life but instead is designed to inform the wider experience of students in our school community.

RSHE lessons are taught with student participation in mind. Opportunities for discussion and oracy play a central part in teaching. Student voice plays an important role in helping us to understand what needs to be taught and when. Students are consulted as part of review processes and their opinions and feedback are used to develop delivery for future sessions. The aim is to equip students with the knowledge, understanding and skills to apply their learning in real situations, not simply to cover content.

Our curriculum sequence is carefully designed to help students understand core concepts and themes progressively. This includes providing opportunities to return to topics, developing age-appropriate understanding throughout the students' journey through school. We have considered carefully student feedback about their experiences to decide when topics should be introduced. This balances the aim of equipping students before challenges arise with the need to ensure content is always age and stage appropriate.



Parents are central to effective RSHE. The school ensures parents are informed of what is being taught and when, and provides access to curriculum materials through a parent portal. Parents will be actively supported in continuing RSHE conversations at home.

Teaching RSHE requires particular skill. Staff are supported to establish ground rules, manage sensitive discussion, apply distancing strategies where appropriate and recognise when individual follow-up is needed. The school develops this expertise through regular CPD and access to specialist guidance.

The curriculum is designed to be accessible to all students and to support their needs, including those with SEND. It aims to include and represent the broad range of students and families that make up our school community. It is adapted as necessary to meet individual needs. This is to ensure it is relevant to the full range of students' experiences and circumstances.

4. Planning, Teaching and Curriculum

Responsibility for the RSHE curriculum design is held by the Deputy Headteacher for Personal Development. The curriculum is principally delivered by form tutors in fortnightly timetabled tutorial sessions.

The curriculum is designed to progressively increase in depth through a student's experience of school. To achieve this, lessons are grouped into units, which in turn allows connected topics to build over time. For example, the topic of personal safety begins in Year 7 by considering safety in the community and beyond, across a student's journey this is applied in an age appropriate manner to different contexts.

This model in turn, allows us to build appropriately on the material students have already covered as part of their primary RSHE experience. For example, key learning regarding puberty and adolescence is revisited in Year 7 through a complementary unit, allowing students to develop their understanding in a secondary context.

To support a consistent, high quality approach to lesson planning, all staff designing lessons make reference to a shared 'Planning Principles' document. Lesson design is quality assured by the Deputy Headteacher with overall responsibility for Personal Development. Alongside broader CPD, staff have access to specific lesson guidance through a training video to support their individual preparation.

To support lesson design, careful use is made of external resources as reference points. This includes reference to national organisations such as the PSHE Association, Pol-Ed or specific bodies such as the RNLI. Where appropriate, specific activities or sources of information are used, however, it is rare that an 'off-the-shelf' approach is taken, instead a judicious approach is taken to use the best of available resources, adapted to the specific needs and context of our school.



We recognise the cross-curricular connection between RSHE topics and other aspects of the school curriculum, for example:

- In science, where topics about reproduction and developing bodies connect to students understanding of relationships
- In PE, where the benefits of activity for physical and mental health are made explicit
- In Food Technology, where an understanding of a healthy relationship with food is taught.
- In ICT, where online safety features as an introductory unit in each KS3 year, establishing the foundations for safe digital engagement.

Student progress in RSHE is assessed through a range of in-lesson activities, including baseline assessments, hinge questions and broader assessment tasks designed to gauge knowledge and understanding. In addition, students complete a termly questionnaire covering the RSHE content taught that term. This includes scenario-based questions to assess students' ability to apply their learning, not simply to recall it. Outcomes are analysed by the Deputy Headteacher for Personal Development and used to determine the appropriate level of response, whether individual follow-up, cohort reteaching or year group reinforcement, with Pastoral Leaders responsible for delivering follow-up activities within their year group.

Relationships education and health education are compulsory for all students and there is no right to withdraw from them.

Sex education, defined as content that goes beyond the biological content covered in the National Curriculum for Science, is also taught at Ponteland High School. At Ponteland High School, sex education content is introduced in Year 9 and continues through Years 10 and 11. Parents of secondary-age students have the right to request that their child is withdrawn from sex education. This is addressed in Section 9 of this policy. The specific content that constitutes sex education are outlined below:

- Y9 Unit 3: Intimate and Sexual Relationships
- Y10 Unit 2: Healthy and Safe Relationships
- Y11 Unit 3: Safe Relationships and Sexual Health

All other units within the RSHE programme constitute relationships education or health education. There is no right to withdraw from these.

5. Working with External Agencies

Within our curriculum design, certain topics are designated as 'Specialist Input' sessions, delivered by external agencies such as the School Nursing Team. The school vets all external speakers for suitability and requires presentation materials to be submitted in advance. A visiting speaker protocol ensures a consistent approach is applied.

The selection of external providers is based on their specialist knowledge, professional standing and experience of working with secondary-age students. Before any external agency delivers a



session, the school carries out checks on the organisation and any individual visitors, in line with our visiting speaker protocol. No external provider delivers a session without prior approval from the Deputy Headteacher for Personal Development.

All materials to be used in a session must be submitted to the school in advance. These are reviewed to ensure they are age appropriate, accurate and aligned to the school's curriculum aims before approval is granted. We reserve the right to seek amendments to materials or withdraw approval where content does not meet these standards.

Before each session, the school briefs external providers on its safeguarding procedures, including how concerns or disclosures should be handled. Providers are made aware that any safeguarding concern that arises must be referred immediately to the Designated Safeguarding Lead. A member of school staff is present for all externally delivered sessions.

6. Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

Ponteland High School is committed to fulfilling its duties under the Equality Act 2010. In the context of RSHE, this means ensuring that the curriculum is relevant and accessible to all students, that the full range of families and relationships represented in our school community is reflected in what we teach, and that no student is made to feel excluded by the content or approach of their RSHE education

Teaching about sexual orientation and same-sex relationships is integrated throughout the curriculum in an age-appropriate way, rather than treated as a standalone topic, with due regard to the religious and cultural backgrounds of students.

The religious and cultural backgrounds of students are taken into account in planning and delivering RSHE. We are respectful of the range of beliefs held within our broader community. The classroom is a space from which students can engage with the topics taught from within their own value frameworks. We have a clear responsibility to teach all statutory content to all students (with the exception of specific rights for withdrawal from sex education). Where a student's religious or cultural background leads them to question or disagree with curriculum content this will be handled with sensitivity.

Our curriculum explicitly addresses the harms caused by sexism, misogyny and gender stereotyping. Students will be taught to recognise and challenge sexism in the range of forms it may present itself. This will include opportunities for all students to explore and develop positive, healthy understandings of masculinity.

In teaching about biological sex and gender reassignment, the school's approach is grounded in facts and the law. Students are taught accurately about biological sex, the legal status of gender reassignment as a protected characteristic, and the rights associated with both. Beyond this, the school recognises that questions of gender identity are the subject of significant social and legal



debate. The school does not teach any particular view on these questions as fact, and does not use materials that present contested positions as settled.

Our aim across all areas is to reflect the law as it currently stands, ensure that students understand their own rights and the rights of others, and equip them to navigate life in modern Britain.

7. Special Educational Needs and Disabilities

Ponteland High School is committed to RSHE being fully accessible to all students, including the approximately 200 students on our SEND register. Our SEND population reflects the full range of needs across the four areas identified in the SEND Code of Practice, and our approach to RSHE is designed with this breadth in mind.

RSHE is delivered through inclusive mainstream provision. Our starting point is universal provision that is SEND-friendly by design. Lessons and resources are planned from the outset with the needs of SEND students in mind, with adaptations built in as options rather than added as afterthoughts. Where individual students require targeted support beyond this, adaptations are made in response to specific need, informed by the work of the SENCO and the Deputy Headteacher for Personal Development.

We recognise that students with SEND can be more vulnerable than their peers to harmful relationships and sexual exploitation. This shapes both our curriculum planning and our monitoring of student wellbeing. Assessment data, including the termly questionnaire, is reviewed with SEND students' needs in mind, and where responses indicate a need for further input, this is addressed through the same three-level response structure applied across the wider cohort, with additional support commissioned where appropriate.

For students with an Education, Health and Care Plan, the preparing for adulthood outcomes set out in the SEND Code of Practice are an important reference point in curriculum planning. Key leaders ensure that RSHE provision supports students in developing the knowledge, skills and understanding they will need as they move towards greater independence, including in the context of relationships, health and personal safety.

8. Safeguarding and Confidentiality

RSHE addresses topics that are sensitive by nature and that can, on occasion, prompt students to disclose information about their own experiences or circumstances. The school recognises that effective RSHE, precisely because it creates an open and honest environment, may increase the likelihood of safeguarding disclosures. This is not a reason to avoid difficult content; it is a reason to ensure that the conditions for safe disclosure are well understood by both staff and students.

Lesson and task design plays an important role in managing this. RSHE lessons are designed, wherever possible, to use distanced approaches, framing discussions and activities in ways that



allow students to engage with sensitive material without being required to draw on or disclose personal experience. This might include the use of scenarios, case studies or hypothetical situations that create productive distance between the content and the student's own circumstances. Staff are trained in the importance of asking questions in a distanced manner, understanding that how a question is framed can determine whether a student feels safe enough to engage. This approach is embedded in the school's Planning Principles and reinforced through staff CPD.

At the start of units covering sensitive material, class teachers establish clear ground rules for discussion. Students are made aware of the limits of confidentiality, that whilst the classroom is a space for open discussion, information shared that gives rise to a safeguarding concern will be passed to the appropriate member of staff. Students are signposted to sources of support both within school and beyond, so that they know where to turn if a topic raises concerns for them personally.

Where a student makes a disclosure during an RSHE lesson, or where a member of staff identifies signs of distress, staff follow the school's standard safeguarding procedure, referring the concern to the Designated Safeguarding Lead without delay. All staff teaching RSHE are aware of their responsibilities in this regard.

Where a student asks a question that touches on content beyond the planned lesson, including content relating to sex education from which they may have been withdrawn, teachers use professional judgement in responding, prioritising the student's safety and wellbeing and signposting to appropriate support where necessary.

All RSHE provision is delivered in accordance with the current version of Keeping Children Safe in Education and the school's Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy, to which readers are directed for full procedural detail. Safeguarding arrangements for sessions delivered by external agencies are set out in Section 5 of this policy.

9. Parents' Rights and Engagement

Parents are the primary educators of their children and their engagement with RSHE is something the school actively seeks to support. This section sets out how the school keeps parents informed, how parents can access curriculum materials, and the process for requesting withdrawal from sex education.

Keeping Parents Informed

At the start of each academic year, parents are informed of the RSHE content their child will cover during that year, including which units constitute sex education. This communication is issued through the school's usual parent communication channel. The school is committed to ensuring that no parent is unaware that their child is studying sex education content, proactive communication is a standing commitment, not a response to concern.



Parents are directed to the school's Curriculum Overview, published on the school website, for a full breakdown of what is taught in each year group and when. Parents who wish to discuss the content of the RSHE programme at any point are welcome to contact the Deputy Headteacher for Personal Development.

Accessing Curriculum Materials

The school operates a parent portal through which parents can access RSHE curriculum materials. From September 2026, this will include all lesson presentations and a representative sample of other resources used in the programme. Parents who wish to access materials before the portal is fully operational should contact the Deputy Headteacher for Personal Development to arrange this.

Where copyright restrictions apply to external materials used in RSHE, the school will only use providers whose terms permit parent access, including, for example, the PSHE Association. Copyright considerations will never be used as a reason to withhold materials from parents.

Parents' Right to Withdraw from Sex Education

Parents of secondary-age students have the right to request that their child is withdrawn from sex education. This right applies to the units identified as sex education in the Curriculum Overview, it does not extend to relationships education or health education, from which there is no right of withdrawal.

The school is committed to handling withdrawal requests with care and without judgement. Parents wishing to make a request should contact the Deputy Headteacher for Personal Development in the first instance. A discussion will follow, covering the content of the relevant units, with the aim of addressing any concerns and supporting parents to make a fully informed decision. The outcome of this discussion is documented and, where withdrawal is agreed, the decision is confirmed by the Headteacher.

The school will comply with a withdrawal request in all but exceptional circumstances. Where the Headteacher considers that withdrawal would not be in the best interests of the student, for example where there are safeguarding considerations, the request may be refused. In such cases, the school will explain its reasoning to the parent and signpost to the appropriate avenue for raising a concern.

Students who are withdrawn from sex education are supported to work independently on topics drawn from the broader RSHE curriculum, in a designated location with pastoral supervision.

Students' Right to Opt Back In

Students who have been withdrawn from sex education have the right to opt back into those sessions from three terms before their sixteenth birthday. The school will ensure that withdrawn students are made aware of this right at the appropriate point, so that they are able to exercise it if they choose to do so.



10. Monitoring and Evaluation

The quality and impact of RSHE provision is monitored on a termly basis by the Deputy Headteacher for Personal Development. This draws together evidence from multiple sources: year group learning walks inform judgement about the quality of delivery; termly assessment data, including the scenario-based questionnaire described in Section 4, provides a measure of students' developing knowledge, understanding and skills; and staff delivering RSHE contribute their own reflections on what is working well and where provision could be strengthened.

Student voice plays a central role in the monitoring process. The termly questionnaire is complemented by follow-up student voice activities, designed to investigate emerging themes from assessment responses and give leaders the opportunity to explore student views in greater depth. These conversations also provide students with the opportunity to identify which aspects of their RSHE experience have been most effective and where sessions could be made more relevant to their lives. This ensures that the student perspective shapes provision in a meaningful and ongoing way, rather than being gathered and set aside.

Parent views on Personal Development provision are sought as part of the school's broader engagement with families and inform the annual review of this policy. The school is committed to strengthening the mechanisms through which parents contribute to the evaluation of RSHE, and this will be developed as part of the consultation process described in Section 2.

The school's link governor for Personal Development receives regular updates on RSHE monitoring and evaluation, including assessment outcomes and the findings of student and staff voice activities. Governors satisfy themselves that provision is effective, accessible to all students including those with SEND, and aligned with the statutory guidance.

Successful RSHE is understood broadly. Progress in students' knowledge, understanding and skills is evidenced through the full range of in-lesson and termly assessment activities, but the school recognises that the impact of effective RSHE extends beyond what formal assessment can capture. The quality of provision is also visible in wider indicators: in how students engage with one another and with the school community, in patterns of safeguarding referrals and early help, and in the confidence students demonstrate in seeking support when they need it. Monitoring takes account of this broader picture alongside formal assessment data.

11. Policy Governance

Day-to-day responsibility for this policy rests with the Deputy Headteacher for Personal Development, who oversees its implementation, ensures it remains current and coordinates the



review process.

This policy is approved by the Academy Committee. It is reviewed annually, with any revisions presented to the Academy Committee for approval before taking effect. The review process draws on the monitoring and evaluation activities described in Section 10, including assessment data, student and staff voice, and the outcomes of parent consultation.

This policy is published on the school website and is available free of charge in printed form to any parent or member of the public who requests a copy from the school office.

J Greenshields

July 26