PSHE and RSE Policy

This policy covers pupils across the full age range the schools admit, from age 5 up to age 18, and reflects the schools' shared identity as independent special educational needs (SEND) schools working within a trauma-informed, relational ethos.

Policy Owner:	Polaris Education
Approved by:	Managing Director
Date approved:	September 2026
Next review date:	September 2027
Version No:	1
Replaces:	Previous separate PSHE policy and RSE policy (now combined)
Associated Documents:	This policy should be read alongside all other relevant policies, procedures and guidance documents, including: Trauma-Informed Relationships and Behaviour Policy; Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy; Anti-Bullying Policy; Online Safety and Acceptable Use Policy; Equality Policy; Careers Education, Information, Advice and Guidance Policy; Curriculum Policy; Health and Safety Policy; SEND Policy

All group companies are detailed in the current legal structure.
This policy forms part of the Group Quality Management system ISO 9001.

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1. Introduction and ethos

Our schools are committed to providing every pupil with a high-quality Personal, Social, Health and Economic (PSHE) education, including Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) and careers education. We recognise that these areas of learning are central to pupils' personal development, wellbeing, safety and preparation for adult life – and that this is especially true for our pupils, all of whom have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), and many of whom have experienced trauma, loss, instability or adverse childhood experiences before joining us.

PSHE and RSE at Polaris Education are delivered through a relational, trauma-informed lens. We understand that a pupil's readiness to learn about relationships, their body, feelings or the wider world is shaped by their individual history and current sense of safety, as well as by their cognitive and developmental profile. Our approach is therefore personalised, predictable, and paced to the pupil in front of us, while still ensuring every pupil receives their full entitlement to statutory content by the end of each key stage.

2. Legal status and the guidance this policy is based on

PSHE as a whole subject is not a separate statutory standard for independent schools, but Relationships Education, RSE and the wider personal, social, health and economic curriculum are required under the Independent School Standards, and Health Education forms part of the school's broader PSHE provision. This policy has been written with regard to the sources set out below.

Source	What it requires
Independent School Standards Guidance for Independent Schools (revised April 2026), Part 1	Departmental guidance confirming how proprietors meet Standard 2A: relationships/RSE policies must be consulted on with parents, published, and shared on request, and provision for pupils with SEND must be scaffolded rather than limited in scope.
Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014, Schedule, Part 1, paragraph 2A	Requires every registered pupil receiving primary education to be provided with Relationships Education, and every pupil receiving secondary education to be provided with Relationships and Sex Education (RSE), having regard to the statutory guidance issued under section 80A of the Education Act 2002. Health Education is not a separate standard for non-academy independent schools; it is delivered through the curriculum standard at paragraph 2(2)(d) (personal, social, health and economic education).
Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014, Schedule, Part 3, paragraph 7	The safeguarding standard: arrangements to safeguard and promote pupils' welfare, having regard to Keeping Children Safe in Education. PSHE/RSE is a key part of the school's preventative safeguarding curriculum.
DfE statutory guidance – Relationships Education, Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) and Health Education (updated version, statutory from 1 September 2026)	Sets out what pupils should know by the end of primary and secondary school, the guiding principles for effective teaching, and parents' right to withdraw their child from sex education. The school has regard to this guidance in full and is adopting the updated content ahead of the statutory deadline.
Children and Social Work Act 2017, s.34	The primary legislation making Relationships Education (primary) and RSE (secondary) compulsory and giving the Secretary of State power to issue statutory guidance.
Keeping Children Safe in Education (statutory guidance, current edition)	Confirms that a robust and effective PSHE/RSHE curriculum, covering topics such as online safety, healthy relationships, consent and exploitation, supports the school's safeguarding responsibilities and pupils' ability to recognise and disclose harm.

Equality Act 2010	The school must not discriminate against pupils with protected characteristics and must make reasonable adjustments for pupils with disabilities; the PSHE/RSE curriculum promotes respect for equality and diversity and is taught in a manner accessible to all pupils, including those with SEND.
SEND Code of Practice 0 to 25 (statutory guidance)	Requires provision, including PSHE and RSE, to be adapted to meet each pupil's identified special educational needs, using an individualised, graduated approach rather than a diluted curriculum.
DfE statutory guidance – Careers guidance and access for education and training providers (updated 2025)	Requires schools with pupils in Years 7–13 to secure independent careers guidance and to provide pupils with access to a range of education and training providers (the Provider Access Legislation, formerly the 'Baker Clause'). The Gatsby Benchmarks, updated in 2025, are embedded in this statutory guidance and apply to all secondary schools, including special schools.

3. Definitions

PSHE: Personal, Social, Health and Economic education – the overarching subject through which pupils develop the knowledge, skills and attributes to manage their lives, now and in the future.

Relationships Education: The statutory content, taught to all pupils receiving primary education, covering families, friendships, respectful relationships and online relationships.

RSE (Relationships and Sex Education): The statutory content, taught to all pupils receiving secondary education, building on Relationships Education to include age-appropriate content on human reproduction, sexual health, consent and intimate relationships.

Health Education: Statutory content covering mental wellbeing, physical health, healthy lifestyles and, in the updated guidance, personal safety – delivered at Polaris Education through the PSHE curriculum.

RSHE: A commonly used umbrella term (Relationships, Sex and Health Education) covering Relationships Education, RSE and Health Education together.

Careers education: The planned programme of activities, information and independent guidance that helps pupils understand the choices open to them and prepares them for the next stage of education, training or employment.

Trauma-informed practice: An approach that recognises the impact of adverse experiences on a pupil's brain, body and behaviour, and that prioritises physical and emotional safety, choice, predictability and trusted relationships in how the curriculum is delivered, without lowering expectations of what pupils can achieve.

4. Aims and intent

4.1 Aims

The aims of this policy are to:

- Set out the school's approach to PSHE, RSE and careers education, and how it will be delivered.
- Ensure all members of the school community understand how the curriculum supports pupils in becoming safe, healthy, confident and valued members of society.
- Ensure the curriculum meets statutory requirements while being genuinely accessible to pupils with a wide range of SEND, communication needs and life experiences.
- Explain how a trauma-informed approach shapes not only what is taught but how it is taught.

4.2 Intent – what we are trying to achieve

Our intent is to deliver a curriculum that gives pupils the experiences, knowledge and skills to become confident, healthy and responsible members of society, and lifelong learners able to meet new experiences, challenges and unfamiliar situations with resilience. We want every pupil, whatever their starting point, to:

- Develop a strong sense of self-worth by playing a positive role in school life and the wider community.
- Build emotional literacy and the vocabulary to identify, express and regulate their feelings.
- Understand what keeps them physically and mentally healthy, and how to ask for help.
- Form healthy, safe and respectful relationships, both online and offline.
- Understand their rights and responsibilities as citizens and value living in a diverse society.
- Leave school with the knowledge, confidence and independence skills to make informed choices about their future – in further education, training or employment.

5. Roles and responsibilities

- The Head Teacher has overall responsibility for the delivery of PSHE and RSE, for ensuring the curriculum meets statutory requirements, and for ensuring reasonable adjustments are made for pupils with SEND.
- The Curriculum Lead is responsible for the curriculum map, resources, staff training needs, and liaison with the designated safeguarding lead (DSL) where PSHE, RSE or careers content overlaps with safeguarding.
- The Careers Leader is responsible for the school's careers programme and for evidencing progress against the Gatsby Benchmarks (see Section 8).
- Class and subject teachers are responsible for delivering the curriculum in an engaging, age- and stage-appropriate, trauma-informed way, and for referring any safeguarding concerns arising from lessons to the DSL without delay.
- The Proprietary Body / Education Leadership Team is responsible for monitoring the effectiveness of this policy and holding leaders to account for its implementation.

6. Curriculum design and implementation

PSHE, Citizenship, Careers and RSE are planned around the three core themes of PSHE education – Health and Wellbeing, Relationships, and Living in the Wider World – delivered through PSHE/SEAL, Life Skills and Careers lessons, and reinforced through tutor group time, key stage assemblies and themed days/ events (for example Anti-Bullying Week, E-Safety Week, Black History Month and events such as the school's Macmillan coffee morning and Eco-Schools activity).

The curriculum is a spiral programme: themes are revisited and extended year on year, gradually deepening knowledge and skills rather than being taught as one-off, disconnected topics. Full detail of what is taught, and when, is set out in the school's Wider PSHE/Citizenship Curriculum Map, which is reviewed annually alongside this policy.

6.1 Age and attainment

Pupils are taught content at the level appropriate to their current attainment and developmental stage, which may differ from their chronological age – reflecting the fact that many pupils join us with gaps in their learning, or are not working within the National Curriculum expectations for their chronological year group. The exception is RSE, which pupils must be taught at their actual chronological age, in line with statutory guidance and safeguarding good practice, so that pupils receive time-critical safety information (for example about puberty, consent or online risk) before they are likely to need it, regardless of their academic working level.

Where a pupil is working at a significantly younger developmental level (for example, in the earliest stages of communication, self-regulation or independence), staff draw on early child development frameworks to scaffold learning in Health and Wellbeing and Relationships – for example, supporting a pupil to recognise and regulate feelings, form positive attachments, or manage their own basic care needs. This is a teaching strategy for meeting a pupil's assessed developmental need; it does not mean the school follows the Early Years Foundation Stage statutory framework, which does not apply as the school does not provide EYFS provision.

6.2 How the curriculum changes through the school

Phase	How it is delivered	Curriculum focus
Year 1 – Year 2 (Lower School)	Class-based teaching with a consistent class teacher and Learning Support Assistant; PSHE/SEAL sessions, circle time, tutor time and assemblies. Younger pupils follow the school's own sequenced curriculum rather than the Early Years Foundation Stage framework although the presentation may be reminiscent of EYFS practice.	Health and Wellbeing, living in the Wider World, and the foundations of RSE (feelings, family, friendships, keeping safe, people who help us).
Years 3 – 6 (Lower/Upper School)	Half-termly PSHE/SEAL units delivered as discrete lessons and reinforced through Life Skills, tutor time, assemblies and themed weeks (e.g. Anti-Bullying Week, E-Safety Week).	Widening understanding of relationships, online safety, changing bodies, first aid basics, money, communities, and rights and responsibilities, building in a spiral towards puberty and the statutory RSE content pupils must know before transferring to secondary provision.
Key Stage 3	A three-year rolling cycle (Cycle 1–3) so that the topic studied changes every year regardless of a pupil's year of entry; delivered through PSHE/SEAL, Life Skills and Careers lessons, and reinforced through tutor time and assemblies.	Citizenship (rules, law, democracy, financial education), Health and Wellbeing (diet, drugs, mental health, first aid and CPR), Careers (teamwork, aspirations, equality of opportunity) and RSE (friendships, self-worth, consent, diversity, prejudice and bullying).
Key Stage 4 (Years 10–11)	Lessons become more subject-specific, with Health and Wellbeing, Citizenship/Financial Education, Careers and RSE increasingly taught as distinct strands rather than a single blended session, reflecting the greater depth and sensitivity of the content.	Mental health and safeguarding (self-harm, stigma, healthy coping), extremism and radicalisation, financial decision-making, healthy and unhealthy relationships, consent and the law, contraception, STIs, FGM, pornography and online harms, and preparation for adult life.
Post-16 (Year 12/13 programme)	Continues age-appropriate PSHE, RSE and independent careers guidance for those pupils who remain at the school beyond Year 11 because additional time is needed to secure core qualifications, life skills or confidence for adulthood.	Independent living skills, healthy relationships in adulthood, further/higher education and employment transition, and continued access to independent careers advice, in line with the school's commitment to preparing pupils for adulthood.

6.3 Cross-curricular links

PSHE, RSE and Careers content is reinforced across the wider curriculum: for example, drama and role-play, discussion and debate in English; teamwork and health in PE; environmental, health and drug-related topics in Science; online safety and digital literacy in Computing; and beliefs, values and practices in Religious Education. Life Skills lessons (for example cooking, personal care, budgeting and independent travel) give pupils repeated, practical opportunities to apply what they learn.

7. Relationships and Sex Education (RSE)

7.1 Legal requirements

Relationships Education is compulsory for all pupils receiving primary education, and RSE is compulsory for all pupils receiving secondary education. Personal, social, health and economic education – within which Health Education sits for independent schools – remains part of the core curriculum for all pupils. The school follows the updated DfE statutory guidance on Relationships Education, RSE and Health Education, mandatory from 1 September 2026, which places a stronger emphasis on: online safety and the risks of AI-generated sexual imagery and deepfakes; positive role models and challenging harmful stereotypes, including content addressing so-called 'incel' and misogynistic online cultures; personal safety as a distinct strand of Health Education (spotting hazards and assessing and managing risk, including around water, roads and railways); and accurate, age-appropriate terminology for body parts.

7.2 Right to withdraw

Parents/carers may request that their child be withdrawn from some or all the sex education delivered as part of RSE, other than the elements of sex education that form part of the statutory science curriculum (for example, human reproduction), which cannot be withdrawn from. Parents/carers cannot withdraw their child from Relationships Education or Health Education.

- A request to withdraw should be made in writing to the Head Teacher, who will discuss the request with the parent/carer, explore the reasons behind it, and explain the benefits of the pupil receiving this education.
- Except in exceptional circumstances, the school will grant a request to withdraw a pupil from sex education up to and until three terms before the pupil turns 16. After that point, if the pupil themselves wishes to receive sex education, the school will make arrangements for this to happen, in one of the three terms before the pupil turns 16.
- The school will keep a record of the request and the discussion, and will provide the withdrawn pupil with an alternative, meaningful activity during the lesson(s) concerned.
- Where a pupil has an Education, Health and Care (EHC) plan, the Head Teacher will consider the request in consultation with relevant professionals, taking account of whether it is in the pupil's best interests to be withdrawn given their SEND and any heightened vulnerability to harm.

7.3 Curriculum content

RSE is delivered through the wider PSHE curriculum, Science, and wider curriculum opportunities, and follows the school's Curriculum Map. Topics build progressively and may include, at an age- and stage-appropriate level:

- Families, friendships and other relationships, including online relationships.
- Respect, self-worth, consent and personal boundaries.
- Recognising safe and unsafe situations, and how to seek help.
- Physical, emotional and social development, including puberty.
- Equality, diversity and inclusion, including different family structures and challenging prejudice.
- Recognising and reporting abuse, exploitation, grooming and other inappropriate behaviour, including online.
- Sexual health and reproductive health, delivered as pupils approach and move through secondary education.
- Healthy and unhealthy relationships, including the influence of pornography, coercion and domestic abuse, at the appropriate secondary key stage.

Full detail by year group and half term is set out in the Curriculum Map, which is available to parents/carers on request.

7.4 Answering questions and handling disclosures

Staff answer pupils' questions honestly and sensitively, at a level appropriate to the pupil's age and understanding, without providing more detail than is age-appropriate or safe. Where a question goes beyond what is appropriate to answer to the whole class, the member of staff will offer to discuss it with the pupil individually and will consider whether the pupil's parents/carers should be informed. Ground rules are established at the start of any RSE topic (for example, that no one has to share personal information, and that some questions are best asked privately) to help create a safe, trauma-informed learning space. Any disclosure of harm made during a PSHE or RSE lesson is referred to the DSL immediately, in line with the school's Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy.

8. Careers education

Careers content is embedded across the PSHE/Citizenship curriculum from an early age, in a form appropriate to pupils' age and understanding, and becomes a structured, statutory programme from Year 7 onwards. The school follows the DfE's statutory Careers guidance and access for education and training providers and uses the eight Gatsby Benchmarks (updated 2025) as the framework for its careers programme:

- A stable careers programme, led by a named Careers Leader
- Learning from career and labour market information
- Addressing the needs of each pupil, including those with SEND and an EHC plan
- Linking curriculum learning to careers
- Encounters with employers and employees
- Experiences of workplaces
- Encounters with further and higher education, including apprenticeships and technical routes
- Personal guidance from an independent, qualified careers adviser

In practice, this means every pupil in Years 7–13 has access to weekly careers lessons suited to their age and need, independent careers guidance, encounters with employers and further/higher education providers (meeting the requirements of the Provider Access Legislation, also known as the Baker Clause), college visits and taster days, work experience opportunities where appropriate, and support with applications, interviews and understanding qualification and progression routes. Careers guidance is tailored to each pupil's individual needs and, in line with Gatsby Benchmark 3, is never limited by assumptions based on a pupil's SEND. For pupils remaining at the school in a bespoke Year 12/13 programme, this support continues, with a focus on securing core qualifications, independence skills and a confirmed next step into college, training or employment.

9. Teaching and learning methods

We use a range of teaching and learning styles, with an emphasis on active learning, discussion, and practical, real-life application, delivered through:

- Regular, discrete PSHE/RSE sessions (for example circle time) that build routine and predictability.
- Group and paired work that develops cooperation, negotiation and turn-taking, scaffolded for pupils who find social interaction difficult.
- Practical and oral activities, recognising that many of our pupils find written recording a barrier, so understanding is assessed primarily through discussion and observation.

- Visual supports, social stories, now/next boards, Makaton or other augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) as required by individual pupils' communication needs.
- Themed days, assemblies and whole-school events that reinforce key messages in a low-demand, celebratory way.
- Real-world, practical opportunities – for example charity fundraising, the School Council, and involvement in planning school events – that let pupils practise active citizenship.

10. SEND and inclusion

Every pupil at a Polaris Education school has identified special educational needs and/or a disability, so inclusive practice is not an add-on to this policy – it is the starting point for how the curriculum is planned. In line with the SEND Code of Practice and the updated RSHE statutory guidance, the school meets pupils' needs through scaffolding, adapted resources and different teaching approaches, not by removing or diluting content. Staff carefully consider each pupil's age, developmental stage, communication needs, cognitive profile and emotional wellbeing when planning how (not whether) statutory content is taught.

- Content is broken into smaller steps and revisited more frequently for pupils who need this (the spiral curriculum, see Section 6).
- Individual pupils' Education, Health and Care plans, Individual Healthcare Plans and behaviour support plans inform how sensitive topics are introduced and paced.
- Where a pupil's needs mean that whole-class delivery of a topic is not appropriate, the school provides small-group or 1:1 delivery instead.
- Staff are alert to pupils becoming distressed, dysregulated or disengaged during a lesson, and have planned strategies (a break, a change of activity, a trusted adult) to support the pupil to re-engage when ready, rather than pressing on regardless.
- Pupil voice is sought, using accessible methods, to check understanding and to shape future planning.

11. A trauma-informed approach to PSHE and RSE

Many of our pupils have experienced trauma, loss, instability, or adverse childhood experiences, and PSHE and RSE can touch directly on themes – family, safety, the body, relationships, loss – that are personally significant or difficult for them. Our approach, aligned with the school's Trauma-Informed Relationships and Behaviour Policy, is that behaviour and disengagement during these lessons is often communication, not defiance, and that learning is only possible once a pupil feels safe.

- Relational safety first: sensitive content is introduced by a trusted, familiar adult wherever possible, not a visitor or supply member of staff a pupil does not know well.
- Predictability: pupils are told in advance what a lesson will cover, using visual timetables or pre-teaching where helpful, so that sensitive topics do not come as a surprise.
- Choice and control: where appropriate, pupils are given some choice over how they participate (for example, listening rather than speaking, or using a private way to ask a question), which helps reduce feelings of threat or exposure.
- Awareness of individual triggers: teachers are briefed on any known triggers for pupils in their group (for example around loss, particular family structures, or past experiences of harm) so that content can be introduced sensitively and support can be ready in advance.
- Maintaining high expectations: a trauma-informed approach adjusts how content is delivered, not what pupils are entitled to learn; staff hold consistent, warm expectations while remaining flexible about pace and method.

- Space to regulate and return pupils who become distressed are supported to regulate (for example through a designated calm space or trusted adult) and are helped to re-engage with the learning once ready, rather than the topic being avoided altogether.

12. Working with parents and carers

We recognise the vital role parents and carers play in supporting pupils' personal development, and we are committed to working in partnership with families on PSHE and RSE. In line with the updated statutory guidance, the school:

- Consults with parents/carers when developing or significantly revising this policy and the Curriculum Map, giving them sufficient information and time to respond meaningfully before decisions are finalised.
- Makes this policy, and information about what is taught and when, available to parents/carers on the school website and on request.
- Shares teaching materials with parents/carers on request, subject to reasonable safeguarding and copyright considerations.
- Informs parents/carers in advance of any new or particularly sensitive topic (for example, puberty or sex education) being introduced to their child.
- Explains parents'/carers' right to request their child be withdrawn from sex education (see Section 7.2) and encourages any parent/carer with questions or concerns about RSE to contact the school to discuss them.

13. Safeguarding

A well-planned PSHE and RSE curriculum is a core part of the school's preventative safeguarding work, helping pupils recognise healthy and unhealthy relationships, understand personal safety (online and offline), and know how to seek help for themselves or a friend. Any safeguarding concern or disclosure arising during a PSHE or RSE lesson – including anything shared during discussion, written work or a private conversation – is reported to the Designated Safeguarding Lead the same day, in line with the school's Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy. Staff do not promise confidentiality to a pupil who is sharing a concern.

14. Equality, diversity and inclusion

PSHE and RSE are delivered in accordance with the Equality Act 2010 and promote respect, dignity and inclusion for all. Teaching reflects the diverse nature of modern society, including different family structures, and helps pupils value and respect difference – whether of ethnicity, gender, disability, age, sexual orientation, gender identity or religion or belief. The updated statutory guidance is clear that schools should avoid language that stigmatises any group, including gendered language that might normalise harmful behaviour by boys or men, and should present a positive, balanced view of relationships and identity. Teaching does not promote partisan political views, and where political or contested issues are discussed, pupils are offered a balanced presentation of opposing views, in line with the Independent School Standards.

15. External visitors, speakers and resources

Visiting speakers – for example health professionals, police officers, or representatives from local colleges or faith communities – can enrich the PSHE, RSE and careers curriculum. All visitors delivering PSHE, RSE or careers content are: agreed in advance with the relevant subject lead; briefed on the school's ethos, safeguarding expectations, and the specific needs of the pupils they will work with; and always accompanied by a member of

school staff, who remains responsible for the session and for managing any disclosure or safeguarding concern that arises.

Any external resource, video, book or website used to support teaching is checked in advance for age-appropriateness, accuracy and the absence of bias, and is not used simply because it is popular or widely available. Where the DfE publishes a list of quality-assured, government-funded resources for RSHE, the school gives this list due weight when selecting materials.

16. Assessment and recording

Teachers assess pupils' progress mainly through observation, discussion and informal judgement during lessons, reflecting the fact that written recording is not the best measure of understanding for many of our pupils. The school has clear expectations of what pupils should know, understand and be able to do by the end of each key stage, referenced against the Curriculum Map. Progress is recorded and shared with parents/carers through Parents' Evenings, additional meetings as needed, and school reports.

17. Staff training

All staff delivering PSHE, RSE or careers content receive training appropriate to their role, covering: the statutory content and how to teach it confidently and without personal bias; how to answer questions and manage disclosures; how to adapt content for pupils with a wide range of SEND; and how to apply the school's trauma-informed, relational approach (see Section 11), aligned with the Trauma-Informed Relationships and Behaviour Policy. Training needs are identified by the PSHE/RSE Lead and reviewed at least annually, and refreshed sooner where the curriculum, statutory guidance, or the needs of the pupil cohort change.

18. Monitoring and review

The Head Teacher is responsible for monitoring the standards of pupils' learning and the quality of teaching, through work sampling, lesson observation and discussion with pupils and staff, and for evaluating strengths and areas for development. This policy is monitored by the Governing Body / Polaris Leadership Team and is reviewed annually, or sooner following a change in statutory guidance, a significant incident, or a material change to the needs of the pupil cohort.

Date	Version	Summary of changes made
September 2026	1	New combined PSHE and RSE policy, replacing previous separate policies; updated to reflect the DfE's RSHE statutory guidance (mandatory from 1 September 2026), the Gatsby Benchmarks (2025), the Independent School Standards Guidance (April 2026), and the school's trauma-informed, SEND-specific ethos across the 5–18 age range.

19. Links with other policies

This policy should be read alongside:

- Trauma-Informed Relationships and Behaviour Policy
- Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy
- Anti-Bullying Policy
- Online Safety and Acceptable Use Policy

- Equality Policy
- Careers Education, Information, Advice and Guidance Policy
- SEND Policy
- Curriculum Policy
- Health and Safety Policy
- Supporting Pupils with Medical Conditions Policy

20. Review Dates

Date:	Version:	Summary of Changes: