



Relationships and Sexuality Education (R.S.E.) Policy

**St. Mary's National School,
Saggart,
Co. Dublin.**

Introduction

This policy was drawn up in 2003 by a Committee involving teachers and parents. It was reviewed in 2008 by the principal and staff in consultation with the Cuiditheoir for SPHE. It was reviewed in 2016 by the principal, post-holder and staff. This policy was reviewed in February 2022 by the RSE Policy Review Team.

Rationale

Education in St. Mary's is characterised by respect and care for each individual. The child's many needs are met in a well-structured environment where she/he can live fully the life of a child and develop as a whole person-academically, socially, emotionally, mindfully and spiritually. While nourishing the child's young life, we strive to foster an atmosphere that will enable each child develop to his/her full potential in a safe environment. The environment is such that the child is encouraged and stimulated to be confident, appreciate, independent and creative. The Relationships and Sexuality (RSE) programme will be implemented within this framework.

Definition of RSE

RSE aims to provide opportunities for children to learn about relationships and sexuality in ways that help them think and act in a moral, caring and responsible way. This work will be based on developing a good image, promoting respect for themselves and others, and providing them with appropriate information for their age-group.

RSE in the context of our SPHE programme

Throughout the school year, Social, Personal and Health Education (S.P.H.E.) is taught as a subject from Junior Infants to 6th class. A wide variety of topics are included on this programme, at age-appropriate levels. RSE forms a part of this programme; it is a spiral curriculum which ensures that topics are taught in a developmental manner throughout a child's primary school years.

Aims of our RSE programme

- To enhance the personal development, self-esteem and well-being of each child.
- To help children develop healthy friendships and relationships.
- To foster an understanding of, and a healthy attitude to, human sexuality and relationships in a moral, spiritual and social framework.
- To enable the older child to acquire an understanding of, and respect for, human love, sexual intercourse and reproduction.
- To develop and promote in the child a sense of wonder and awe at the process of birth and new life.
- To enable the child to be comfortable with the sexuality of oneself and others while growing and developing.

School Policies and Curricular Plans which support our RSE:

Traditionally we are a child centred school. The educational and emotional needs of the children in our care are central to our curricular planning and policy making processes.

- Grow in Love Programme
- SPHE Curriculum
- Stay Safe Programme

- Walk Tall Programme

Policies which support SPHE/RSE.

- School's Code of Behaviour and Discipline Policy.
- Healthy Eating Policy.
- Anti –Bullying Policy.
- Child Protection Policy.
- Enrolment Policy.
- Mobile Phone Policy Statement.
- Internet Safety Policy.
- Administration of Medicine Policy.
- Wellbeing Policy.

In keeping with the sentiment and spirit of these policies we informally support many of the aims on which RSE is modelled. We encourage good behaviour, open communication, understanding and tolerance of differences, and respect for staff and others. We recognise that both pupils and staff have rights and responsibilities in our school. A sense of responsibility is fostered and attention is paid to the well- being of all the members of the school community.

Overview of content

Strand

Strand

Myself

Infant Classes

Strand Units

I am unique

My Body

As I grow I change

New Life

Feeling Safe

Feelings and emotions

Making decisions

Myself and others

Myself and my family

Myself and my friends

Special people in my life

Relating to others

1st and 2nd Classes

I am unique

My Body

As I grow I change

New Life

Feeling Safe

Feelings and emotions

Making decisions

Myself and my family

Myself and my friends

Other people

Relating to others

Strand

Myself

3rd and 4th Classes

Strand Units

Accepting myself

Physical development

Growing and changing

Birth and new life

Feelings and emotions

Personal Hygiene

Personal Safety

Making decisions

Myself and others

Roles and responsibilities in families

Portrayal of sexuality and relationships

Roles of males and females in society

Relating to others

5th and 6th Classes

Accepting myself

Physical development

Becoming an adult

Parenthood

Feelings and emotions

Personal Hygiene

Personal Safety

Making decisions

Changing relationships in families and friendships

Group affiliation and loyalty

Portrayal of sexuality and relationships

Sexual stereotypes

Relating to others

Guidelines for the management and organisation of RSE in St. Mary's N.S.:

- R.S.E. is taught as an integral part of the Social, Personal and Health Education. We recognise that parents are the primary educators of their children, and that the home is the natural environment in which RSE should take place. The role of the school, therefore, is seen as one of support for the work of the home in this area.
- On enrolment, parents will be provided with a copy of the R.S.E. policy. They will also be sent a reminder letter (via email) a week before the sensitive topics are taught. The children in St. Mary's N.S. Lighthouse are encouraged to join the mainstream classes for these lessons where appropriate. However, if this is not deemed suitable they may be taught by their own class teacher on a one-to-one basis. (See appendix 1 for further information).
- The approach in school is child-centred and will always take the age and stage of development of the children into account.
- Appropriate vocabulary relating to sexuality, growing up, physical changes, parts of the body and feelings will be used. The use of slang words will be discouraged. (See appendix 2 for language).
- Some aspects of RSE will be taught through discrete lessons with the remainder being taught in a cross curricular manner. Teachers will have to identify the appropriate links with other subject areas to ensure that children receive a broad based approach to RSE.
- Discrete lessons with regard to sensitive and areas of RSE (physical changes at puberty, menstruation, intercourse, conception for senior classes) will be timetabled for the end of 2nd term/beginning of 3rd term.
- Parents/Guardians will be notified in advance and invited to talk to the teachers if they have any concerns and also may view the contents if they wish. A copy of the Busy Bodies Booklet will be sent to parents of 5th and 6th classes by email. This provides the parents with the opportunity to familiarise themselves with the content of the sensitive topics of the R.S.E. programme.
- Questions arising from lesson content will be answered in an age-appropriate manner. The class teacher cannot answer questions which do not relate to the particular curriculum objectives for a class. Pupils will be informed if a question/issue is not on the programme and they will be advised to talk with their parents.
- Presently in St. Mary's all teachers deliver this programme to their own class. However, provisions will be made for teachers who may have difficulty with teaching the sensitive areas of the programme.
- Arrangements may be made with colleagues by mutual agreement to deliver whatever sections of the programme a teacher may have difficulty with.
- Staff members own privacy will be respected and they should not feel obliged to disclose aspects of their own personal life. The privacy of all students will be respected.

Withdrawal of a child from the lessons with sensitive topics

Our RSE programme is inclusive and so we actively discourage withdrawal. Should a parent seek to have their child withdrawn from the RSE lessons, the school will take account of parental concerns, and parents' right to withdraw their child from themes pertaining to sensitive issues will be honoured on the understanding that the parent is taking full responsibility for this aspect of education themselves.

The onus will be on the parent to inform the school in writing of this decision. This letter from the parent will be stored appropriately.

If a child is withdrawn from the lesson, the school cannot guarantee that other children will not inform the child in question of the content of the lessons or that the children in the class may not refer incidentally in class to aspects of the lesson during subsequent days/weeks.

Confidentiality

Where there is disclosure by a child of abuse, or a teacher has any concerns about a child, the school authorities will follow our Child Protection Policy. Our Principal is our Designated Liaison Person.

Ongoing support, development and review

The Board of Management, staff, pupils and parents of St. Mary's supports the implementation of the RSE programme. We recognise that our school has a supportive role to that of the home and we have a commitment to ensuring that our teachers have access to in-career development opportunities and access to relevant teaching materials.

Teaching Methodologies/Approaches:

- Integration with other curricular areas, SPHE, SESE, Art, Religion and Drama.
- Direct Teaching for the discrete, sensitive areas of the programme.
- Discussion, group work, role play, circle time, video education.
- The age and development of the pupils are considered and arrangements made as necessary.

Resources:

- RSE Interim Curriculum Guidelines for Primary Schools (NCCA)
- Busy Bodies DVD
- Busy Body Booklet for Parents
- Early Moments Dolls (2 sets of anatomically correct boys and girls)

- Relationships and Sexuality Education Teacher Manuals
- Walk Tall Teacher Manuals
- Taking Care of Myself by Mary Wrobel (Stored in Room 1 – Lighthouse)
- Staff Share – Resources from RSE Teacher Training

Evaluation

- Teacher Observation
- Pupils Behaviour.
- Pupils/Parents Feedback.

Parents/Guardians have the primary responsibility for educating their children in sexual matters. The School's RSE programme only acts as a support to parents.

Implementation

This revised policy will be implemented from 2022 and will be reviewed again in 2024.

Ratification

This policy was ratified by the Board of Management on 13/6/22.

Signed: Miriam Marlon Date: 13/6/22

Appendix One - Children with Special Educational Needs

- Children with Special Educational Needs will need more help than others in coping with the physical and emotional aspects of growing up.
- They may also need more help with learning what sorts of behaviour are/are not acceptable.
- The Resource Teacher can input here.

Teaching RSE to Children with Autism - General Principles

Consulting with Parents: Given the sensitivity of some of the topics in RSE it is advisable to talk to parents if there are specific issues, if the teacher is unsure about anything or if a child is behaving in ways that are inappropriate.

Small Group Work. Children with learning difficulties, including children with autism, can benefit from small group work. This allows for repetition and re-enforcement and also facilitates development of social skills.

Development of Social Skills. This is an important aspect of the RSE programme for children with autism. A useful resource for this is 'Social Skills Training for Children and Adolescents with Asperger's Syndrome and Social and Communication Problems'.

Use of Visual Resources.

Children with autism often learn better from visual resource. Suggested resources are: Busy Bodies DVD and Parents Booklet.

The NCCA 'Guidelines for Teachers of Students with General Learning Disabilities' (www.ncca.ie) has a wealth of information and material for teaching SPHE to students with general learning disabilities.

RSE is part of the educational entitlement of all students. All young people, whatever their ability, develop physically and emotionally and all need help to understand their bodies and their feelings.

RSE helps students with their overall development, confidence and self-esteem. Some students with mild learning disabilities may lack confidence and need opportunities to develop the following skills through a structured SPHE/RSE programme:

- Development of positive self esteem
- Social and communication skills
- Appropriate expression of feelings

- Safety and protection skills
- An understanding of their body and the changes that take place at puberty.

When teaching RSE it is worth remembering that:

- The development of interpersonal skills and knowledge about one's body is dependent on the development of communication and language skills. This is the most fundamental skill that children need in order to describe themselves, to relate to their peers, and to interact with the outside world.
- The education of the child should be needs led, meaning that the teacher should try to establish what the needs of the student are and also what the child's emotional readiness and level of understanding are. This can be done through consultation with the parents and with the student him/herself.
- Consultation with the parents on sensitive issues is advisable. They may find the subject of sexuality in relation to their child difficult and may need information and support.
- Following consultation with parents and other members of staff, a School Support Plus Plan for the student should be developed.
- The child will be better able to learn if the teacher uses key words, diagrams and active learning methodologies. Children with learning difficulties may also need more repetition and reinforcement.
- The resource teacher could consider integrating some of the RSE content into his/her lessons in order to reinforce the learning from the mainstream classroom.
- Children with learning difficulties need to learn in a variety of contexts in order to be able to generalise what they have learned.
- Inappropriate behaviour is not necessarily sexual but may stem from the fact that the child is stressed, bored, lonely or lacks access to other sensory experience. This should be borne in mind when helping a student to understand the boundaries between public and private behaviour.
- Many inappropriate behaviours in children are preventable if school initiates a conversation with parents while their child is in infant classes. This should stress the importance of putting a consistent approach in place which grows with the pupil and which, from the time the child is young, teaches what is appropriate, in what setting, and when.

Appendix Two - Language

Class	Language Taught
Junior Infants	<p>"Womb"</p> <p>"Penis", "vagina" and "urethra"-taught as obvious physical differences between boy/girl</p> <p>"Breast-feeding" may be used in conversations as a means of feeding a baby.</p>
Senior Infants	As for Junior Infants
First Class	"penis" and "urethra" taught in terms of passing urine
Second Class	As for First class
Third Class	<p>Revision of terms listed above.</p> <p>"Developing foetus"</p>
Fourth Class	<p>"Developing foetus"</p> <p>"Umbilical cord"</p> <p>"Navel"</p>
Fifth Class	<p>"Growth spurt"</p> <p>"menstruation"</p> <p>"development of breasts"</p> <p>"ovaries"</p> <p>"fallopian tubes"</p> <p>"sperm production"</p> <p>"erection"</p> <p>"sexual intercourse"</p> <p>"conception"</p> <p>"puberty", "human reproduction" and "sexual intercourse" in the context of a loving family.</p>
Sixth Class	<p>As in 5th class</p> <p>"pregnancy"</p> <p>Development of baby in womb</p> <p>Contractions</p> <p>Birth of baby</p>