

## **RSE Policy**

### **Introduction**

St Mary's Convent Primary School is a co-ed mainstream primary school catering for pupils from infants to sixth classes. The school is a catholic primary school under the patronage of the Diocese of Meath. The ethos of our school is founded on Christian principles where tolerance and respect for others is paramount. It is our intention that everyone feels valued and our pupils are encouraged to develop their full potential in a caring and supportive environment. Relationships and Sexuality Education (R.S.E.) encompasses the acquisition of knowledge and understanding, and the development of attitudes, beliefs and values about relationships, sexual identity and intimacy. In St Mary's Convent Primary School we seek to promote the overall development of the child which involves the integration of Relationships and Sexuality into personal understanding, growth and development within the context of our Catholic ethos.

### **Development of this Policy**

Parents were encouraged to play a meaningful role in the R.S.E. policy formation, through a series of meetings, representation on the Policy Development Committee and the ratification of the finished product. Consultations took place with staff, parents and Board of Management in the writing of this policy.

### **Rationale**

St Mary's Convent Primary School is committed to the education of children regardless of race, religion, gender or status. Relationships and Sexuality are integral parts of the human personality and impact biologically, psychologically, culturally, socially and spiritually. The Christian ethos of the school is the cornerstone of our Relationships and Sexuality Policy. RSE is a lifelong process that involves the acquisition of knowledge, understanding and skills, and the development of attitudes, beliefs, morals and values. While we believe that the primary responsibility for addressing these issues rests with parents, we acknowledge the vital part the school can play in supporting and complementing this.

### **Definition of Relationships and Sexuality Education**

Relationships and Sexuality Education seeks to provide children with opportunities to acquire knowledge and understanding of relationships and human sexuality, through processes which will enable them to form values and establish behaviours within a moral, spiritual and social framework. RSE aims to help children learn, at home and in school, about their own development and about their friendships and relationships with others. This work will be based on developing a good self-image, promoting respect for themselves and others and providing them with appropriate information.

### **Relationship of RSE to Social, Personal and Health Education**

In St Mary's Convent Primary School, RSE will be taught in the context of Social, Personal and Health Education. SPHE is a subject in the primary school curriculum. SPHE contributes to developing the work of the school in promoting the health and well-being of children and young people. This happens

in the context of their emotional, moral, social and spiritual growth, as well as their intellectual, physical, political, religious and creative development. SPHE is taught from Junior Infants to Sixth class and is formally timetabled.

### **RSE will be facilitated in the following ways within our school:**

- In the context of a positive school climate and atmosphere.
- As part of timetabled S.P.H.E.
- On an integrated, cross-curricular basis.

The RSE Curriculum is a spiral curriculum. This involves revisiting key topics in a developmental manner at regular intervals. All content objectives will be taught by the time the children leave Sixth Class.

### **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 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.

### **Management and Organisation of the R.S.E Programme in our school**

#### **Parental Involvement:**

Relationships and Sexuality Education is an on-going process throughout life. Parents and the family are acknowledged as the primary educators of their children. We work in a supportive role with the parents of our school, by complementing their role with a school based programme in R.S.E. Parents will be given a copy of our RSE Policy on enrolment. It will also be available to view online on our school website.

#### **Withdrawal from RSE:**

Since RSE is an obligatory requirement of the Department of Education and Science, it should be inclusive. St Mary's Convent Primary School actively promotes the implementation of RSE and strongly discourages withdrawal. The school will, however, take account of parental concerns and a parent's right to withdraw a pupil from themes pertaining to sensitive issues will be honoured on the understanding that the parent(s) is taking full responsibility for this aspect of education themselves. Parents are obliged to inform the school in writing of their decision to withdraw the child from the sensitive issues classes. Any parent who wishes to withdraw their child should make arrangements for the supervision of the child while the RSE class is in progress. The school can take no responsibility for any information which the pupil may receive outside the direct teaching of the RSE lessons.

## **Content:**

All the content objectives of the RSE Programme will be covered by the time children leave sixth class. It is school policy that the content objectives are covered with each class level as outlined in the SPHE curriculum statement, within the context of the school's Catholic ethos and without personal slants from the class teacher. One half hour period per week is timetabled in each class for SPHE and RSE will be included in the programme taught during this time. The approach to the teaching of RSE will be kept as normal as possible and will usually be delivered within the child's class by the class teacher. Teachers will be encouraged and supported to teach the sensitive issues to their own class. Possible sensitive issues such as naming the body parts and sexual intercourse will be covered within the SPHE strand units "Taking care of my Body", "Growing and Changing" and "Safety and Protection".

## **Rights and responsibilities of teachers:**

- Each class teacher will teach the SPHE programme.
- A teachers' right to **opt out** from teaching the sensitive issues will be honoured. Provision will then be made for these issues to be taught by

### **1. Another staff member**

2. **Trained outside Personnel:** All information delivered will be informed by the content objectives of the SPHE Curriculum. (See SPHE Curriculum statement p. 32.) We will require the said Personnel to keep within the school guidelines, and to furnish the school with an outline of the talk beforehand.

Class teacher will be present when this takes place.

## **Mixed Groups:**

In our school where there is a **multi-class situation** with children of different class levels and abilities, should information be inappropriate for the younger age group, they will be withdrawn.

Excepting 6<sup>th</sup> Class, if the class teacher feels that a particular class is not ready for parts of the prescribed programme, she/he may defer those areas for the following year. This decision will be recorded in writing and passed on to relevant teacher.

## **Children with Special Needs:**

Children with special needs will receive the same content objectives as other children, but the teacher may have to differentiate the information and use more active learning methodology i.e. make it more child specific. The Special Education teachers will assist to achieve this.

## **Terminology:**

The acquisition of appropriate language in RSE is crucially important to enable children to communicate confidently about themselves, their sexuality and their relationships. We will give children the correct and appropriate language outlined in the RSE materials.

Parents will be notified by letter before these specific RSE lessons are taught.

- Junior Infants: womb, breast feeding
- Senior Infants: penis and vagina.

- 1<sup>st</sup> class: urine passes through the penis in boys and the urethra in girls. Baby is in womb for 9 months and may be breast or bottle-fed.
- 2<sup>nd</sup> class: penis and urethra, vagina (to be revised), navel and breast.
- 3<sup>rd</sup> class: puberty, the womb, breast feeding, umbilical cord.
- 4<sup>th</sup> class: developing foetus, changes in puberty – body shape, menstruation, voice changes, mood changes, skin changes, increases in body hair
- 5<sup>th</sup> class: puberty (to be revised); physical changes in boys and girls
- 6<sup>th</sup> class: reproduction and sexual intercourse in the context of a loving committed relationship in marriage.

### **Questions:**

Questions arising from curriculum content will be addressed by the teacher or by the visitor in a sensible, sensitive and 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 that that question/issue is not on the programme and they will be referred back to the parent(s). Teachers may exercise discretion to contact parents themselves if they feel that a question is very inappropriate.

### **Confidentiality and Child Protection:**

Where there is disclosure by a child of abuse, the school will follow the Department of Education and Science child protection guidelines and guidelines as set out in 'Children First'.

### **Family Status:**

Pupils will be encouraged to appreciate the value of a stable family life and the importance of marriage as the ideal context for rearing children. We acknowledge the different family units that are represented in school and will endeavour to treat all situations sensitively

### **Sources and Resources:**

- We will use the RSE and the Stay Safe programmes and other resources that are deemed suitable by the Department of Education & Science and the Principal / SPHE coordinator e.g. Busy Bodies Booklet.
- We may also invite other visitors such as mother, father and new baby when teaching certain aspects. These adults may be invited to talk and be questioned by the pupils.

### ***Provision for ongoing support, development and review***

- I. Where necessary or if opportunities arise the Board of Management may be requested to fund/ support:
  - a. Ongoing in-career development for teachers
  - b. Purchase of relevant materials / resources.
- II. The revised policy will be circulated to parents, teachers and the school authorities by the R.S.E. Committee and amended where feasible.
- III. The final agreed policy will be presented to the Board of Management, ratified by them, circulated to all parties involved and implemented.
- IV. This policy and the RSE programme will be reviewed by the B.O.M. annually, in November, or as new legislation dictates. All partners will be informed of any amendments necessary after such a review. R.S.E. resources will also be reviewed to ensure they are kept up to date.

