



# Relationships and Sex Education Policy

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This document applies to all academies and operations of the Vale Academy Trust: [www.vale-academy.org](http://www.vale-academy.org)

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### **1. Introduction**

Relationships and Sex Education (hereafter 'RSE') is not a statutory requirement in English academies. However, in the Vale Academy Trust (hereafter 'VAT') we are committed to our students' academic, cultural, emotional and moral development and to preparing them for the responsibilities and experiences of adult life. We believe that an important part of this development and preparation, therefore, is the provision of age-appropriate RSE for all our students.

RSE involves learning about the emotional, social and physical aspects of growing up, about relationships, sex, human sexuality and sexual health. Some aspects of RSE are taught in Science and other aspects are taught as part of Personal, Social, Health, Citizenship and Economic education (hereafter 'PSHCE').

A comprehensive programme of RSE provides accurate information about the body, reproduction, sex and sexual health. It also gives children and young people essential skills for building positive, enjoyable, respectful and non-exploitative relationships and for staying safe both on and offline.

In the VAT we believe that RSE makes an essential contribution to every student's self-esteem and emotional wellbeing. It helps students to form and maintain worthwhile and satisfying relationships, based on respect for themselves and for others, at home, at school, and in the community in preparation for adult life in society.

The students in our academies sometimes come from diverse backgrounds, expressing a range of beliefs and values. The stage of development and the experiences of any group of young people of the same age will therefore be diverse and varied. This has clear implications for the curriculum content, for our teaching approaches, and for the creation of appropriate learning environments based on the need to develop in young people respect for each other's differences.

The aim of this policy is to communicate to staff, governors, parents/guardians, visitors and students both the rationale behind RSE and the manner in which RSE will be delivered and supported in all VAT academies in accordance with the government's *Guidance 2000* on RSE.

This policy recognises that the prime responsibility for bringing up children rests with parents and carers. RSE in VAT academies aims to complement and support the role played by parents.

## **2. Why should RSE be taught as part of PSHE?**

Young people's experiences of sex and relationships are influenced by a range of factors, such as their confidence, self-image, and, in some cases, alcohol and drugs. It is therefore best for RSE to be taught as part of a broader PSHCE curriculum, which includes related topics such as risk, safety, equality, stereotyping, prejudice, media literacy and abusive behaviour and attitudes. This approach helps students to develop the skills, knowledge and personal attributes they need to manage their lives and this approach is endorsed by leading RSE initiatives such as the Sex Education Forum.

### 3. What is effective RSE?

According to the government's *Guidance 2000*, RSE is "...lifelong learning about physical, moral and emotional development. It is about the understanding of the importance of marriage for family life, stable and loving relationships, respect, love and care. It is also about the teaching of sex, sexuality and sexual health. It is not about the promotion of sexual orientation or sexual activity – this would be inappropriate teaching." (DfE RSE *Guidance 2000* p5)

The DfE guidance suggests that RSE should have the following three main elements:

#### *Knowledge and understanding*

- Learning and understanding physical development at appropriate stages;
- understanding human sexuality, sexual health, emotions and relationships;
- learning about contraception and a range of local and national sexual health advice, contraception and support services;
- learning the reasons for delaying sexual activity, the benefits to be gained from such delay;
- the avoidance of unplanned pregnancy.

#### *Attitudes and values*

- Learning the importance of values and individual conscience and moral considerations;
- learning the value of family life, marriage and stable and loving relationships for the nurture of children;
- learning the value of respect, love and care;
- exploring, considering and understanding moral dilemmas;
- developing critical thinking as part of decision making.

#### *Personal and social skills*

- Learning to manage emotions and relationships confidently and sensitively;
- developing self-respect and empathy for others;
- learning to make choices based on an understanding of difference and with an absence of prejudice;
- developing an appreciation of the consequences of choices made;
- managing conflict;
- learning how to recognise and avoid exploitation and abuse.

#### **4. What are the morals and values underpinning RSE?**

Effective RSE is essential if young people are to make responsible and well informed decisions about their lives. A successful and progressive RSE programme, firmly embedded in PSHCE, will help young people learn to respect themselves and others and move with confidence from childhood through adolescence into adulthood, developing children and young people for an adult life in which they can

- prepare to play an active role as citizens;
- understand about puberty before they experience the onset of physical change;
- name parts of the body and describe how their bodies work;
- understand how relationships may affect health and well-being including mental health;
- develop positive values and a moral framework that will guide their decisions, judgements and behaviours;
- be aware of their sexuality and understand and respect all human sexuality;
- have the confidence and self-esteem to value themselves and others and respect individual conscience;
- have the skills to judge what kind of relationships they want;
- understand the arguments for delaying sexual activity;
- understand the consequences of their actions and behave responsibly within sexual and other social relationships;
- communicate effectively;
- have sufficient information and skills to protect themselves and (where they have one) their partner from unintended or unwanted conceptions and from sexually transmitted infections;
- understand the reasons for not having unprotected sex;
- avoid being exploited or exploiting others;
- avoid being pressured into unwanted or unprotected sex;
- access confidential sexual health advice, support and, if necessary, treatment;
- know how the law applies to sexual relationships.

To do this, we aim to provide

- an education about relationships with a focus on friendship, bullying and the building of self-esteem;
- a programme of progressive, differentiated learning, providing clear information that meets the needs of all students, whatever their developing sexuality;
- an atmosphere which encourages questions and the discussion of sensitive matters, which counters myths, prejudice and discrimination and which promotes tolerance and respect.
- an understanding of the importance of loving relationships between consenting partners, the value of family life, the implications of parenthood and the needs of the very young.
- an atmosphere of tolerance and understanding that recognises the cultural and religious influences on individual sexuality and promotes respect for them;
- support to parents in talking to their children about relationships and sex education and how to link this to what is being taught in school.

Controversial issues are dealt with sensitively and in a non-judgemental way, ensuring that the young person's needs are of prime importance. As stated in the DfE *Guidance 2000* point 2.1, we strive to ensure that, as far as possible, the "personal beliefs and attitudes of staff will not influence the teaching of sex and relationship education". We do believe, however, that RSE is about understanding the importance of stable and loving relationships, respect and care. It is about the teaching of sex, sexuality and sexual health. It is not about the promotion of any particular sexual orientation or sexual activity. Research has shown that good, comprehensive RSE does not make young people more likely to enter into sexual activity. Indeed, it can help them learn the reasons for and the benefits to be gained from delaying such activity.

As part of this

- students will be encouraged to value and respect themselves and others as unique individuals, capable of spiritual, moral, intellectual and physical growth and development and accepting and considering each other's needs and views;
- students will be encouraged to value relationships as fundamental to the development and fulfilment of themselves and others, and as fundamental for the good of the community;
- students will be encouraged to value truth, freedom, justice, human rights, the rule of law and the collective effort for the common good. In particular, students will be encouraged to value family life as a source of love and support for all people, and as the basis of a society in which people care for others. This includes all styles of modern family life.

Personal beliefs and attitudes will not influence the teaching of RSE. Teachers will address students' questions bearing in mind that students come from families with potentially diverse beliefs and values.

## **5. How does RSE relate to Equal Opportunities?**

The VAT Equal Opportunities policy underpins the teaching of RSE. RSE can act as a basis for promoting equality between individuals and groups. It necessarily involves an exploration of human and social diversity, and a fostering of self-esteem and self-worth in a learning environment that recognises and respects difference. The VAT works to ensure that RSE is relevant and accessible to all students and is appropriate for all levels of understanding and maturity. RSE will be respectful of how students choose to identify themselves with regard to their emerging sexual orientation and gender identity.

## **6. How is RSE organised?**

RSE is not an isolated subject: it permeates the ethos of each VAT academy, the school curriculum and the pastoral system. RSE is also informed by the daily behaviour of academy staff as role models.

All subjects, but particularly Science, RE, English, PE and Drama provide a focus for exploring elements of RSE, along with time spent explicitly on RSE in PSHCE lessons and in tutor time. There will inevitably be plenty of informal opportunities for members of staff to answer students' questions and explore issues as they arise on a daily basis.

Each VAT academy has a co-ordinator of RSE (who may typically be the PSHCE co-ordinator). This person, working with other relevant staff, will be responsible for the overall planning, formal implementation and review of the RSE programme.

## **7. How is RSE taught?**

Each VAT academy places a high importance on creating a supportive and secure environment where students can develop the confidence needed to talk, listen and think about relationships, change and sex. In order to do this, teachers will

- Establish clear rules
- Emphasise the importance of mutual respect
- Require no open disclosures in a class setting
- Use distancing techniques
- Where necessary, provide for anonymity so that students can ask the questions they need to ask (eg. using a question box)

Each VAT academy will draw on a range of teaching methods appropriate to a particular age group in order to encourage the exploration of attitudes, values and beliefs, and in order to impart information.

In order to create a supportive and secure classroom environment, it is best if students know their teacher well. However, not all teachers are best suited to teaching some aspects of the RSE curriculum. So, where appropriate, particular teachers will deliver particular aspects of the RSE curriculum. These teachers will be trained and supported to do this. Each VAT school will also draw on the expertise of professionals from other agencies, as appropriate.

All RSE teachers will be clear about the boundaries of confidentiality and about where students can go for further information, advice and support.

## **8. The content of RSE lessons**

VAT academies will plan their own RSE content through a graduated and age appropriate programme.

Typically at Primary level this will include topics such as:

- Making friends and communicating effectively with other people
- Respecting other people and their views
- The physical development of human bodies
- Understanding feelings
- Accepting personal responsibility and understanding the consequences of our actions
- Personal hygiene
- Healthy eating and the importance of exercise
- Understanding the differences between people
- Making moral choices and resisting peer pressure
- The way humans reproduce
- Death
- Family life and parenting styles
- Safety, danger and child protection
- Pregnancy and child rearing
- Puberty
- Understanding how the media affect the way we see things
- Where to get help from agencies outside school
- Sexual and gender identity
- Menstruation

- Nocturnal emissions
- Masturbation
- The meaning of slang and other 'sex' words
- Sexual relationships and the law
- Homosexuality, heterosexuality, bi-sexuality

Typically at Secondary level this will include the above and topics such as:

- The importance of sex within loving relationships
- Virginity and abstinence
- Different methods of contraception (including Emergency Contraception)
- Methods of abortion
- The importance of checking breasts and testicles
- Sexually transmitted infections

## **9. Parents' right of withdrawal**

RSE is an important part of all students' education and it is hoped that all students will participate. However, the VAT acknowledges that, under the Education Act 1993, parents have the right to withdraw their children from all or part of the RSE programme *except* for that part which occurs in the National Science Curriculum. Parents need to be aware, however, that RSE can occur at any time, arising naturally from class or from informal discussions. They also need to consider whether they want their child withdrawn from *all* RSE or just from the parts of RSE that deal explicitly with sexual intercourse and related issues. Crucial discussions about feelings, values and relationships may well not be of concern to parents.

Parents wishing to exercise this right are asked to make an appointment to meet the school PSHE co-ordinator to discuss any concerns. VAT academies will provide alternative arrangements for particular students as necessary.

## **10. Procedure for Monitoring and Evaluating**

This policy and the RSE teaching programme will be reviewed regularly, based on the outcome of monitoring and evaluation. Governors and senior staff will play a key role in monitoring this. A working group made up of governors, teachers, parents and students will evaluate the effectiveness of the policy as a working document. Such evaluation could include:

- Assessments of knowledge gained and the understanding of information and issues addressed in RSE;
- Students' responses to the teaching content and methods;
- Teachers' responses to the teaching content and methods;
- Evidence of students' increased sense of responsibility and respectful attitudes towards each other, as monitored by senior pastoral staff;
- A decrease in recorded instances of homophobia, sexual bullying, sexist graffiti and the casual use of derogatory language, particularly with sexual or gender meanings, as monitored by senior pastoral staff.