



# Ashfield Girls' High School



**“Each different. Each talented. All valued.”**

## **Relationships and Sexuality Education Policy**

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## Executive Summary

The aim of Ashfield Girls' High School is to provide each student with a programme of education which meets their individual needs and prepares them for life beyond school. In seeking to fulfil this aim the school endeavours to promote self-respect, self-discipline and positive attitudes. As part of the curriculum there will be opportunities to develop skills promoting intellectual, social, emotional, aesthetic, spiritual and moral growth.

The Human Rights Act guarantees in Articles 8, 9, and 10:

- *The Right to respect for private and family life*
- *Freedom of thought, conscience and religion*
- *Freedom of expression*

*The United Nations Convention on the Rights of a Child (1989) guarantees in Articles 2, 6, 12, 13, 16, 19 and 36:*

- *Non discrimination*
- *Right to life survival and development*
- *Right to express views freely in all matters affecting the child*
- *Right to access information*
- *Right to privacy*
- *Protection from harm*

The Children (Northern Ireland) Order 1995

*The welfare of the child must be the paramount consideration.*

The school would seek to uphold these rights and provide an atmosphere where all may express their opinions and respect each other's values.

This Relationships and Sexual Education (RSE) policy reflects the ethos and principles of Ashfield Girls' High School, the views of pupils, teachers, parents, governors and the wider community.



## Section A (Aims of the Policy)

The aim of Ashfield Girls' High School is to provide each student with a secure and supportive learning environment for a programme of education which meets her individual needs, and which brings her success and fulfilment in her school life and prepares her for life beyond school.

In seeking to fulfil this aim, the school will endeavour to:

- Create an information rich environment where each student may reach her full potential
- Provide a pastoral care system which gives support and guidance at all times
- Promote self-confidence, self-respect, self-discipline, self-motivation, initiative and positive attitudes
- Promote strategies which enable students to develop a language for life and learning
- Provide a curriculum which affords opportunities for students to develop a range of skills which promotes intellectual, social, emotional, aesthetic, spiritual and moral growth
- Provide guidance which will prepare students for the challenges of changing patterns of work and leisure
- Forge strong links with outside agencies and with the local community which it serves

The Relationships and Sexuality Education Policy aims to:

- Ensure that Relationships and Sexuality Education enables our pupils to develop and maintain safe, healthy and satisfying personal relationships.
- Value and support school personnel involved in the planning and delivery of Relationships and Sexuality Education
- Ensure that the planning and delivery of Relationships and Sexuality Education reflects the ethos and values framework of our school



## Section B (Legislative Context and Linked Policies)

The Relationships and Sexuality Education (Northern Ireland) (Amendment) Regulations 2023

Equality Act 1995

The Education and Libraries Order (Northern Ireland) 2003

The Children (Northern Ireland) Order 1995

Education (Curriculum Minimum Content) Order (Northern Ireland) 2007

Human Rights Act 1998

Children's Services Co-operation Act (2015)

Special Educational Needs and Disability Order (2005)

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of a Child (1998)

DENI Circular 2024/1 - Guidance on Amendments to The Relationships And Sexuality Education (RSE) Curriculum Content

DENI Emotional Health and Wellbeing Framework (2021)

DENI Circular 2017/04 - Safeguarding and Child Protection in Schools (Update August 2020)

Safeguarding and Child Protection in Schools Guidance (August 2020)

DENI Circular 2015/22 - Relationship and Sexuality Education Guidance

DENI Circular 2013/16

CCEA Relationships and Sexuality Education Guidance (October 2019)

DENI: Pastoral Care in Schools: Promoting Positive Behaviour

DENI: Every School a Good School (2009)

DENI: Every Child (2023)

ETI: Inspection and Self Evaluation Framework (2017)

ETI report (September 2014) 'An evaluation of preventative education and the statutory curriculum to inform the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Exploitation':

Northern Ireland Curriculum

iMatter Programme

CCEA RSE Hub

### Linked Policies

Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy

Special Educational Needs Policy

Anti-Bullying Policy

Health and Safety Policy

Behaviour for Learning and Positive Behaviour Policy

Mobile Devices Policy

Food in School Policy

Medical Needs Policy

Substance Misuse Policy

Equality and Inclusion Policy

eSafety Policy

Pupil Wellbeing Policy



## Section C (Policy and Procedures)

### Relationships and Sexuality Education Team

- Principal
- Vice Principal (Pastoral Care)
- Vice Principal (Curriculum)
- Head of Learning for Life and Work
- Board of Governor's representative
- Assistant Vice Principal for e-Learning
- Pupil Welfare Auxiliary (Medical)
- Pupil Welfare Auxiliary (Safeguarding)

Teacher representatives from Science, Religious Education, Physical Education, Drama, ICT and Home Economics departments may be invited to contribute to the team.

### The Moral Framework of the Policy

We recognise that young people live in a diverse range of cultures, religions, and family types. We recognise them as individuals with the right to be treated with respect and dignity regardless of their class, sexuality, culture, religion, and gender. We are committed to an RSE programme which at all times will reflect the diversity and complexity of the lives and experiences of young people in our school and community.

We also recognise that at times there may be conflict between the different value systems and at all times, whilst respecting differences, we will uphold the ethos of the school and include it in all aspects of RSE teaching.

In Ashfield, we value:

- Stable family life, permanent loving relationships, and the responsibilities of parenthood.
- The positive benefits of seeking sexual fulfilment within a permanent, committed relationship with one person.
- The deferment of sexual activity; until young people are physically and emotionally mature enough to understand the inherent responsibilities.
- Abstinence is a positive and desirable option, which is an achievable reality to which young people can aspire.





## Confidentiality

There is no statutory legislation relating specifically to confidentiality. Ashfield Girls' High school recognises that pupils need and expect a certain level of confidentiality, but as we have responsibility for the welfare and safety of young people within the school environment, it is not always possible to offer confidentiality.

It is essential that, at all times, confidentiality operates within the boundaries of the school's Child Protection Policy and the Children's (Northern Ireland) Order 1995. This is in addition to the guidance provided in '*Safeguarding and Child Protection in Schools*'.

All teaching staff must follow the following;

- Confidentiality must be discussed and clarified with pupils before beginning an RSE programme or one off session.
- Ground rules should be agreed with pupils.
- Pupils should be informed that there are instances when confidentiality cannot be held (for example in cases of suspected abuse). Pupils should be fully informed of action that will be taken.
- Pupils must be fully aware that they have the right to report inappropriate attitudes and/or behaviour by any member of the school community.
- Where teachers are unsure when confidentiality should not be maintained they should in the first instance consult a Designated Teacher.





## Curriculum

The Relationships and Sexuality Education (Northern Ireland) (Amendment) Regulations 2023 states that pupils at Key Stages 3 and 4 should 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*'.

Opportunities to explain the elements of RSE present themselves throughout the school curriculum. Encouraging discussion in the different subject areas helps place RSE in the context of life and social skills learning. This encourages young people to see it as an inherent part of human relationships and their own development. Relevant staff will review the Programme once a year to ensure that cross curriculum input is complementary and reflects the ethos of the school.

The following topics will be addressed in the RSE programme across the curriculum, predominantly through the school's Personal Development programme; but also through Science, Home Economics, Religious Education, Drama, ICT and Physical Education and through the school's pastoral system.

### Growth and development from birth through the life stages

- The male and female body
- Puberty
- Pregnancy
- Childbirth
- Abortion
- Menopause
- Physical wellbeing
- Emotional wellbeing

### Personal

- Self-esteem
- Confidence
- Resilience
- Comfort
- Personal reflection on risk taking
- Safety
- Protective behaviours
- Staying safe online
- Making informed choices

### Relationships

- Developing, maintaining and managing change in personal and sexual relationships.
- Healthy and unhealthy relationships
- Relationship dynamics
- Communication skills
- Decision making skills
- Recognising the signs of abuse



## Sexuality

- Identity
- Diversity and Inclusion
- Orientation
- Expression
- Sexual response
- Establishing boundaries

## Reproductive Health and Rights

- Safer sex
- Contraception
- Sexually transmitted infections
- Cervical and breast screening
- Testicular screening
- Sexual health services
- Abortion
- Female Genital Mutilation

## The Law

- What is consent?
- Age of medical consent
- Age of sexual consent

## Teaching Methods

Ashfield Girls' is committed to providing an information rich learning environment, which best suits the needs of the pupils and provides opportunity for participation and engagement. This approach facilitates open discussion, peer mentoring, involvement and process providing opportunities for the development of social and life skills, and a values framework.

Teaching methods have been formed based upon guidance from the Department of Education, Education Authority, CCEA (*Teaching Controversial and Sensitive Issues KS3 and KS4*) and also from the Safeguarding Board NI.

The teaching method chosen will depend on the learning objectives:

- Information and knowledge based objectives need a variety of teaching and learning experiences e.g. mind mapping, questioning, discussion, reflection, and problem solving.
- Skills based objectives need participation and use of verbal and non-verbal communication. Useful methods include scenarios, role-play, investigation tasks, video and auditory recordings, any method that brings real life situations into the classroom.
- Values and attitudes objectives are best achieved through open discussion, developing talking and listening skills, building self-esteem and encouraging self-awareness and exploration and the development of the individual's values system. Methods include situation cards, voting buttons, circle time, personal charters, "agony aunt" role plays
- Whole groups' sessions including assemblies with specific organisations.



Students with Special Educational Needs will be provided with appropriate, accessible and relevant Relationships and Sexuality Education. Resources may be adapted to ensure there is no barrier to learning. Parents may be informed if certain topics are being covered that may raise concerns for their child.

It is widely recognised that pupils with Special Educational Needs are more vulnerable to all forms of abuse and exploitation. Staff will try to ensure that they develop the knowledge, understanding and skills of pupils to enable them to:

- identify inappropriate and exploitative behaviour;
- help develop their own prevention strategies to stay safe;
- recognise and build healthy relationships; and
- know who they can talk to.

## Specific Issues

Issues such as sexual identity, female genital mutilation and abortion can attract a wide range of beliefs or values. The teaching of all issues including those that may be perceived as sensitive will be consistent with the ethos of the school. As these issues are perceived as sensitive, they will be delivered with the ethos of the school even though that may be a contradiction to the lifestyle or experiences of some pupils, parents or staff. The school must ensure that the pupils receive information that is balanced, non-judgemental and respectful of the diversity of values that are reflected in society.

This does not prevent teachers and pupils from discussing and commenting on moral, ethical or spiritual issues which may arise in relation to matters associated with the legislative change to the minimum content. Specifically, that the legislation does not prevent teachers and pupils discussing and considering moral, ethical and spiritual issues alongside the age-appropriate, comprehensive and scientifically accurate teaching and associated learning resources.

## Requests for pupils to be excused from elements of the RSE Curriculum

If a parent or pupil wishes to be excluded from the study of a particularly sensitive issue or topic, they can discuss this with a Vice Principal, should they wish.

For pupils in Years 8, 9, 10 and 11 the circumstances are, where a parent makes a request for a pupil to be excused from Article 5(1A) education or specified elements of it by confirming which elements of the education, the pupil should be excused. (See Appendix 2).

For pupils in Year 12 the circumstances are, where a parent makes a request for a pupil to be excused from Article 5(1A) education or specified elements of it by confirming which elements of the education the pupil should be excused from and confirms that the pupil does not object to being excused. (See Appendix 2).

The request should be made in writing and addressed to the principal and identify the pupil to whom the request relates. (See Appendix 2)

## External Agencies and Support

Ashfield Girls' recognises that the expertise of education and health professionals from statutory or voluntary bodies or individuals from the community can provide a value-added dimension to the RSE programme.



Before agreeing to use an external agency or individual teachers must;

- Ensure that the agency or individual receives a copy of the school's RSE policy.
- Issues around confidentiality and the school ethos must be highlighted
- An appropriate teacher should be present
- Ensure that the input complements the schools RSE programme and will incorporate preparation and follow up activities
- Inform pupils of the purpose of the visit
- Ensure that the pupils evaluate the work

Advice may also be sought from other agencies such as the Education Authority or:

Knowing Our Identity (KOI) is a gender identity development service operated by the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust. The service is for children and adolescents (up to the age of 18) across Northern Ireland who are experiencing distress in relation to their gender identity development.

The preferred referral route is through CAMHS (Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service), however other professionals, including education, as well as young people and their families can contact the service direct to discuss a possible referral. More details can be found at: [www.belfasttrust.hscni.net/pdf/website\\_KOIleaflet.pdf](http://www.belfasttrust.hscni.net/pdf/website_KOIleaflet.pdf)

The Northern Ireland Anti-Bullying Forum (NIABF) offers guidance on how to address all forms of bullying in schools and includes resources on homophobic bullying.  
[www.endbullying.org.uk](http://www.endbullying.org.uk)



## Section D (Roles and Responsibilities)

### Board of Governors

- Will ratify the policy and ensure that it is reviewed every two years, or when guidance changes
- Will monitor the effectiveness of the policy
- Have a statutory responsibility to deliver the minimum curriculum content, having autonomy over when, how and who is involved in curriculum delivery, aligned with the ethos of the school.

### Principal

- Will ensure that the policy follows the appropriate CCEA / DE guidance
- Will ensure that staff are aware of the policy and its procedures
- Will respond to any concerns raised

### Vice-Principal (Pastoral)

- Will review the RSE policy and preventative curriculum, updating it when there is new guidance
- Will report annually to governors in relation to any changes or developments within the preventative curriculum
- Will outline how the school meets the Statutory RSE Requirements, using the Education and Training Inspectorate's Annual Safeguarding Proforma
- Will ensure that any new staff are aware of the contents of this policy
- Will provide training to staff on the delivery RSE

### Vice-Principal (Curriculum)

- Will work with the Vice-Principal (Pastoral) in meeting the requirements of this policy
- Will ensure that preventative curriculum is being delivered across relevant subjects and key stages
- Will map learning of RSE across the curriculum
- Will ensure that the statutory minimum requirements are being met

### Senior Leadership Team

- Will monitor the policy's effectiveness and ensure that it is being followed

### Head of Learning for Life and Work

- Will provide training to staff on the delivery of Personal Development
- Will update the Personal Development curriculum to ensure it remains current and responds to the needs of pupils
- Will immediately raise any safeguarding concerns with the Designated Teacher
- Will, when necessary, arrange additional learning opportunities to support the delivery of RSE within the Personal Development curriculum

### Staff

- Will be aware of the contents of the policy
- Will report any concerns surrounding the content or delivery of RSE to a Vice Principal

### Parents

- Will be encouraged to report any concerns they may have regarding the RSE programme

### Pupils

- Will be encouraged to report any feedback or concerns they may have regarding the RSE programme



## **Section E (Consultation, Communication, Monitoring and Evaluation of the Policy)**

This policy has been developed in consultation with pupils, parents, staff and governors.

The Relationships and Sexuality Education team will evaluate the provision for RSE within the school. Views of the whole school community will be sought and used to give informed feedback on a bi-annual review of policy and practice.

The aim of the evaluation process will be to ensure that:

- The RSE policy continues to comply with guidelines/legislation
- Classroom practice continues to reflect the policy and the needs of pupils
- Teaching resources are reviewed and updated
- The views, thoughts and feelings are respected and will be used to influence the real needs of pupils rather than perceived needs

To appropriately monitor the effectiveness of the policy, the Board of Governors shall:

- be updated regularly on any regulation changes, respective of RSE
- identify current issues, trends and priorities for action
- assess the effectiveness of strategies aimed at ensuring that pupils needs are met in relation to the preventative curriculum / RSE.



## Appendices

### Appendix 1: Period Dignity

**Period Dignity** refers to the accessibility and availability of essential care needed to support a period, in conjunction with the breaking of stigma and taboo around periods.

#### Aims

We aim to ensure that pupils will receive:

- Access to period products
- Support period wellness
- Provide education that gives an awareness of how a period can impact upon physical and emotional wellbeing
- Guidance on menstrual hygiene
- Education to assist in challenging related stigma

#### Whole School Approach

Ashfield Girls' supports period dignity through a child centred approach through the following ways:

- 'Each different. Each talented. All valued' – ethos.
- The provision of free period products in all bathrooms or from the Pupil Welfare Auxiliary
- Encouraging pupils to seek support from staff
- Evaluating the impact of the measures to support period dignity through pupil and staff feedback
- Encouraging pupils to challenge different attitudes, myths and stereotypes associated with period
- Educating pupils on the many issues that surround periods – signs, symptoms, menstrual wellbeing, gender inequality and period dignity
- Consideration given to educating those with Special Educational Needs
- Consideration given to the culture, religion, and age range of pupils

#### Supportive Measures

Ashfield Girls' High School uses the following measures to support period dignity. These are regularly reviewed through discussions and surveys with pupils:

- Free period products in all bathrooms
- Bags containing period products (available to take home) on the back of toilet cubicles
- Period products available from the Pupil Welfare Auxiliary or any other member of the pastoral team
- Replacement underwear, tights, pants, uniform is available from the Pupil Welfare Auxiliary or any other member of the pastoral team
- Packs available for use at home
- Heat packs are available from the Pupil Welfare Auxiliary, as is medication (with parental consent – as per Medical Needs Policy)
- Other personal hygiene items are available from the Pupil Welfare Auxiliary





### Period Dignity Learning

Period Dignity is a topic that is covered in the Personal Development curriculum and pastoral programme, this may be during form time, group talks, assemblies or timetabled classes.

Lessons will cover topics including:

- Facts about periods
- Period/Menstrual wellness – physical, emotional and psychological wellbeing, leading up to and during periods
- Period products – the different types, advantages, and disadvantages, how to dispose of them
- Period/Menstrual hygiene – essential facts and how to deal with related situations
- Challenges – pain, anxiety, fear, embarrassment, myths
- Toxic Shock Syndrome (TSS)
- Health disorders (i.e. endometriosis) – symptoms, support and treatment
- Challenging attitudes, stereotypes, myths and gender inequality in relation to periods.



Appendix 2: TEMPLATE FOR USE BY A PARENT REQUESTING THAT A PUPIL BE EXCUSED FROM ARTICLE 5(1A) EDUCATION OR A SPECIFIED ELEMENT OF IT.

To the Principal of Ashfield Girls' High School

For pupils in Year 8, 9, 10 and 11

I am writing to request that my daughter [Name] who is a pupil in Year \_\_ at your school be excused from age-appropriate, comprehensive or scientifically accurate education on sexual and reproductive health and rights, covering prevention of early pregnancy and access to abortion or the specified element or elements of it as set out below. I can confirm that this education is contrary to my wishes.

Please tick as appropriate:

- Prevention of early pregnancy
- Access to abortion

For pupils in Year 12

I am writing to request that my daughter \_\_\_\_\_ who is a pupil in Year 12 at your school be excused from age-appropriate, comprehensive or scientifically accurate education on sexual and reproductive health and rights, covering prevention of early pregnancy and access to abortion or the specified element or elements of it as set out below. I can confirm that this education is contrary to my wishes.

I can confirm that \_\_\_\_\_ has not objected to being excused.

Please tick as appropriate:

- Prevention of early pregnancy
- Access to abortion

Name of parent \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_





# ***Challenging girls today; creating women of value in the future***



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