

Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) Policy

School Details

St. Mary's N.S. is a mixed gender school in Co. Wicklow. The school has a Catholic ethos. There are four classrooms with multi-grade classes in each.

Introductory Statement

The school has a responsibility to put in place a Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) policy as an integral part of the wider, Social Personal Health Education (SPHE) strand of the curriculum.

Rationale

The need for this policy arises from our schools obligation to provide for all the needs of the student body and respond appropriately to sensitive and emotive issues relating to emerging sexuality. The policy highlights an approved approach to the teaching of RSE in St. Mary's NS. It was developed after teacher up-skilling in the area of RSE.

School Philosophy

St. Mary's N.S. is a Catholic school under the patronage of the Bishop of Ferns. It is managed by a Board of Management, elected according to the procedures agreed by the Partners in Education. The school has a Catholic ethos and this ethos is a guiding principle in the formulation and implementation of this RSE Policy. This ethos recognises the value and dignity of each pupil and all those working in the school community, and aims at promoting the full and harmonious development of all aspects of the person, including:

- a) relationship with God
- b) relationship with family
- c) relationship with teachers
- d) relationship with self
- e) relationship with others
- f) relationship with the environment.

This ethos also acknowledges the cultural and religious values of all the pupils attending the school. The school recognises that the parents are the primary educators of their children and we support them in that role.

In the area of RSE above all, the schools' role is subsidiary to that of the parents and we support and complement their work. The school ethos affirms and supports close links between school and home. To this end parents are encouraged to play a meaningful role in

R.S.E. Parents also has the right to withdraw their children from participating in the sensitive lessons of the R.S.E programme. Parents/guardians are entitled to withdraw their child/children from any lessons on sensitive topics they feel necessary.

Definition of RSE

RSE is an integral part of Social, Personal and Health Education and must be taught in this context. It provides structured opportunities for pupils to acquire knowledge and understanding of human sexuality and relationships through processes, which will enable them to form values and establish behaviours within a moral, spiritual and social framework. (p. 5 NCCA curriculum and guidelines for RSE). RSE is the formal approach to educating children in:

- Relationships with others - parents, siblings, friends and the community in general
- Respect for themselves and others
- Physical development - bodily functions and changes, and personal hygiene
- Emotional development - maturing in society
- Parenting, personal and social skills and relationships
- Sexuality in context - part of a loving relationship.

In St. Mary's N.S. children will be encouraged to examine and explore the various relationships in their lives and to learn how to develop and enjoy the various relationships in their lives and to learn how to develop and enjoy friendships which are based on responsibility and mutual respect enabling them to build the foundation for developing more intimate relationships later in life.

Environment

RSE will be a vital part of Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE). It will take place in the school context but is based on and supported by home teaching. It will be supportive of the Catholic culture of the school.

Aims of R.S.E.

At primary level RSE aims to help children learn at home and in school about their own development and about their friendships with others. This work will be based on developing a good self-image, providing respect for themselves and for others and providing them with appropriate information. Central to RSE is the fostering of self-esteem through which the pupil becomes more responsible in making choices and decisions in all aspects of life and particularly in those relating to sexuality and relationships:

1. To promote an understanding of and a healthy attitude to sexuality and relationships.

2. To promote knowledge of and respect for human love, sexual intercourse and reproduction.
3. To promote a sense of wonder and awe at the process of birth and new life;
4. To enable the child to feel comfortable with his / her sexuality and that of others.

Broad Objectives

When due account is taken of intrinsic abilities and varying circumstances the Relationships and Sexuality Education curriculum should enable the child to:

- Acquire and develop knowledge and understanding of self.
- Develop a positive sense of self-awareness, self-esteem and self-worth.
- Develop an appreciation of the dignity, uniqueness and well-being of others.

Understand the nature, growth and development of relationships within families, in friendships and in wider contexts.

- Develop an awareness and respect of differing family patterns.
- Come to value family life and appreciate the responsibilities of parenthood.

Develop strategies to make decisions, solve problems and implement actions in various personal, social and health contexts.

- Become aware of the variety of ways in which individuals grow, change and understand that their developing sexuality is an important aspect of self-identity.
- Develop personal skills which will help to establish and sustain healthy personal relationships
- Develop some coping strategies to protect self and others from various forms of abuse.
- Acquire and improve skills of communication and social interaction
- Acquire and use an appropriate vocabulary to discuss feelings, sexuality, growth and development.
- Develop a critical understanding of external influences on lifestyles and decision making.

Relationship of R.S.E. to S.P.H.E. and Religion

RSE is taught as an integral part of the SPHE curriculum. The aim of SPHE is to foster the personal development, health and wellbeing of the child and to help him/her to create and maintain supportive relationships to become an active and responsible citizen in society.

The key characteristics of this programme are that SPHE is a lifelong process and is a shared responsibility between family, school, health professionals and the community.

The main strands of the SPHE programme are:

1. Myself
2. Myself and Others
3. Myself and the Wider World

It is clear that the Relationships and Sexuality Programme is correctly defined as being an integral part of the programme outlined above. As stated previously, the content of all lessons will be cognisant of the schools' Catholic ethos as taught in the Grow in Love Religion programme.

School Provision for R.S.E. under the S. P. H. E. Strand Units

1. Myself - Self-identity, taking care of my body, growing and changing, safety and protection.
2. Myself and Others - Myself and family, friends and relating to other people.
3. Taking Care of My Body - Naming parts of the male and female body using appropriate terminology (Junior and Lower Middle classes). Identifying physical changes, Understanding puberty and the Reproductive System (Senior Classes)
4. Growing and Changing - The stages of development of a baby from conception to birth (Middle Classes). Understanding sexual relations within the context of a committed loving relationship (Senior Classes).

Topics covered up to 2nd class include:

- Keeping safe.
- Naming bodily parts using correct terminology.
- Bodily changes during growth and development.
- Making and keeping friends.
- Making age appropriate choices.
- Appreciating family life.
- Recognising and expressing feelings.
- Self-care, hygiene, diet, exercise and sleep (link with P.E. Healthy Eating and S.P.H.E.)
- Expressing opinions and listening to others.

Topics covered from 3rd to 6th Classes include:

- Bodily changes.
- Healthy eating, personal hygiene, exercise.
- Keeping safe.
- Expressing feelings.
- Family relationships.
- Making healthy and responsible decisions.
- Forming friendships.
- Reproduction, conception (5th and 6th Classes)

Teachers will teach content that reflect the parameters of the curriculum. For that reason, teachers **will not** cover topics such as contraception and same sex relationships. Children who ask questions in class on such content are advised to speak to their parents and will be informed that they will learn about these topics in post-primary school.

* Schools are expected to address same-sex relationships when issues relating to homophobic bullying arise. Resources and support materials that aim to address questions relating to sexual orientation for primary schools are available on www.pdst.ie/primary/RSE

Withdrawal of Children

Permission from parents is not required for the teaching of RSE. However, parents will be informed in advance of lessons on the sensitive areas of the RSE programme, with a letter relevant to what will be taught at their child's class level.

The letter will be issued in advance, giving parents an opportunity to meet with relevant class teachers if they so wish, to discuss or clarify what is covered and to prepare their children, it also gives parents an opportunity to become involved, to inform themselves of the programme content and to prepare children for the information they will acquire around the sensitive areas and discuss areas covered in RSE/SPHE.

Parents are invited/welcome to view the curriculum and may speak to the class teacher if they have any concerns at any time during the year. The school acknowledges that parents have the primary responsibility for educating their children about growing and changing.

Should any parent wish to withdraw their child(ren) from the RSE curriculum, **they must put this request in writing and state that they "accept responsibility for teaching their child the content of the RSE curriculum."**

Parents can use and view the RSE materials produced by the Department of Education

and Skills on www.pdst.ie/primary/RSE and materials produced by the Health Promotion Unit (HSE) on www.healthpromotion.ie/health/inner/busy-bodies

Methodology

All lessons will be taught by the class teacher. 5th and 6th class will have a visiting guest speaker once every two years who will discuss the sensitive issues with them. If a child asks something which will be covered later the teacher will say "that's a difficult question for this class, you will be learning that in ____ class". If a child asks a question which the teacher deems inappropriate he/she will say, "I think that it would be better to ask that question at home". All classes shall be taught as a mixed group e.g. 5th/6th class boys and girls together* A teacher with a conscientious objection to teaching an element of the programme will have the option of asking a colleague or outside person to take that lesson. At all times the child's and the teacher's right to privacy will be respected. Active Learning is the principal learning and teaching approach recommended. It is a process in which children participate meaningfully in their own learning, in which they can begin from what they already know, explore possibilities, question, draw conclusions and reflect on outcomes. The strategies used are: drama activities; co-operative games; circle time; discussion; written activities; pictures and visual images; the media and information and communication technology; looking at children's work.

*Boys and girls are taught together in all classes though sensitive issues may be taught separately. Senior pupils are treated in a mature way and are encouraged to discuss issues that arise with their parents or teacher.

Resources

We utilise the resource materials for teaching RSE produced by the Department of Education and Skills and lessons from the revised Walk Tall resource. Teachers can use the Making the Links booklet to support planning for RSE. *(All of these resources are available to use and download from <http://www.pdst.ie/primary/RSE> and can be purchased from Laois Education Centre)*

Themes included in the Resource Manuals for Relationships and Sexuality Education

Junior Infants	First Class	Third Class	Fifth Class
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · This Is Me · Who Are You · We Are Friends · This Is My Family · People Who Teach Us About Keeping Safe · We Have Feelings · New Life · I Grow · Making Choices 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Things I like to do · My Friends · My Family · Keeping Safe · Showing our Feelings · The Wonder of New Life · How My Body Works · Growing Means Changing · Decisions and their Consequences 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Special Gifts · Sometimes Friends Fight · My Family · Keeping Safe · Expressing Feelings · Preparing for New Life · Our Senses · As I grow I Change · Making Decisions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · The Person I Am · Different Kinds Of Friends · My Family · Keeping Safe · Feelings And Emotions · My Body Grows And Changes · The Wonder Of New Life · Caring For New Life · Making Healthy Decisions
Senior Infants	Second Class	Fourth Class	Sixth Class
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Look What I Can Do · These Are My Friends · This Is My Family · I Can Be Safe · Other People Have Feelings Too · Caring For New Life · My Body · I Grow And Change · Making Decisions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Other People are Special · Being Friends · My Family · Keeping Safe · Coping with Our Feelings · The Wonder of New Life · When my Body needs Special Care · Growing and Changing · Personal Decisions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Myself and Others · Bullying Behaviour · My Family · Reasons for Rules · Feelings and Emotions · The Wonder of New Life · Being Clean - Keeping Healthy · Growing and Changing · Problem Solving 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Me and My Aspirations · Different Kinds Of Love · Families · Keeping Safe And Healthy · Feelings And Emotions · Growing And Changing · Relationships And New Life · A Baby Is A Miracle · Choices and Decision-Making

Pupils with Special Educational Needs

Adaptions to the way in which the content is delivered will be made for children with Special Educational Needs. Consultation with parents/ guardians in advance and anticipation of the children's needs will be central to ensuring learning is meaningful.

- Children may be pre-taught language or concepts in anticipation of whole class work
- Children may work in smaller groups or 1:1 on adapted and suitable material
- Any different or specific objectives related to the pupils own learning needs should be detailed in their Support Plans in consultation with parents/guardians.

A note on language

There is a great deal of power in language and not being familiar with the biological terms for the body can put children at a disadvantage. To give children this vocabulary, it is recommended that the teacher uses everyday situations to include words for the body, and bodily functions, naturally and without undue emphasis. The teaching materials for RSE are designed to give teachers a variety of opportunities to introduce terminology for body parts in the context of hygiene practice, illness, injury, swimming, etc. In the RSE Booklet for Parents, *Going Forward Together*, the following rationale is given for the use of correct terminology for body parts:

It is important that children learn the appropriate vocabulary for discussing aspects of life related to sexuality, growing up and their body's physical changes so that they can communicate confidently about themselves. When children begin school, it is not unusual, indeed it is quite normal, for them to have other names for their genitals. However, the use of proper terms for parts of the body and bodily functions should be encouraged from the earliest age, so that these terms are given a status and an acceptability. As children get older and become comfortable with these words, they can discuss aspects of their growth and development with greater ease. They are also less likely to resort to inappropriate or vulgar language when referring to the body or bodily functions.

In addition, the SPHE Curriculum Guidelines (page 11) state:

As physical growth and development are explored, children learn the appropriate anatomical terms for the private parts of both the male and the female body. Acquiring this vocabulary at an early age provides the foundation for later learning on puberty and reproduction and can help children to speak about all parts of their bodies in a respectful and dignified way. Children can acquire the language and vocabulary necessary to discuss his/her own growth and development as well as being able to ask appropriate questions and clarify and find information that he/she might need.

Appendix 1 of the SPHE policy indicates the biological terms for the body which are to be used and the ages at which they will be introduced, in line with the SPHE curriculum.

Stay Safe and RSE

The Stay Safe programme is a personal safety skills programme for primary schools taught in the context of social, personal and health education. The aim of the programme is to reduce vulnerability to child abuse and bullying through the provision of personal safety education for children. It is developmentally structured to enable primary school teachers to deliver an abuse prevention education that addresses personal safety issues such as physical, emotional and sexual abuse as well as bullying and stranger danger. The importance of building confidence and self-esteem and developing assertiveness and strong clear communication is emphasised throughout the programme. Children are taught that it is not their fault if they are bullied or abused.

In the Stay Safe programme, children learn the following:

- About Feelings: To recognise the importance of feelings; how to express them appropriately and in particular to recognise unsafe feelings
- About Friendship: Making and keeping friends and the value of friendship
- About Bullying: What bullying is; strategies for dealing with bullying behaviour, and that it is never acceptable to bully others
- The importance of building confidence and self esteem
- How to identify and deal with inappropriate or unsafe touch
- That it is ok to say 'no' to an adult in a situation where they feel unsafe, threatened or frightened
- To identify trusted adults whom they should tell if they are feeling frightened, threatened, worried or unsafe in any way
- To understand how someone might bribe, trick or threaten them to keep a secret
- It is never their fault if they are victimised or abused
- That they should never go anywhere with or take anything from a stranger
- Appropriate language for telling
- The Stay Safe rules: Say No, Get Away and Tell, Never keep secrets about touch, Never go anywhere with or take anything from a stranger.

In the Stay Safe programme, children are encouraged to use appropriate language for telling, including the correct anatomical terms for parts of the body. This is in line with the SPHE Curriculum Guidelines (page 11).

Child Protection

The school follows the D.E.S. child protection guidelines and has a Child Safeguarding Statement in place with the Principal as Designated Liaison Person (DLP). In cases of disclosure; the DLP will follow the procedures as set out in Children First.

Roles and Responsibilities

The whole school community of B.O.M., staff, pupils and parents play a key role in the formulation and implementation of the plan.

Ratification

The policy was ratified by the Board of Management on _____

Review

This policy will be reviewed every two years or as the need arises.

Signed: _____

Date: _____

Chairperson

Signed: _____

Date: _____

Principal