

# Relationship and Sex Education Policy

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## Aims

The aims of Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) at Thornden School are to:

- Equip students with the knowledge, skills and values required to build healthy, respectful relationships.
- Promote a secure understanding of consent, boundaries and equality.
- Provide accurate, age-appropriate teaching on sexual health, contraception and pregnancy choices.
- Help students recognise unhealthy, controlling or abusive behaviours and know how to respond safely.
- Support young people to stay safe online and offline, including navigating social media, pornography and image-sharing.
- Develop emotional wellbeing, resilience and self-esteem.
- Act as a core component of Thornden's preventative safeguarding curriculum, reducing risk, increasing awareness and strengthening help-seeking behaviour.
- Reflect and promote Thornden's values of *Belong, Care, Aspire, Succeed*:
  - Belong – ensuring every student feels seen, respected and included, especially in topics relating to identity, relationships and equality.
  - Care – fostering empathy, kindness and responsibility in relationships, and teaching how to care for oneself and others safely.
  - Aspire – encouraging students to aspire to healthy futures, informed choices, respectful partnerships and positive wellbeing.
  - Succeed – equipping students with the skills and confidence to succeed in adult life, personal relationships and community participation.

## Statutory requirements

As a secondary academy, Thornden School must provide Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) to all pupils under **Section 34 of the Children and Social Work Act 2017**.

In teaching RSE, we are required by our funding agreement to have regard to the statutory guidance issued by the Secretary of State under **Section 403 of the Education Act 1996**.

We also have regard to the following legal duties:

- **Sections 406 and 407 of the Education Act 1996**, which require that the political views presented to pupils are balanced and that no partisan political views are promoted.
- **Part 6, Chapter 1 of the Equality Act 2010**, which protects individuals from discrimination related to protected characteristics.
- **The Public Sector Equality Duty (Section 149, Equality Act 2010)**, which requires schools to:
  - eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation;
  - advance equality of opportunity between different groups;
  - foster good relations between people from different backgrounds.

Thornden School also fulfils its duties under:

- **Keeping Children Safe in Education (KCSIE)**
- **Working Together to Safeguard Children**
- **The Online Safety Act 2023**, which sets out responsibilities relating to online harms, image-sharing and digital safety
- **DfE RSE and Health Education statutory guidance (updated)**, including expectations coming into force from **September 2026** relating to parental access to materials and the exceptional circumstances under which a headteacher may decline a withdrawal request.

RSE at Thornden School is taught in accordance with these statutory requirements and **forms a central part of our preventative safeguarding curriculum**, equipping students with the knowledge and skills to recognise risk, stay safe and seek help when needed.

## Policy development

This policy has been developed through a comprehensive consultation and review process involving staff, pupils, parents and governors. This ensures that the Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) curriculum reflects statutory requirements, local safeguarding needs and the values of Thornden School.

The consultation and policy development process involved the following steps:

### 1. Review of Guidance

A small working group, including the Deputy Headteacher/DSL and PD Lead, reviewed all relevant national and local guidance, including:

- DfE statutory RSE and Health Education guidance
- Equality Act 2010 requirements
- Keeping Children Safe in Education
- The Online Safety Act 2023

- Local contextual safeguarding information
  - The Key's RSE policy checklist
2. Staff Consultation  
All staff involved in delivering RSE or the wider Personal Development curriculum have been invited to provide feedback and offer suggestions. Fortnightly PD team discussions informed refinements to ensure accuracy, consistency and safeguarding alignment.
  3. Pupil Consultation (Student Voice)  
Student voice activities, including surveys and focus groups, were used to understand what pupils value, what they feel confident about, and what they believe they need more support with. Feedback from these activities shaped decisions about content sequencing, examples used, and emphasis on consent, online safety and managing pressure.
  4. Parent/Carer Consultation (Parent Voice)  
Parents were invited to review information about the RSE curriculum and provide feedback through surveys and consultation opportunities.
  5. Policy Drafting and Amendment  
Insights from staff, pupils and parents were incorporated into a revised policy, ensuring that the curriculum is relevant, inclusive, developmentally appropriate and reflective of community needs.
  6. Governance and Ratification  
The updated policy was shared with the Governing Body for review and approval. Governors considered statutory compliance, curriculum quality and safeguarding alignment before ratifying the policy.

Thornden School continues to review and refine the policy annually to ensure it remains compliant, responsive and aligned with our values: *Belong, Care, Aspire, Succeed*.

## Definition

RSE at Thornden forms a key part of our preventative safeguarding approach and our commitment to ensuring every student can *Belong, Care, Aspire and Succeed*.

Students learn to:

- belong to safe, respectful and inclusive communities;
- care for themselves and others through empathy, consent and healthy communication;
- aspire to healthy adult relationships, autonomy and emotional wellbeing;
- succeed by making informed, responsible decisions about relationships, sexual health, and personal values.

RSE includes understanding:

- healthy and unhealthy relationships;
- consent, personal boundaries and communication;
- equality, respect and inclusion;
- online risks, pornography, manipulation and coercion;
- sexual health, STIs, contraception and pregnancy choices;
- harmful sexual behaviour and the law;

- how, when and where to seek help.

RSE is designed to build confidence, empower students and strengthen safe decision-making.

## Curriculum

Our RSE curriculum is set out as per Appendix 1, but we may need to adapt it as and when necessary.

RSE at Thornden is deliberately structured so that students develop the knowledge, character and behaviours needed to live out our school values:

### Belong

- Students explore identity, equality, respect and diversity.
- Teaching reinforces that every individual has the right to feel safe, valued and included.
- LGBTQ+ inclusion and protected characteristics are taught explicitly.

### Care

- Students learn to recognise safe and unsafe behaviours.
- Emotional literacy, empathy, consent and communication are central.
- Lessons include signposting and safe help-seeking.

### Aspire

- Students are encouraged to think critically, challenge stereotypes, evaluate relationships and envision healthy futures.
- Teaching prepares them for adult responsibilities, autonomy and respectful partnerships.

### Succeed

- Students develop the knowledge, self-awareness and confidence needed to succeed in adult life.
- They are taught to manage risk, understand the law, make informed choices and contribute positively to society.

This makes your values *operational* within the curriculum, not just referenced.

We have developed the curriculum in consultation with parents, pupils and staff, and taking into account the age, developmental stage, needs and feelings of our pupils. If pupils ask questions outside the scope of this policy, teachers will respond in an appropriate manner so that pupils are fully informed and don't seek answers online.

For more information about our curriculum, see our curriculum map in Appendix 1.

## Delivery of RSE

RSE is delivered as part of Thornden's Personal Development curriculum, which forms a core component of our preventative safeguarding approach. Teaching is structured, age-appropriate and sequenced to ensure students develop the knowledge, skills and confidence to build healthy relationships and stay safe.

RSE is taught through:

- The whole-school Tutor Programme (Years 7–11), providing weekly learning on relationships, respect, equality, online safety and wellbeing.
- Dedicated PD lessons in Years 10 and 11, where more complex topics such as consent, sexual health, exploitation, coercive control, pornography and managing pressure are explored in greater depth.
- The science curriculum, which covers the biological aspects of reproduction, STIs and human development.
- Religious Studies (Years 7–9) and Ethics & Belief (Years 10–11), which explore relationships, morality, family life, equality, respect and ethical reasoning.
- Assemblies, tutor-time enrichment and external speakers, which reinforce key messages about safety, respect, diversity and digital citizenship.

RSE at Thornden is delivered in a manner that actively models our school values:

- **Belong** – creating safe, respectful and inclusive classrooms where every pupil feels valued.
- **Care** – encouraging empathy, compassion and responsibility within relationships.
- **Aspire** – supporting pupils to aspire to healthy futures, informed decision-making and positive wellbeing.
- **Succeed** – equipping pupils with the skills and knowledge to succeed in adult life, personal relationships and wider society.

RSE lessons model these values in practice by creating environments where students learn to listen, reflect, challenge appropriately and support one another.

### Curriculum Coverage

RSE provides pupils with the information they need to develop healthy, nurturing relationships of all kinds, including:

- Families
- Respectful relationships, including friendships and peer interactions
- Online behaviour, social media, and digital safety
- Being safe, recognising risk and knowing how to seek help
- Intimate and sexual relationships, including consent, contraception, sexual health and the law

For more detail, see Appendices 1 and 2, which outline delivery across the Tutor Programme and KS4 PD curriculum.

### Inclusivity

RSE at Thornden is delivered in a way that is inclusive, sensitive and accessible for all students. Much of our RSE curriculum—particularly within the Tutor Programme—is **taught by students’ own tutors**, who know their tutees well and are able to create supportive, trusting classroom environments where students feel safe to engage, ask questions and seek help.

The curriculum reflects the reality of **diverse family structures**, ensuring no pupil feels stigmatised based on their home circumstances. This includes recognition of:

- Single-parent families

- LGBT parents and carers
- Families headed by grandparents or extended relatives
- Foster and adoptive families
- Looked-after children
- Young carers
- Pupils with additional needs or vulnerabilities

Tutors and teachers approach all content with care, acknowledging differences in maturity, prior experiences, cultural background and emotional readiness.

To ensure RSE is accessible to every learner, Thornden uses **adaptive teaching strategies** and the principles of the **Thornden DNA**. This includes:

- Scaffolding tasks and discussions appropriately
- Clear modelling and structured vocabulary teaching
- Anticipating and addressing misconceptions sensitively
- Using varied learning approaches to support diverse needs
- Providing additional guidance or small-group support where appropriate
- Delivering trauma-informed, emotionally safe lessons
- Working closely with the SENCo, DSL and pastoral team where bespoke adjustments are needed

These approaches ensure all students can engage meaningfully with RSE and develop the knowledge, skills and confidence needed to form healthy relationships and keep themselves safe.

### **Legal and Ethical Responsibilities**

Teaching is aligned with the law and does not condone or encourage illegal or harmful activity, including:

- Violence, extremism or terrorism
- Hate crime or discriminatory behaviour
- Criminal damage or the unlawful use of substances
- Sharing illegal images or engaging in unlawful online behaviour

Students are taught clearly what the law says about consent, digital communication, sexual activity, harmful sexual behaviour, and online offences such as image-based abuse.

### **Use of resources**

Thornden School takes great care to ensure that all resources used in RSE are safe, accurate and appropriate for our pupils. Before using any material—whether created internally or sourced externally—we consider whether it:

1. Meets statutory requirements set out in the DfE RSE and Health Education guidance.
2. Supports the intended learning, enabling pupils to apply knowledge confidently in real-life contexts.

3. Is age-appropriate and developmentally suitable, taking into account the maturity, backgrounds and lived experiences of our pupils.
4. Is factually accurate, evidence-based and drawn from reputable organisations.
5. Fits logically within our curriculum sequence and reinforces prior learning.
6. Comes from a credible provider, consistent with safeguarding expectations and the Equality Act.
7. Is compatible with effective teaching approaches, including adaptive teaching and Thornden DNA principles.
8. Is sensitive to pupils' experiences and will not unnecessarily provoke distress, anxiety or harm.

Any external resources or guest speakers are checked by the DSL prior to use to ensure they meet the above criteria and align with Thornden's values of Belong, Care, Aspire, Succeed.

## Use of external organisations and materials

We will make sure that an 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 RSE is balanced, and it and the resources they intend to use:
  - Are age appropriate.
  - Are in line with pupils' developmental stage.
  - Comply with:
    - This policy.
    - 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.
- Make sure that any speakers and resources meet the intended outcome of the relevant part of the curriculum.
- Review any case study materials and look for feedback from other people the agency has worked with
- Be clear on:
  - What they're going to say.

- Their position on the issues to be discussed.
- Ask to see in advance any materials that the agency may use.
- Know the named individuals who will be there, and follow our usual safeguarding procedures for these people.
- Conduct a basic online search and address anything that may be of concern to us, or to parents and carers.
- Check the agency's protocol for taking pictures or using any personal data they might get from a session.
- Remind teachers that they can say "no" or, in extreme cases, stop a session.
- Make sure that the teacher is in the room during any sessions with external speakers.

We won't, under any circumstances:

- Work with external agencies that take or promote extreme political positions.
- Use materials produced by such agencies, even if the material itself is not extreme.

## Roles and responsibilities

**The Local Academy Committee is responsible for:**

- Approving the RSE policy annually.
- Holding the Headteacher to account for the effective implementation of the policy and the quality of RSE provision.
- Ensuring RSE fulfils statutory requirements and aligns with the school's safeguarding duties and values (Belong, Care, Aspire, Succeed).

### **The Headteacher**

The Headteacher is responsible for:

- Ensuring RSE is taught consistently across the school in line with statutory guidance.
- Overseeing the quality, accuracy and safeguarding integrity of RSE content.
- Managing parental requests to withdraw their child from non-statutory elements of sex education.
- Ensuring staff receive appropriate training to deliver sensitive and complex content safely.
- Ensuring curriculum materials are available for parents to view, in line with emerging 2026 statutory requirements.

### **The Deputy Headteacher / Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL)**

The DSL oversees:

- The sequencing, safeguarding accuracy and appropriateness of the RSE curriculum.
- Staff training and briefings linked to contextual safeguarding themes.
- Ensuring RSE forms a core component of the school's preventative safeguarding curriculum.

- Monitoring the impact of RSE through student voice, staff feedback, pastoral intelligence and CPOMS patterns.
- Quality assurance of lessons (Learning Walks, Department Reviews).
- Designing, planning and quality-assuring RSE lessons within the Tutor Programme and KS4 PD curriculum.
- Providing structured lesson resources that follow Thornden DNA and adaptive teaching expectations.
- Supporting staff through guidance, CPD and coaching in managing sensitive discussions safely.
- Ensuring content is age-appropriate, inclusive, trauma-aware and aligned with statutory guidance.

### **Staff (including Tutors and PD Teachers)**

All staff involved in delivering RSE are responsible for:

- Delivering RSE in a sensitive, inclusive and developmentally appropriate way.
- Modelling positive attitudes and behaviours that reflect Thornden's values.
- Following safeguarding protocols and responding appropriately to concerns disclosed during lessons.
- Using adaptive teaching strategies to ensure accessibility for all students, including SEND, EAL and vulnerable pupils.
- Creating safe, respectful classroom environments that support open discussion and emotional safety.
- Monitoring student engagement and progress and providing feedback to the PD Lead/DSL where necessary.

Staff **cannot opt out** of teaching RSE and must seek support from the PD Lead or DSL if they feel uncertain about sensitive topics.

### **Pupils**

Pupils are expected to:

- Engage fully with RSE lessons and participate sensitively and respectfully.
- Treat others' experiences, identities and views with respect.
- Uphold Thornden's values by promoting a safe, inclusive and non-judgemental learning environment.

### **Parents and Carers**

Parents and carers:

- Will be consulted during policy review cycles and invited to provide feedback on RSE provision.

- Have the right to request withdrawal from the non-statutory aspects of sex education up to three terms before their child turns 16.
- Are entitled, from September 2026, to view all RSE lesson materials upon request, and we will provide access in line with DfE guidance.
- Are encouraged to discuss RSE content with their child at home to reinforce learning.

## Parents' right to withdraw

Parents have the right to withdraw their children from the non-statutory/non-science components of sex education within RSE 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 must be made in writing using the form in Appendix 3 and addressed to the Headteacher. A copy of the request will be placed in the pupil's educational record. The Headteacher will discuss the request with parents and take appropriate action.

From September 2026, the Headteacher may decline a withdrawal request in exceptional circumstances, including where there are safeguarding concerns.

Alternative work will be provided for pupils who are withdrawn from sex education.

Where a withdrawal takes place, parents assume responsibility for delivering this aspect of learning.

## Training

Staff receive training in the delivery of RSE and this is revisited regularly through our continuing professional development (CPD) programme. Training ensures staff feel confident, well-informed and prepared to teach sensitive content safely and inclusively.

RSE training at Thornden includes:

- Annual whole-staff training on statutory RSE requirements, safeguarding and inclusive practice
- DSL briefings that link live safeguarding themes to upcoming RSE and Personal Development content
- CPD on adaptive teaching, and the Thornden DNA
- Opportunities to review resources, discuss scenarios and practise facilitation of challenging conversations

Where appropriate, the Headteacher and DSL invite external professionals—such as school nurses, sexual health specialists or other qualified practitioners—to contribute to staff training or provide expert input.

This approach ensures that all staff teaching RSE are confident, consistent and able to create safe, respectful and well-informed learning environments.

## Monitoring arrangements

The delivery and impact of RSE at Thornden School are monitored regularly to ensure high-quality provision and strong safeguarding practice.

Monitoring of Delivery

RSE is monitored by Adam Thomas (Deputy Headteacher and Designated Safeguarding Lead) through a range of quality assurance processes, including:

- Learning Walks and lesson observations
- Student Voice surveys and focus groups
- Staff Voice and tutor feedback
- Department Reviews
- Review of resources and curriculum sequencing
- Analysis of safeguarding themes emerging through CPOMS
- Performance Management discussions where relevant

These processes ensure that RSE is taught consistently, accurately and in line with statutory guidance and Thornden's values.

#### Monitoring of Pupil Progress

Pupils' development in RSE is monitored by tutors and PD teachers as part of our internal assessment systems, including reflection tasks, retrieval activities, lesson outcomes and ongoing formative assessment.

#### Policy Review

This policy will be reviewed annually by Adam Thomas (Deputy Headteacher/DSL) to ensure alignment with statutory guidance, safeguarding updates and local contextual needs. At each review, the updated policy will be shared with and approved by the Local Academy Committee.

Please find below links to where we cover the Statutory PSHE areas:

- 1) Tutor Programme - [New 2026 Statutory Guidance Tracking Document.docx](#)
- 2) All Curriculum Areas - [Whole School Personal Development \(Statutory PSHE\) Audit.docx](#)
- 3) British Values Audit - [British Values Audit](#)
- 4) Spiritual, Moral, Ethical and Social Audit - [SMSC Audit](#)
- 5) Diversity Audit - [Diversity and Inclusion Audit](#)

Please find below links to our Intent, Implementation and Impact Documents

- 1) [Tutor Programme Intent, Implementation and Impact Document.docx](#)
- 2) [KS4 Personal Development Lesson Intent Implementation and Impact Document.docx](#)

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

The following statements reflect the statutory knowledge pupils must acquire by the end of secondary education, as set out in the DfE *Relationships, Sex and Health Education Guidance*. Thornden School delivers this content through the Tutor Programme, KS4 Personal Development lessons, assemblies, cross-curricular learning and safeguarding education.

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### **1. Families**

By the end of secondary school, pupils should know:

- That stable, caring relationships are at the heart of healthy family life.
- How families differ (e.g., single-parent, blended, LGBT parents, adoptive, foster, kinship care) and that all deserving of respect.
- The legal rights and responsibilities regarding parenting and marriage (including forced marriage and honour-based abuse awareness).
- The characteristics of healthy family relationships, including commitment, communication, trust and care.
- How to seek support if family relationships feel unsafe or harmful.

### **2. Respectful Relationships, Including Friendships**

Pupils should know:

- The qualities of positive, healthy friendships and relationships (trust, respect, honesty, kindness, boundaries).
- How to manage conflict and repair relationships where appropriate.
- How stereotypes, prejudice and discrimination can negatively affect relationships.
- The legal and moral importance of equality and respect for all, including those with protected characteristics.
- The role of peer influence and how to challenge unhealthy norms (e.g., misogyny, toxic friendships, peer pressure).
- The signs of coercive or controlling behaviour in any relationship.

### **3. Online and Media**

Pupils should know:

- Their rights and responsibilities online, including how their data and images may be used.
-

- How online content is curated, manipulated or misleading (e.g., pornography, unrealistic expectations, deepfakes).
- The law regarding harmful online behaviours, including cyberflashing, online grooming, sextortion and sharing intimate images.
- How to make safe, responsible choices on social media, gaming platforms and messaging apps.
- How to report harmful or abusive content and keep themselves safe online.
- The impact of online pressure, comparison culture and its links to mental health.

#### **4. Being Safe**

Pupils should know:

- What constitutes consent, and how to recognise whether it has been freely given (including capacity, coercion and withdrawal).
- How to recognise risk, harmful sexual behaviour, exploitation and grooming — both online and offline.
- The law relating to sexual behaviour, consent, harassment, assault, rape and image-based abuse.
- The meaning of sexual consent, including myths, misunderstandings and how to safely navigate grey areas.
- How to seek help if they or a friend feel unsafe, including disclosure routes and trusted adults in school.
- How to identify and respond to unhealthy or abusive dynamics in friendships, relationships or within the family.
- The impact of drugs and alcohol on decision-making and personal safety.

#### **5. Intimate and Sexual Relationships, Including Sexual Health**

Pupils should know:

- How to develop healthy, safe and consensual intimate relationships.
- The full range of contraceptive choices, including emergency contraception.
- How STIs are transmitted, prevented, diagnosed and treated.
- The importance of regular sexual health check-ups and how to access local services confidentially.

- Pregnancy choices, including parenting, adoption and abortion, and the law surrounding these decisions.
- Facts about fertility, miscarriage and the impact of lifestyle on reproductive health.
- The influence of pornography on expectations, behaviour, consent and self-esteem.
- How to manage sexual pressure and communicate boundaries confidently and respectfully.

### Appendix 3: Parent form: Withdrawal from Sex Education within RS

TO BE COMPLETED BY PARENTS			
Name of child		Class	
Name of parent		Date	
Reason for withdrawing from sex education within relationships and sex education			
Any other information you would like the school to consider			
Parent signature			

TO BE COMPLETED BY THE SCHOOL	
Agreed actions from discussion with parents	