Minerva Virtual Academy

Relationship, Health and Sex Education Policy

KEY CONTACTS

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Harry Allen	Vice Principal Middle East
Rebecca Pinfield	Vice Principal Pastoral
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INTRODUCTION

Minerva Virtual Academy aims to ensure students are well prepared for the wider world and today's society through a full and thorough Wellbeing curriculum of Personal, Social, Health and Economic (PSHE) education. The Wellbeing curriculum has been carefully developed in order to provide pupils with knowledge and guidance that will allow them to make sound life decisions. It includes topics such as self-concept, self-confidence, careers, personal safety, physical and mental health, substance education, understanding political systems, radicalisation and extremism, discrimination, online safety and digital literacy, local and global citizenship, financial understanding, and much more. Relationships, Health and Sex Education (RHSE) sits within this wider PSHE curriculum, forming the core of the subject. This is because without robust education about one's relationships with oneself and others, it becomes very difficult to be safe and successful.

Definition

Relationships, Sex & Health Education (RHSE) provides learning opportunities that focus on the emotional, social and cultural development of pupils, and involves learning about relationships, sexual health, sexuality, healthy lifestyles, diversity and personal identity. RHSE involves a combination of sharing information, and exploring issues and values. RHSE is not about the promotion of sexual activity.

The RHSE strands of our PSHE curriculum enable our students to develop understanding and skills that will help them thrive in non-sexual relationships as family members, friends, students, employees and global citizens. Further to this, RHSE aims to enable them to remain safe and make informed decisions regarding their reproductive/sexual health and relationships. This aspect of RHSE is not about the promotion of sexual activity; it focuses instead on boundaries, safety, consent and taking seriously the impact that sexual activity can have. The curriculum is aligned with the Government's

statutory guidance on Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) and Health Education and is LGBTQ+ inclusive. (September 2026).

The aims of Relationships, Health and Sex education (RHSE) at our school are to:

- Provide a framework in which sensitive discussions can take place
- Prepare pupils for changes and development during adolescence
- Help pupils develop feelings of self-respect, confidence and empathy
- Create a positive culture around issues of sexuality and relationships
- Give pupils impartial, age-appropriate, information that they might otherwise seek less safely and successfully from peers or the internet
- Develop pupils' understanding of reproductive health and options
- Enable pupils to source help and support from trusted adults, healthcare providers and professionals

The aims of RHSE at our school are **not** to:

- Encourage uncontrolled disclosure and discussion within lessons
- Encourage sexual activity
- Provide mental health treatment, diagnosis or therapy

Statutory requirements

As an independent secondary school, we must provide RHSE to all pupils under section 34 of the Children and Social Work Act 2017.

In teaching RHSE, we're required to have regard to guidance issued by the Secretary of State, as outlined in section 403 of the Education Act 1996.

We also have regard to legal duties set out in:

- Sections 406 and 407 of the Education Act 1996
- Keeping Children Safe in Education 2026
- Part 6, Chapter 1 of the Equality Act 2010

In addition, we must adhere to The Public Sector Equality Duty (as set out in section 149 of the Equality Act 2010). This duty requires public bodies to have due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between different people when carrying out their activities.

Policy development

This policy was drafted by the Principal, in consultation with the Wellbeing teaching team and Heads of Year.

This policy has been developed in consultation with parents and is made available to parents.

Curriculum

In lesson time, our RHSE curriculum is taught weekly in 45-minute lessons by subject specialists for all year groups. This is set out as per Appendix 1, but may sometimes need to be adapted to ensure it best supports the changing needs of each year group. All lessons and live discussions are carefully planned and managed for age-appropriacy. Teachers are trained in a range of strategies to ensure the lessons are a safe space for all and to ensure that young people are not inadvertently exposed to content that is not safe or appropriate. Wellbeing lessons foster an environment of tolerance and dialogue, rooted in an understanding of ourselves and others. They take an inclusive approach ot LGBTQ+, ethnicity, religion and cultural differences.

In the wider life of the school, we deliver aspects of the curriculum through Assemblies (Whole School and year group) and through Awareness Weeks/Days and Enrichment Weeks. The school observes any relevant national awareness weeks or days, including 'Safer Internet Day' and 'Mental Health Awareness Week'. Mentors develop themes covered in Wellbeing lessons with their mentees, providing pastoral support and reinforcing the curriculum further. Students, staff and parents receive various resources and input (via parent and staff bulletins, links and assemblies) to ensure wider awareness and education and to enable further dialogue.

Delivery of RHSE

This section sets out MVA's approach to delivering RHSE.

RHSE is taught within the Wellbeing curriculum, with the more particular biological aspects of RHSE being taught within the Science curriculum. As indicated above, RHSE focuses on giving young people the information they need to help them develop healthy, nurturing relationships of all kinds.

For specific information about our RHSE curriculum, see Appendix 1 (indicating where RHSE is taught within Wellbeing/PSHE) and Appendix 2 (the government guidance on what statutory content must be taught within each key stage).

Inclusivity

The RHSE teaching materials aim to meet the needs of all pupils regardless of gender, sexual orientation or any other protected characteristic as outlined in the Equality Act of 2010 and will be accessible to all pupils.

We will teach topics in a manner that:

- Considers how a diverse range of pupils will relate to them, emphasising respect for a diversity of cultural and religious beliefs.

- Is sensitive to all pupils' experiences and will avoid (where reasonably possible) the depiction of any one sexuality, gender identity or relationship type as normative or normal.

- Considers the context of family life, taking care to make sure that there is no stigmatisation of children based on their home circumstances (families can include single parent families, LGBT parents, families headed by grandparents, adoptive parents and foster parents/carers, amongst other structures), along with reflecting sensitively that some children may have a different structure of support around them (for example, looked-after children or young carers).

- Is planned so that pupils with SEND can access the learning and thrive. .

- We will also be mindful of the law and legal requirements, taking care not to condone or encourage illegal political activity, such as violent action against people, criminal damage to property, hate crime, terrorism or the illegal use of drugs.

During lessons, create a culture to support students so they are:

- Safe and supported
- Understanding of the key boundaries and ground rules that keep everyone else safe
- Rewarded for positive attitudes to learning
- Able to engage with the key messages
- Building literacy, oracy and numeracy skills that promote their wider academic development

Use of resources

We will consider whether any resources we plan to use:

- Are aligned with the teaching requirements set out in the statutory RHSE guidance
- Would support pupils in applying their knowledge in different contexts and settings
- Contain distancing techniques to enable pupils to engage in the learning without being triggered or sharing overly personal information.
- Are age-appropriate, given the age, developmental stage and background of our pupils

- Are evidence-based and contain up-to-date, impartial, robust facts and statistics
- Fit into our curriculum plan
- Are from credible sources
- Are compatible with effective teaching approaches
- Are sensitive to pupils' experiences and won't provoke distress

Use of external organisations and materials

We will make sure that any agency and any materials used are appropriate and in line with our legal duties around political impartiality.

The school remains responsible for what is said to pupils. This includes making sure that any speakers, tools and resources used don't undermine the fundamental British values of democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty, and mutual respect and tolerance of those with different faiths and beliefs.

We will make appropriate checks and engage with external agencies to make sure that their approach to teaching about RHSE is balanced, and it and the resources they intend to use:

- Align with MVA's inclusive values
- Are age-appropriate
- Are in line with pupils' developmental stage

We will comply with:

- The Teachers' Standards
- The Equality Act 2010
- The Human Rights Act 1998
- The Education Act 1996

Only work with external agencies where we have full confidence in the agency, its approach and the resources it uses.

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

The Vice Principal Pastoral

The VPP is responsible for ensuring that RHSE is taught consistently across the school, and for managing requests to withdraw pupils from all or part of Sex Education (but not Relationships or Health Education up to three terms before their child turns 16).

Staff

Staff are responsible for:

- Delivering RHSE in a sensitive way
- Planning RHSE lessons following best-practice guidance (if Content Creators)
- Modelling positive attitudes to RHSE
- Monitoring progress
- Responding to the needs of individual pupils
- Raising pastoral and safeguarding concerns
- Responding appropriately to pupils whose parents wish them to be withdrawn from the Sex Education of the RHSE curriculum.

Pupils

Pupils are expected to engage fully in RHSE and, when discussing issues related to RHSE, treat others with respect and sensitivity.

Parents' right to withdraw

Parents have the right to withdraw their children from the [non-statutory/non-Science] components of Sex Education within RHSE up to and until three terms before the child turns 16. After this point, if the child wishes to receive Sex Education rather than being withdrawn, the school will arrange this.

Requests for withdrawal should be put in writing and addressed to the Vice Principal Pastoral. Parents will be encouraged to review the curriculum for their child for that year. The extent of the withdrawal will be discussed and parents' wishes will be respected; in some cases, this will mean that a pupil will miss only a portion of the non-statutory Sex Education and in other cases, it will mean that they will miss all of it for that year. A copy of the withdrawal request will be placed in the pupil's educational record in CPOMs. A new request to withdraw will need to be made each academic year to take into account the changing curriculum and the changing needs of the pupil. To comply with government expectations, three terms before the pupil's 16th birthday, the school will use the records of missed Sex Education to offer the pupil the choice to receive the education they have missed. It will then be the pupil's decision whether they receive this education.

Monitoring arrangements

The delivery of RHSE is monitored by Harry Allen, Vice Principal Middle East, through:

- Overseeing content creation on our Virtual Learning Platform
- Pupils' development in RHSE (as part of PSHE) is monitored by class teachers in line with our internal assessment systems.

POLICY DEVELOPMENT AND REVIEW

This procedure is designed to set good practice standards. However, the School recognises that best practice develops over time and, as such, will update it regularly in the light of experience and as a result of changes in legislation or its own internal organisation and policies. The procedure will be subject to a comprehensive review on an annual basis.

Date Policy created:	July 2021
Last Review Date: Reviewed by:	July 2026 Suzanne Lindley and Harry Allen, Bianca Gama
Next Review Date:	July 2027

Appendix 1: Curriculum map

PSHE Curriculum Map (Red blocks indicate where some Sex Education may be present)

Year:	Year 7	Year 8	Year 9	Year 10	Year 11	Year 12	Year 13
Au1	Transition and dealing with change	Looking Ahead - Futures Education	Setting Goals and Developing Academic Skills	Understanding Mental Health	Next Steps - Post-16 Options	Mental Health, Wellbeing and First Aid	Developing Financial Skills
	Futures Introduction	Puberty and Changing Bodies					
Au2	Healthy Friendships and The Kindness Project	Introduction to Romantic Relationships	Intimate Relationships (RSE)	Healthy Online Relationships	Creating Safety in Sexual Intimacy Pregnancy and Parenting	RSE - Healthy Relationships and Sexual Wellbeing	RSE: Sexual Health, Fertility and Personal Safety
Sp1	Emotion Management	Law, Crime, and Society	Futures and Building Careers Literacy	Money and Finance in the Modern World	Citizenship: Crime and Reform in the UK	Independence and Keeping Safe (including Cultural Competency)	Supporting Your Physical Health Independently
Sp2	Diversity & Inclusion	Mental Health and Wellbeing	Drug and Alcohol Education	Careers / Work Experience	Growing Independence	Social Responsibility: Emergency Skills	Exam and Wellbeing Support
Su1	Healthy Lifestyles	Family Structures and Relationships	Individuality, Inequalities, and Fundamental Human Rights	Exploring Influence	Revision Support Sessions	Exam Support Road Safety	
Su2	Safety in the Community	First Aid Skills – choking, allergies, CPR	Healthy Habits for Teenagers	Understanding Extremism		Road Safety	

Appendix 2: By the end of secondary school pupils should know:

Topic	Pupils should know
Families	Pupils should know: • that there are different types of committed, stable relationships inc. LGBTQ+ • how these relationships might contribute to human happiness and their importance for bringing up children • what marriage is, including their legal status e.g. that marriage carries legal rights and protections not available to couples who are cohabiting or who have married, for example, in an unregistered religious ceremony • why marriage is an important relationship choice for many couples and why it must be freely entered into • the characteristics and legal status of other types of long-term relationships • the roles and responsibilities of parents with respect to raising of children, including the characteristics of successful parenting • how to: determine whether other children, adults or sources of information are trustworthy: judge when a family, friend, intimate or other relationship is unsafe (and to recognise this in others' relationships); and how to seek help
Respectful relationships, including friendships	Pupils should know: • the characteristics of positive and healthy friendships (in all contexts, including online) including: trust, respect, honesty, kindness, generosity, boundaries, privacy, consent and the management of conflict, reconciliation and ending relationships. This includes different (non-sexual) types of relationship.

	• practical steps they can take in a range of different contexts to improve or support respectful relationships • how stereotypes, in particular stereotypes based on sex, gender, race, religion, sexual orientation or disability, can cause damage (e.g. how they might normalise non-consensual behaviour or encourage prejudice) • that in school and in wider society they can expect to be treated with respect by others, and that in turn they should show due respect to others, including people in positions of authority and due tolerance of other people's beliefs • about different types of bullying (including cyberbullying), the impact of bullying, responsibilities of bystanders to report bullying and how and where to get help • that some types of behaviour within relationships are criminal, including violent behaviour and coercive control • what constitutes sexual harassment and sexual violence and why these are always unacceptable • the legal rights and responsibilities regarding equality (particularly with reference to the protected characteristics as defined in the Equality Act 2010) and that everyone is unique and equal
Online and media	Pupils should know • their rights, responsibilities and opportunities online, including that the same expectations of behaviour apply in all contexts, including online • about online risks, including that any material someone provides to another has the potential to be shared online and the difficulty of removing potentially compromising material placed online • not to provide material to others that they would not want shared further and not to share personal material which is sent to them • what to do and where to get support to report material or manage issues online • the impact of viewing harmful content

	• that specifically sexually explicit material e.g. pornography presents a distorted picture of sexual behaviours, can damage the way people see themselves in relation to others and negatively affect how they behave towards sexual partners • that sharing and viewing indecent images of children (including those created by children) is a criminal offence which carries severe penalties including jail • how information and data is generated, collected, shared and used online.
Being safe	Pupils should know: • the concepts of, and laws relating to, sexual consent, sexual exploitation, abuse, grooming, coercion, harassment, rape, domestic abuse, forced marriage, honour-based violence and FGM, and how these can affect current and future relationships • how people can actively communicate and recognise consent from others, including sexual consent, and how and when consent can be withdrawn (in all contexts, including online).
Intimate and sexual relationships, including sexual health	Pupils should know: • how to recognise the characteristics and positive aspects of healthy one-to-one intimate relationships, which include mutual respect, consent, loyalty, trust, shared interests and outlook, sex and friendship • that all aspects of health can be affected by choices they make in sex and relationships, positively or negatively, e.g. physical, emotional, mental, sexual and reproductive health and wellbeing • the facts about reproductive health, including fertility, and the potential impact of lifestyle on fertility for men and women and menopause • that there are a range of strategies for identifying and managing sexual pressure, including understanding peer pressure, resisting pressure and not pressurising others • that they have a choice to delay sex or to enjoy intimacy without sex

	• the facts about the full range of contraceptive choices, efficacy and options available inc. for LGBTQ+ • the facts around pregnancy including miscarriage • that there are choices in relation to pregnancy (with medically and legally accurate, impartial information on all options, including keeping the baby, adoption, abortion and where to get further help) • how the different sexually transmitted infections (STIs), including HIV/AIDs, are transmitted, how risk can be reduced through safer sex (including through condom use) and the importance of and facts about testing • about the prevalence of some STIs, the impact they can have on those who contract them and key facts about treatment • how the use of alcohol and drugs can lead to risky sexual behaviour • how to get further advice, including how and where to access confidential sexual and reproductive health advice and treatment.
Mental Wellbeing	Pupils should know: • how to talk about their emotions accurately and sensitively, using appropriate vocabulary • that happiness is linked to being connected to others • how to recognise the early signs of mental wellbeing concerns • common types of mental ill health (e.g. anxiety and depression) • how to critically evaluate when something they do or are involved in has a positive or negative effect on their own or others' mental health • the benefits and importance of physical exercise, time outdoors, community participation and voluntary and service-based activities on mental wellbeing and happiness.
Internet Safety and Harms	Pupils should know: • the similarities and differences between the online world and the physical world, including: the impact of unhealthy or obsessive comparison with others online (including through setting unrealistic expectations for body image), how people may curate a specific image of their life online, over- reliance on online relationships including social media, the risks related to online gambling including the accumulation of debt, how advertising and information is targeted at them and how to be a discerning consumer of information online • how to identify harmful behaviours online (including bullying, abuse or harassment) and how to report, or find support, if they have been

	affected by those behaviours
Physical Health and Fitness	Pupils should know: • the positive associations between physical activity and promotion of mental wellbeing, including as an approach to combat stress • the characteristics and evidence of what constitutes a healthy lifestyle, maintaining a healthy weight, including the links between an inactive lifestyle and ill health, including cancer and cardiovascular ill-health • about the science relating to blood, organ and stem cell donation
Healthy Eating	Pupils should know: • how to maintain healthy eating and the links between a poor diet and health risks, including tooth decay and cancer
Drugs, Alcohol and Tobacco	Pupils should know: • the facts about legal and illegal drugs and their associated risks, including the link between drug use, and the associated risks, including the link to serious mental health conditions • the law relating to the supply and possession of illegal substances • the physical and psychological risks associated with alcohol consumption and what constitutes low risk alcohol consumption in adulthood • the physical and psychological consequences of addiction, including alcohol dependency • awareness of the dangers of drugs which are prescribed but still present serious health risks • the facts about the harms from smoking tobacco (particularly the link to lung cancer), the benefits of quitting and how to access support to do so
Health and Prevention	Pupils should know: • about personal hygiene, germs including bacteria, viruses, how they are spread, treatment and prevention of infection, and about antibiotics • about dental health and the benefits of good oral hygiene and dental flossing, including healthy eating and regular check-ups at the dentist • (late secondary) the benefits of regular self-examination and screening
Basic First Aid	Pupils should know: • basic treatment for common injuries • life-saving skills, including how to administer CPR • the purpose of defibrillators and when one might be needed
Changing	Pupils should know:

Adolescent Body	• key facts about puberty, the changing adolescent body and menstrual wellbeing • the main changes which take place in males and females, and the implications for emotional and physical health