

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 Catholic 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 . 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 Catholic 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.

Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) provides opportunities for pupils to learn basic personal and social skills which foster integrity, self-confidence and self-esteem while nurturing sensitivity to the feelings and rights of others.

SPHE:

- Is taught from Junior Infants to Sixth class and is formally timetabled
- Is a lifelong process and consequently RSE is a continual process throughout primary school and is not confined to once off inputs or lessons
- Is a shared responsibility between family, school, health professionals and the community
- RSE education should include an input from all, and collaboration can be fostered through the teaching and delivery of materials
- Is a generic approach. It is not so much about the specific content of RSE but rather the relationship with a child's skills, attitudes, values and understanding relevant to a range of social, personal and health issues
- Is based on the needs of the child, therefore RSE education should prioritise the needs of the child and his/her environment, with appropriate adaptations made within the curriculum to suit individual requirements and individual school situations
- Is spiralling in nature. RSE is revisited at different stages throughout the child's time in school. This will provide opportunities to consolidate and build on previous learning. This allows for issues and topics to be explored and treated in a manner appropriate to the children's needs, abilities and levels of maturity. All content objectives will be taught by the time the children leave Sixth Class.
- Is free of bias. Lessons, language and resources selected by the school should reflect this. In learning about cultures and traditions of others, children can develop a sense of respect for difference and appreciate the contribution that such has to offer. It will encourage children to be inclusive with each other, challenge prejudice and learn how to live in an intercultural society.
- Engages children to be involved in activity based learning. RSE should provide a range of learning opportunities that include working together, learning about one's own feelings and those of others, developing a sense of empathy and experiencing and supporting healthy relationships.

Through SPHE and RSE, members of the school community should be enabled to enhance their self-esteem and wellbeing through;

- A sense of identity
- A sense of purpose
- A sense of belonging
- A sense of security
- A sense of competence.

Current provision for RSE

RSE will be facilitated in the following ways:

- SPHE lessons (provided through discrete curricular time and integration)

- Use of the RSE Manuals [Click here](#)
- Busy Bodies resources [Click here](#)
- Stay Safe Programme [Click here](#)
- Walk Tall Programme [Click here](#)
- Webwise resources [Click here](#)
- Adapted resources for SEN [Click here](#)
- Religious Education [Click here](#)
- In the context of a positive school climate and atmosphere
- As part of timetabled S.P.H.E
- On an integrated, cross-curricular basis.

Aims of our RSE Programme

We support the aims on which RSE is modelled. We encourage good behaviour, open communication, understanding and tolerance of differences, and respect for self 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 wellbeing of all of the members of the school community.

Our aims:

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

Policies which support SPHE/RSE

- Child Safeguarding Statement
- Substance Use Policy
- Code of Behaviour
- Anti-Bullying Policy
- Enrolment Policy
- Acceptable Use Policy
- Healthy Eating Policy
- Anti Cyberbullying Policy
- Respect and Dignity in the Workplace
- Gender Identity Guidelines

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

Curriculum Content –The curriculum by NCCA will be followed, and will be taught from infants to 6th class. All resources used will be in keeping with the ethos of the school, the whole school plan for SPHE and the RSE policy. Each class teacher will teach the content for their class level each year as laid out in the curriculum, and utilising the RSE manuals to complement their teaching.

Management of RSE

- The strand units Growing and Changing, and Taking Care of my Body are covered in Year Two of our 2 year SPHE plan.
- The sensitive lessons are covered as part of these broad topics as outlined below.
- Special arrangements exist for the delivery of the sensitive elements from 5th class up (see below).
- Special consideration will be taken to ensure that the needs of children with AEN are met
- Taking into account the pupil's social and emotional development, instruction will be based on individual needs where possible. Parents will be consulted around sensitive issues.

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 RSE. Parents will be given a copy of our RSE Policy on enrolment. It will also be available to view online on our school website. 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. See Appendix 1. This gives parents an opportunity 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

Parental resources:

Talking to your young child about relationships and sexuality and growing up [Click](#)

Going Forward Together- Introduction to RSE for parents [Click](#)

Making the Big Talk Many Small Talks 4-7 years [Click](#)

Making the Big Talk Many Small Talks 8-12 years [Click](#)

Parental tips for teaching RSE are available here. [Click](#)

Withdrawal from RSE

As RSE is an integral component to SPHE, consent is not required. RSE is considered 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.

Organisation and Curriculum Planning:

RSE will be covered under the following strands and strand units of the SPHE curriculum:

Strand : Myself
Strand Units : Growing and changing
Taking care of my body

The RSE programme is divided into two main parts:

1) The general programme which contains content covered through SPHE strands and strand units complement the aims and objectives of RSE

- Friendship
- Self-identity
- Family
- Self-esteem
- Growing up

2) The second section will deal with any sensitive / specific content covered through RSE strands and strand units.

Topics covered up to 2 nd include:	Topics from 3 rd to 6 th include:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Keeping safe ● Bodily changes from birth (birth-9) ● Making age-appropriate choices ● Appreciating the variety of family types and the variety of family life that exists in our school and community ● Recognising and expressing feelings ● Self-care, hygiene, diet, exercise and sleep ● Expressing opinions and listening to others ● Naming the parts of the male/ female body using appropriate anatomical terms Junior Infants/ Senior Infants/ First/ Second Class ● Naming the parts of the male/ female body using appropriate anatomical terms and identifying some of their functions (1st/2nd). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Bodily changes ● Healthy eating, personal hygiene and exercise ● Keeping safe ● Expressing feelings ● Appreciating the variety of family types within our school and community and how these family relationships shape us ● Making healthy and responsible decisions ● Forming friendships ● Discuss the stages and sequence of development of the human baby in the womb(3rd, 4th class) ● Introduction to puberty,menstruation and changes (3rd, 4th, 5th and 6th class) ● Changes that occur in boys and girls with the onset of puberty (5th and 6th Class) ● Reproductive system of male/female adults (5th and 6th class) ● Understanding sexual intercourse, conception and birth within the context of a committed loving relationship (6th class).

The NEW sensitive language grid for RSE instruction is available to view here - [Click here](#)
All mainstream classes will be given a laminated copy of the grid to assist in the teaching of RSE lessons.

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.

- Junior Infants: womb, breast feeding, penis,vulva
- Senior Infants: womb, breast feeding, penis, vulva

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

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".

In 5th Class "Busy Bodies Booklets" are not sent home.

In 6th Class "Busy Bodies Booklets" are sent home in a sealed envelope to parents/guardians.

Pupil Voice

In our school the voice of our pupils is acknowledged, valued and respected. Children are given opportunities to reflect and feedback on SPHE/RSE provision via focus groups, questionnaires and Student Council subgroups. This information will be used to inform school improvement in relation to future RSE provision.

Questions

The main aim of talk and discussion is to create an atmosphere where children feel comfortable to ask important questions and that the relationship fostered in these sessions is open, controlled and safe for all children. Teachers will not invalidate questions but set limits.

The following principles will be used when fostering questions and discussions:

- No personal questions of the teacher
- The Question Box will be availed of by the children
- The teacher will be mindful of their reaction to any questions
- Questions do not have to be answered straight away.

Question Box

During the delivery of each section of the sensitive lessons in the senior classes – children will be encouraged to place their questions into a box in the classroom. These questions will then be

monitored and screened with the teacher answering the questions the following week taking into account the following;

1. Questions arising from lesson content will be answered in an age-appropriate manner
2. The class teacher cannot answer questions which do not relate to the particular curriculum objectives for a class
3. Pupils will be informed if a question/issue is not on the programme and they will be advised to talk with their parents
4. Teachers may exercise discretion to contact parents themselves if they feel that a question is very inappropriate or needs to be communicated with home because of other reasons
5. No personal questions will be answered and children will be reminded not to share personal information about their families or others – but can share with the teacher after the lesson
6. Questions related to sexual and gender identity will be answered as per guidelines from the Dept. of Education. See Appendix 2

If issues arise which might be seen to contravene Children First Guidelines, the teacher will notify the Designated Liaison Person in the school.

Language

Language is a powerful tool and should be used with respect and integrity for the dignity of each person. Children should become aware of the power and influence of language. When used positively, language can build up, affirm and show respect to another human being, but if used in a negative manner it can hurt, diminish and demean.

Assessment

Assessment in RSE will enable the teacher to pitch the lessons correctly to their respective class group

The teacher uses:

- Prior learning and formative assessment
- Observation and questions to assess the children's engagement and interest
- Use of teacher-designed tasks such as worksheets, quizzes or games
- Use of reflection or learning log.

Rights and responsibilities of teachers:

- Each class teacher will teach the SPHE/RSE 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 teachers 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. Except for 6th 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 the relevant teacher.

Children with Additional Needs:

Children with additional 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. Teachers will use appropriate resources and publications available to provide a more intensive and individualised approach to teaching personal safety skills to children with additional education needs – Stay Safe/RSE/SPHE. Parents/guardians will be involved in the planning and assessment of the SPHE/RSE needs of their child through consultation with both the class teacher and the Special Ed. teacher. RSE targets will be included in the child's IEP. For further AEN support and resources [Click here.](#)

Differentiation

Teachers will use assessment and professional judgement to differentiate the programme and content to suit the needs of the class. Some of the following techniques will be used:

- ensuring that objectives are realistic for the students
- ensuring that the learning task is compatible with prior learning
- providing opportunities for interacting and working with other students in small groups and spending more time on tasks
- organising the learning task into small stages and ensuring that the language used is pitched at the student's level of understanding
- understanding of the activity using task analysis, outlining the steps to be learned/completed in any given task, posing key questions to guide students through the different stages/processes, and to assist in self-direction and correction
- having short and varied tasks creating a learning environment through the use of concrete, and where possible everyday materials, and by displaying word lists and laminated charts with pictures.
- using group work and discussion

- using higher and lower order questioning in groups
- engaging in moderated whole class discussions through use of a Question Box.

Approaches & Methodologies

Active Learning Methodologies are an integral part of teaching of SPHE and RSE. [click here](#)

The following techniques can be used:

- Discussion
- Role play
- Interviews
- Hosting visitors
- Projects
- Modelling
- Engagement with Restorative Practices
- Surveys of attitudes
- Designing advertisements
- Describing photos
- Analysing and evaluating newspapers, magazines, TV programmes
- Viewing and discussing videos

The RSE curriculum will be taught through the following approaches and methodologies:

- stories and poems
- classroom discussion
- group work
- games
- art activities
- reflection
- circle time
- guest speaker

Confidentiality and Child Protection:

The school follows Children First Guidelines 2017 and The Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post Primary Schools 2017. If a child is withdrawn from the teaching of sensitive issues, we cannot guarantee that the other children will not tell or inform him/her about the lesson content.

Parents are invited to share any changes in circumstances with the school as necessary e.g. changes in family structures etc. For the welfare of some children, this information may be important for a teacher to know prior to engaging in specific topics on family/relationships etc.

Children may disclose personal information during RSE lessons. It is important to protect the privacy of children and their families. This can be done by ensuring there are ground rules for the sharing of information in relation to the topics covered in RSE. Disclosures of abuse must be dealt with in line with Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post- Primary Schools 2017.

Family Status:

Every primary school classroom has children from a diverse range of backgrounds and family types. Every child needs to feel that they belong, are respected and valued.

Pupils will be encouraged to appreciate the value of a stable family life, the importance of marriage and a loving committed relationship 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 resources that are deemed suitable by the Department of Education and the Principal / SPHE coordinator.
- 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.
- Use of the RSE Manuals [Click here](#)
- Busy Bodies resources [Click here](#)
- Stay Safe Programme [Click here](#)
- Walk Tall Programme [Click here](#)
- Webwise resources [Click here](#)
- Adapted resources for SEN [Click here](#)
- Religious Education [Click here](#)
- Making the Links [Click here](#)
- Active Learning Methodology Teaching - [Click here](#)
- All Together Now (an educational awareness programme on homophobic and transphobic bullying in primary school) This is aimed at Fifth and Sixth Class. [Click here](#)
- INTO Different Family/ Same Love [Click here](#)
- We All Belong- [Click here](#)
- RESPECT - Guidelines for primary teachers in addressing homophobic and transphobic bullying [Click here](#)
- RSE boxes including anatomical dolls and storybooks
- PDST resources [Click here](#)
- Gender Equality Matters (GEM) [Click here](#)

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. Staff meetings will be utilised as a platform for discussion and development of RSE materials.
- III. Support will be sought from a PDST Advisor when necessary.
- IV. Promotion and communication of resources is available from www.pdst.ie.
- V. This policy will be reviewed every three years or at an earlier time should a need arise.

- VI. The revised policy will be circulated to parents, teachers and the school authorities by the R.S.E. Committee and amended where feasible.
- VII. The final agreed policy will be presented to the Board of Management, ratified by them, circulated to all parties involved and implemented
- VIII. R.S.E. resources will also be reviewed to ensure they are kept up to date.

Final Staff Consultation:	9th March 2005
Final Consultation with Parents:	16th March 2005
Amended and Passed by R.S.E. Committee:	4th April 2005
Approved by B.O.M.:	27th April 2005
Amended:	14th December 2012
Amended by Special Duties Teacher:	23rd May 2013
Revised by Staff:	19th June 2013
Approved by B.O.M.:	24th June 2013

Revised by Staff	April 2023
Approved by B.O.M	June 2023

Appendix 1

RSE Parental Letter

Dear Parents/Guardians,

Relationships and Sexuality education is an integral part of the S.P.H.E programme. The sensitive elements of the Relationships and Sexuality education programme are covered under the Strand Units, 'Growing and Changing' and 'Taking Care of my Body'. We will be completing these Strand Units with all class levels in the forthcoming weeks.

Topics covered up to 2nd include:

- Keeping Safe
- **Bodily changes from birth (birth-9)**
- Making age appropriate choices
- Appreciating the variety of family types and a variety of family life that exists in our school and community
- Recognising and expressing feelings
- Self-care, hygiene, diet, exercise and sleep
- Expressing opinions and listening to others
- **(Junior/ Senior Infants) *The Language taught at this level will be womb, breast feeding, penis, vulva***
- **Naming the parts of the male/ female body using appropriate anatomical terms and identify some of their functions (1st/2nd)** *The Language taught at this level will be – vulva, penis, vagina, urethra, womb, navel, breastfeeding.*

Topics from 3rd to 6th include:

- **Bodily changes**
- Healthy eating, personal hygiene, exercise
- Keeping Safe
- Expressing Feelings
- Appreciating the variety of family types within our school and community and how these family relationships shape us
- Making healthy and responsible decisions
- Forming Friendships
- **Discuss the stages and sequence of development of the human baby in the womb (3rd, 4th class)**
- **Introduction to puberty, menstruation and changes (3rd, 4th, 5th and 6th class)**
- **Changes that occur in boys and girls with the onset of puberty (5th class)**
- **Reproductive system of male/female adults (6th class)**
- **Understanding sexual intercourse, conception and birth within the context of a committed loving relationship (6th Class)**

The class teacher will send home appropriate home school link pages from the Relationships and Sexuality manual which outline the material that will be covered in class and encourage further discussion of the topics at home. The Sixth Class teachers will be sending home the Busy Body booklets in an envelope in due course. Our New RSE policy is available to view on our school website- www.stmarystrim.ie

If you have any concerns, please make an appointment to see the class teacher.

Yours sincerely,

Sinéad Minogue
SPHE/RSE Coordinator

Appendix 2

SEXUAL ORIENTATION

In St. Mary's we foster a culture that is accepting of difference. An integral part of RSE is learning to respect others; this includes respect for all families and individuals.

The Equal Status Acts 2000 and 2004 provide protection against discrimination on nine grounds, one of which is sexual orientation. The Acts oblige those who manage schools to protect students and staff from discrimination or sexual harassment. If children are using the word 'gay' in a negative fashion our policy will be not to ignore it in the hope that it will go away. Depending on the context and the age group of the children, the teacher will ask a child or a class group what they mean by the word 'gay'.

The teacher's response will be:

'The majority of people are attracted to people of the opposite sex. This is called being heterosexual. Some people are attracted to people of the same sex. This is called being homosexual or gay.'

Our actions if age appropriate will be: :

- To treat homophobic insults in exactly the same way as racist or other insults – the teacher will calmly explain to the child that such insults are hurtful to the other person and are not acceptable
- The Code of Behaviour and Anti Bullying policy procedures will be followed
- Teachers will not teach specific lessons on sexual orientation or gender identity. However sexual orientation and gender identity will be addressed when necessary. Students and families dealing with gender identity issues will be supported through consultation with the NEPS service, CPSMA and other relevant outside agencies
- Appropriate educational programmes will be used when necessary.