



Relationship, Sex and
Health Education (RSE)
Policy

2026/2027

Policy issue and updates

<i>Pages</i>	<i>Issue No.</i>	<i>Date</i>
Whole document pilot update to reflect new DfE RSHE statutory guidance (15 July 2025, in force 1 September 2026); Online Safety Act 2023; KCSIE; and For Women Scotland Supreme Court judgment. Renamed RSHE Policy. New sections 6 (guiding principles), 7 (curriculum content), 8 (online safety, pornography, harmful sexual behaviour and VAWG), 10 (consultation and openness with parents), 13 (SEND and adaptation). Existing sections renumbered.	1	August 2026

The following policy has been approved by the Divisional CEO and the Executive Team.

The policy will be reviewed on an annual basis unless circumstances arise requiring the policy to be reviewed earlier.

Approved by Divisional CEO: August 2026

Board signatory: 

Planned review: August 2027

1. Policy overview

- 1.1 This policy outlines the commitment of Progress Arc to provide effective Relationships, Sex and Health Education (RSHE) for all students, in support of that offered by parents and carers, who are the first educators of their children in this area.
- 1.2 It has been written regarding the Department for Education's statutory guidance "Relationships Education, Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) and Health Education", published 15 July 2025 and in force from 1 September 2026, and to the 2019 statutory guidance which remains in force until that date. It also has regard to Keeping Children Safe in Education (current edition), the Online Safety Act 2023, the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill currently before Parliament, the Equality Act 2010, the Children and Families Act 2014, the Suicide Act 1961 (as amended), the Sexual Offences Act 2003, the Protection of Children Act 1978 and other relevant legislation and statutory guidance.
- 1.3 The Relationships Education, Relationships and Sex Education and Health Education (England) Regulations 2019, made under sections 34 and 35 of the Children and Social Work Act 2017, make Relationships and Health Education compulsory for children receiving secondary education. Although Progress Arc is an independent provider, where personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education is the applicable compulsory subject under the Independent School Standards, we adopt the secondary-phase RSHE content as the basis of our curriculum.
- 1.4 The RSHE teaching in our schools contributes to our statutory duty to safeguard children and prepare them for the responsibilities and experiences of adult life. RSHE is taught in an age-appropriate, developmentally appropriate and trauma-informed manner across all our settings, taking account of the social, emotional and mental health (SEMH) needs and special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) of the students we serve.

2. Policy overview

- 2.1 RSHE is lifelong learning about physical, moral and emotional development. Through RSHE, students learn about healthy and respectful relationships of all kinds; consent,

boundaries and personal rights; family structures and commitment; the body and how it changes; reproduction; sexual health; mental health and emotional wellbeing; online safety and the digital world; the law; and how to keep themselves and others safe.

- 2.2 In line with the new statutory guidance, RSHE places equal weight on knowledge and on the skills and attributes students need to apply that knowledge including resilience, self-worth, respect, honesty, integrity, courage, kindness, trustworthiness, and the ability to communicate, negotiate, set boundaries and seek help. Online and offline contexts are treated as one continuous space rather than as separate topics.
- 2.3 Our key aim in providing RSHE throughout the school is to safeguard our students and to equip them to navigate adult life safely, confidently and with respect for themselves and others.

3. Why RSHE is important in our schools

- 3.1 At Progress Arc, our vision, values, relationships and teaching promote tolerance and respect for all cultures, faiths and lifestyles. The Senior Leadership Team and the Wider Leadership Team ensure that this ethos is reflected and implemented effectively through school policy and practice, and that effective safeguarding policies are in place to safeguard and promote students' welfare.
- 3.2 We have a duty to prepare our students for life in modern Britain and to keep them safe. Everyone has the right to learn and work safely. We do not tolerate bullying, harassment or violence of any kind, including misogynistic language, sexual harassment, sexual violence, homophobic, biphobic, or transphobic abuse, racism or any other prejudice-based behaviour. Derogatory language and behaviour towards others is consistently challenged (see Relationship, Behaviour and Anti-Bullying and Belonging Policy).
- 3.3 The students we serve are disproportionately likely to have encountered adverse childhood experiences, criminal and sexual exploitation, domestic abuse, online harm, harmful sexual behaviour and contact with the criminal justice system. For our cohort, the question is not whether they will encounter the issues addressed in RSHE it is whether they will encounter them first in a classroom designed to keep them safe,

or unsupported in the world outside. High-quality RSHE is therefore central to the protective offer of an alternative provision school.

- 3.4 We acknowledge that not all parents and carers feel confident or comfortable talking with their children about this area. Our work in school ensures that every student has the information and skills they need to keep safe and make positive, healthy choices, regardless of their starting point.

4. Key objectives

- 4.1 The key objectives of the Progress Arc RSHE programme are to:

- Develop knowledge and understanding of positive, healthy and respectful relationships, including the importance of commitment, trust, honesty and consent.
- Make students aware of their rights, including in relation to their own bodies, and to understand the law relating to relationships, sex and online behaviour.
- Enable the development of social and relationship skills, including communication, negotiation, assertiveness, conflict resolution and protective behaviours.
- Prepare students for the physical and emotional changes of puberty and adolescence, and support their understanding of reproduction, contraception, fertility and sexual health within the context of caring relationships.
- Equip students to recognise, challenge and report sexual harassment, sexual violence, misogyny and violence against women and girls (VAWG), and to understand the law and the support available.
- Equip students to recognise, resist and report exploitation, including child sexual exploitation, criminal exploitation, county lines, modern slavery, radicalisation and online grooming.
- Equip students to understand and respond to the realities of online life, including pornography, image-based abuse (“sharing nudes and semi-nudes”), cyberflashing, sextortion, deepfakes, AI-generated imagery, misogynistic and extremist online content, gambling, scams and disinformation.
- Explore a range of attitudes, values and faith perspectives around aspects of relationships and sex, and the law in relation to protected characteristics, in a balanced and respectful way.

- Develop students' skills around assessing risk and keeping safe, in physical and digital environments.
 - Support the development of healthy bodies and minds, including age-appropriate teaching on diet, exercise, sleep, sun safety, immunisation, dental health, smoking, alcohol, drugs and new in the 2025 guidance vaping.
 - Enable students to recognise, name and manage their emotions and to develop the vocabulary to talk about how they feel, including in the context of change, loss and bereavement.
 - Provide students with the knowledge and skills to access appropriate support, including specialist mental health, sexual health and safeguarding services.
- 4.2 The RSHE programme is based on the needs of the students in each school, with learning outcomes appropriate to their age, ability and level of maturity. RSHE is firmly embedded within our broader curriculum, in addition to focused learning through dedicated RSHE sessions, Personal Development time, and engagement with current affairs where appropriate. Students are helped to appreciate difference and to respect themselves and others.

5. Equality, diversity, inclusion and support

- 5.1 We are required to comply with the Equality Act 2010. Our schools value diversity, encourage respect for all and promote tolerance for, and celebration of, difference. We do not discriminate against students because of any protected characteristic (age, sex, race, disability, religion or belief, gender reassignment, pregnancy or maternity, marriage or civil partnership, or sexual orientation). Where there is an identified need, we may take positive action through our planning and delivery of RSHE to address disadvantages facing students with a particular characteristic. RSHE is accessible to all students regardless of their sex.
- 5.2 Parents and carers are key partners in RSHE and are best placed to support their children to understand how their learning at school fits with their family's faith, beliefs and values. To support this, we make parents aware of what will be taught, and the resources used, at induction and through the consultation arrangements set out in section 10. We use materials that reflect the diversity of our school population and

encourage acceptance and respect. Every child and family should feel included, respected and valued.

- 5.3 Many of our students have experienced adverse childhood experiences which may affect their engagement with RSHE. Care is taken to ensure that planning is sensitive to their situations and, where appropriate, parents and carers will be consulted in advance of specific content. Trigger-aware delivery, opt-out from individual sessions on welfare grounds (without disengagement from the wider curriculum), and the availability of a known adult for post-lesson check-ins are standard practice across the network.
- 5.4 A range of family structures and relationships is explored within RSHE. All students, whatever their identity, developing identity or family background, should feel that RSHE is relevant to them. Resources and books used reflect families of all kinds, including mum-and-dad, two mums, two dads, fostering, adoption, single-parent, kinship-care, extended and blended families.
- 5.5 In line with the July 2025 statutory guidance, teaching about sex, gender reassignment and gender identity is approached with care. Students are taught the facts and the law about biological sex and about gender reassignment as a protected characteristic under the Equality Act 2010, including the implications of the Supreme Court's judgment in *For Women Scotland Ltd v The Scottish Ministers* [2025]. Staff are mindful that there is significant public debate in this area and do not endorse any particular contested view as fact; students are supported to discuss these matters respectfully, and the dignity of every student is upheld at all times.
- 5.6 Homophobic, biphobic, transphobic, misogynistic, sexist or sexual language, behaviour or bullying is never tolerated. Incidents are addressed under the Behaviour Policy and Anti-Bullying Policy and, where appropriate, reported to the Designated Safeguarding Lead and to external agencies.

6. Guiding principles for our RSHE curriculum

- 6.1 The July 2025 statutory guidance sets seven guiding principles for the development and delivery of an RSHE curriculum. Across Progress Arc, our curriculum is built on

these principles and adapted for an SEMH specialist provision context as follows:

- 6.2 **Engagement with students.** Student voice informs our curriculum. We engage students through structured student voice activities, anonymous surveys, and “ask-it basket” sessions, and use what we hear to refine sequencing, content and delivery. We are particularly attentive to the views of students who have experienced adverse experiences in this area.
- 6.3 **Engagement with parents and carers.** We consult parents and carers proactively (see section 10), share materials transparently, and welcome questions. Parents may view any resource used in advance.
- 6.4 **A focus on building positive attitudes and skills.** Our curriculum promotes healthy norms about relationships and avoids language that normalises harmful behaviour. We name and reinforce the attributes of healthy relationships: respect, honesty, kindness, trustworthiness, courage and integrity.
- 6.5 **Preparing students for the realities of adult life.** We equip students with the knowledge, skills and confidence to handle the situations they will actually face, including online life, intimate relationships, work, parenthood, money, health, civic life and the law.
- 6.6 **A preventative approach to harm.** RSHE is part of the school’s safeguarding offer. The curriculum is sequenced so that students encounter knowledge and skills before they typically need them, not after.
- 6.7 **A whole-school approach.** RSHE is reinforced through behaviour expectations, the pastoral system, assemblies, displays, staff modelling, and the Relationships, Behaviour, Anti-Bullying, and Belonging Policy, Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy, E-Safety and Mobile Phone policy
- 6.8 **Inclusive, evidence-informed and age-appropriate teaching.** We use evidence-informed materials, adapt for SEND and SEMH needs (see section 13), and ensure teaching is participative and interactive.

7. Curriculum content

- 7.1 Our commitment to RSHE is delivered through PSHE, Citizenship, RE, Personal

Development, Enrichment, Form Time and through cross-curricular opportunities in English, Science, Computing and Physical Education. Our entire curriculum is designed to build resilience and relationships to allow our students to thrive.

7.2 The curriculum covers, as a minimum, the content set out in the DfE statutory guidance for the secondary phase. The major content areas, expressed at high level, are:

7.3 Relationships and sex education

- Families: marriage, civil partnership and other long-term commitments; parenting; the diversity of family structures; conflict and family breakdown; sources of support.
- Respectful relationships, including friendships: characteristics of healthy and unhealthy relationships; power imbalances; coercion and control; conflict resolution; loneliness and isolation; bystander behaviour.
- Online and media: online identity; communicating respectfully online; the permanence of digital content; pornography and its distorting effects, including on expectations of relationships and sexual behaviour; image-based abuse, including sharing of nudes and semi-nudes, cyberflashing, sextortion, deepfakes and AI-generated imagery; the law on indecent images of children.
- Being safe: consent in relationships and in law (including the Sexual Offences Act 2003); the law on rape, sexual assault and harassment; recognising grooming, exploitation and coercion; how to report and where to seek help.
- Intimate and sexual relationships, including sexual health: contraception; STIs, including HIV; choices in pregnancy; fertility; the impact of alcohol and drugs on decision-making; the law on sexual activity and the age of consent.
- Misogyny and violence against women and girls (VAWG): challenging misogynistic content and “manosphere” influences; recognising controlling and coercive behaviour; understanding sexism and sexual harassment as a continuum that includes serious sexual violence; the law and reporting routes.

7.4 Health and wellbeing

- Mental health and emotional wellbeing: a vocabulary of feelings; recognising signs of poor mental health in self and others; help-seeking; the distinction between everyday

distress and clinical concern; stigma.

- Change, loss and bereavement: recognising that a range of feelings is normal and that everyone grieves differently.
- Internet safety and harms: time online; the impact of social media on wellbeing; misinformation and disinformation; online radicalisation; gambling and gambling-style mechanics in games.
- Physical health and fitness: the benefits of physical activity; the link between physical and mental health.
- Healthy eating: characteristics of a poor diet; risks of disordered eating; help-seeking.
- Drugs, alcohol and tobacco: facts and law; the specific harms of vaping and nicotine addiction, new in the 2025 guidance; the role of vapes in adult smoking cessation; managing peer pressure.
- Health and prevention: dental health, sun safety, sleep, immunisation, self-examination and screening.
- Basic first aid, including CPR and the purpose of defibrillators.
- Changing adolescent body: puberty (including for those for whom this comes earlier or later than peers); the menstrual cycle.

7.5 How the content is sequenced

Because students typically join Progress Arc at different points in Key Stage 3 or Key Stage 4 and bring uneven prior experience of RSHE, our schemes of work are designed in modular units that allow students to access content appropriate to their developmental stage, irrespective of when in the academic year they arrive. A baseline assessment is completed within the first half-term of placement.

8. Online safety, pornography, harmful sexual behaviour and VAWG

- 8.1 The July 2025 statutory guidance integrates online safety throughout RSHE rather than treating it as a separate topic. Our curriculum and pastoral system reflect this. The Online Safety Act 2023, with its age-verification requirements for pornography and

other regulated content, forms part of the legal context taught to students.

- 8.2 Pornography is taught about, not shown. Teaching addresses the prevalence of online pornography among children, its distorting effects on understandings of consent, intimacy, body image and gendered behaviour, and its links to harmful attitudes and behaviours. Students are supported to develop the critical skills to recognise and resist these influences. The Children's Commissioner's findings that the average age of first exposure is now 13, and that one in four children has seen pornography by the age of 11, inform our sequencing and delivery.
- 8.3 Image-based abuse is taught explicitly. Students learn the law on the making, possession and distribution of indecent images of children (including self-generated images), and that the law applies to under-18s sharing images of themselves and one another. Staff response to disclosures or discoveries follows the UK Council for Internet Safety "Sharing nudes and semi-nudes: advice for education settings" and the Safeguarding Policy. Suspected indecent images of a child are never viewed, copied or forwarded by staff; the device is secured and the DSL and police informed immediately.
- 8.4 Harmful sexual behaviour (HSB) between students including sexualised language, sexual harassment, unwanted sexual touching, sharing of sexual images and sexual assault is treated as a safeguarding matter at all times. The school applies the Brook Sexual Behaviours Traffic Light Tool to support assessment, and the response is led by the Designated Safeguarding Lead in accordance with Keeping Children Safe in Education (Part 5: Child-on-child sexual violence and sexual harassment). Misogyny and violence against women and girls (VAWG) are explicitly addressed in the curriculum, including the influence of online "manosphere" content. Sexist or misogynistic comments are consistently challenged in the moment by all staff. Repeated or serious incidents are managed under the Behaviour Policy and, where the threshold is met, the Safeguarding Policy and the Anti-Bullying Policy.
- 8.5 Filtering and monitoring on the school network and on school-provided devices are in line with the Keeping Children Safe in Education filtering and monitoring standards. The Mobile Phone and Smart Technology Policy provides that personal phones are not in use during the school day; this reduces, but does not eliminate, online safety risk in

school. The RSHE curriculum addresses the reality of students' online life outside school.

9 External speakers and resources

- 9.1 Occasionally we use external speakers and externally produced resources to enhance our delivery of RSHE. All external speakers deliver in line with this policy, the Safeguarding Policy and the Visitors Policy. The Headteacher and Education Standards Team checks the credentials and content of all external providers in advance, retains a record of due diligence, and observes delivery where appropriate.
- 9.2 In line with the July 2025 statutory guidance, we do not use resources from organisations that take a strong partisan view on a contested topic, and we do not use materials that perpetuate stereotypes or that encourage students to question their sex. Where contested topics are taught, materials present the facts and the law in a balanced way.
- 9.3 Copies of materials used by external speakers are retained and are available to parents and carers on request.

10 Consultation and openness with parents and carers

- 10.1 The new statutory guidance reinforces the duty to engage with parents and carers proactively, and to be transparent about the materials used. Across Progress Arc, this duty is discharged as follows.
- 10.2 The current RSHE policy, an overview of the curriculum and a list of resources used are published on each school's website. Parents and carers may request to view any specific resource at any time.
- 10.3 Parents and carers may raise questions or concerns about the RSHE curriculum at any time, through the school office, the Headteacher, or the Executive Team. Concerns are addressed promptly and recorded.

11 Right to withdraw

- 11.1 Parents and carers have a statutory right to request that their child be withdrawn from

some or all of the sex education delivered within the RSHE curriculum. There is no right to withdraw from relationships education or from health education. To request a withdrawal, the parent or carer must speak with the Headteacher.

- 11.2 On receipt of any such request, the Headteacher will hold a meeting with the parent or carer and, where appropriate, with the student, to ensure that their wishes are understood and to clarify the nature and purpose of the curriculum. All discussions are recorded on Arbor. New students are offered the opportunity to consider this option at induction, via the consent form.
- 11.3 As good practice, the discussion will include the benefits of receiving this important education and any detrimental effects that withdrawal might have on the student. These can include the social and emotional impact of being excluded from the lesson, and the likelihood of the student receiving information from peers in place of teaching from staff. The risk to safeguarding for our cohort in which students are statistically more exposed to exploitation, harmful sexual behaviour and online harm than the national average will also be discussed honestly.
- 11.4 Once discussions have been held, and except in exceptional circumstances, we respect the parent or carer's request to withdraw their child from sex education only – not from relationships education or health education. From three school terms before the student's 16th birthday, the student may opt in to sex education themselves, and the school will respect that request.
- 11.5 A student withdrawn from sex education is provided with purposeful education in its place; they are not left without supervision and are not excluded from the pastoral life of the school.
- 11.6 This process is the same for students with SEND. However, there may be exceptional circumstances in which the Headteacher takes a student's specific needs arising from their SEND into account when reaching a decision.

12 Confidentiality, disclosures and safeguarding

- 12.1 Staff approach RSHE lessons knowing that disclosures may arise. Ground rules established at the start of each session make clear that confidentiality cannot be guaranteed where a safeguarding concern is raised. Students are told this in advance.

- 12.2 Any disclosure or concern that arises in or after an RSHE lesson is reported to the Designated Safeguarding Lead on the same day in accordance with the Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy and Keeping Children Safe in Education.
- 12.3 Students are signposted to in-school sources of support (Welfare Officer, DSL/DDSL) and to external services (Childline, Brook, The Mix, Samaritans, Shout, Refuge, Karma Nirvana, NSPCC, local sexual health services, local CAMHS pathways).

13 Students with SEND and adaptation of delivery

- 13.1 The new statutory guidance offers limited detail on adaptation for SEND. Progress Arc is an SEMH-focused alternative provision; meaningful adaptation is therefore central to our offer rather than an addition to it.
- 13.2 For each student, the Engagement Mentor, SENCO and class teacher consider:
- Communication needs; visual supports, simplified language, additional time, pre-teaching of vocabulary, alternative means of response.
 - Sensory and regulation need; lesson environment, predictability, movement breaks, identified safe space.
 - Trauma history; likely triggers, advance notice of content, opt-out from a specific lesson without disengagement from the wider curriculum, identified key adult for post-lesson check-in.
 - Reading age and prior attainment; differentiated materials and assessment.
 - EHCP outcomes; alignment with relevant outcomes (Social, Emotional and Mental Health; Communication and Interaction).
 - Risk; elevated individual risk of exploitation, HSB or online harm, and the consequent need for targeted small-group or 1:1 work.
- 13.3 Adaptations are recorded on the student's Individual Education Development Plan (IEDP), reviewed termly, and shared with the parent or carer.

14 Staff training and confidence

- 14.1 All staff delivering RSHE receive induction training on this policy and the curriculum.

Annual refresher training covers updates to statutory guidance, safeguarding context, and emerging issues (currently: misogyny and online VAWG content, image-based abuse, AI-generated imagery, vaping). Specific further training is provided where staff are due to teach more sensitive content for the first time.

- 14.2 Staff who feel unable to deliver particular content for reasons of personal belief or experience should speak with the Head of School. We will identify a colleague to deliver the content; the students' entitlement to the full curriculum is not affected.

15 Monitoring and evaluation

- 15.1 The subject is monitored and evaluated through:

- Curriculum review meetings.
- Student voice (forums, surveys).
- Parental surveys and consultation responses.
- Workbook scrutiny and lesson observation.
- Student progression and attainment data.
- Individual Education Development Plans choices and wellbeing, relationships, and behaviour sections specifically.
- Behaviour and safeguarding data, including HSB incidents and online safety concerns.
- Annual review of this policy against statutory guidance and against Ofsted feedback at inspection.