



Relationships and Sexuality Policy

POLICY STATEMENT

We in St. Mary's Primary School view the development and implementation of a policy in Relationships and Sexuality (RSE) as an important step towards achieving our aim to develop all aspects of a child's personality and growth. The morals and values of our Catholic Faith are the core principles that underpin the teaching of RSE.

St. Mary's Primary School is committed to the education of children regardless of race, religion, gender or status. All pupils have a right to an education which adequately prepares them for adult life, and RSE plays an integral part. In the Northern Ireland Primary School Curriculum, one of the areas of learning is Personal Development and Mutual Understanding (PDMU). An integral part of the PDMU curriculum is the provision of RSE. As a Catholic school, St. Mary's Primary School advocates the promotion of a 'Personal Development' approach to RSE whereby children in our care are given the skills to help them resist peer and media pressure, and make informed decisions based on their own internal self-respect and self-esteem. Pupils are encouraged to recognise their individual needs to respecting the needs and wants of others. RSE is a lifelong process that involves the acquisition of knowledge, understanding and skills and the development of attitudes, beliefs, morals and values.

As the learning process begins informally in the home we will endeavour to engage in full consultation with parents regarding the aims, objectives and teaching programme of this policy and their views will be considered when implementing and reviewing the policy.

Teaching RSE should provide opportunities that enable pupils to:

- Form values and establish behaviour within a moral, spiritual and social framework
- Learn how to develop and enjoy personal relationships and friendships which are based on responsibility and mutual respect
- Build the foundations for developing more positive personal relationships in later life
- Make positive, responsible choices about themselves and others and the way they live their lives.

AIMS:

In St. Mary's Primary School we aim to:

- Develop a loving pride in one's family and an active association with one's community;
- Promote an appreciation of the importance of the family unit (regardless of structure/composition);

- Enhance the personal development, self-esteem and wellbeing of each child;
- Help the children to develop healthy and respectful friendships within the school and at home;
- Develop an understanding of how human relationships grow and deepen through friendship, love and affection;
- Promote an appreciation of the value of human life and the wonder of birth;
- Enhance the personal development, self-esteem and well-being of the child;
- Help the child develop healthy and respectful friendships and relationships;
- Foster an understanding of, and a healthy attitude to, human sexuality and relationships in a moral, social and spiritual framework and
- promote responsible behaviour and the ability to make informed decisions.

LEARNING OUTCOMES:

The RSE curriculum should enable pupils to:

- Develop a positive sense of self awareness, self-esteem and self-worth;
- Develop an appreciation of the dignity, uniqueness and wellbeing of others ;
- Develop personal skills which help to establish and sustain healthy and appropriate personal relationships;
- Acquire and improve skills of communication and social interaction;
- Acquire and use an appropriate vocabulary to discuss feelings, sexuality, growth and development;
- 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;
- Develop a critical understanding of external influences on lifestyles and decision making;
- Understand the nature, growth and development of relationships within families, in friendships and in wider contexts;
- Develop an awareness of differing family patterns;
- Develop strategies to make decisions, solve problems, and implement actions in various personal, social and health contexts;
- Develop some coping strategies to protect self and others from various forms of abuse;

SKILLS:

The RSE curriculum should enable pupils to develop

- **Communication skills** – putting one's own views clearly and appropriately; listening to others' points of view; handling and resolving conflict peacefully
- **Decision making and problem solving skills** – for sensible and responsible choices; making moral judgements about what to do in actual situations; keeping safe and being aware of the dangers posed by (a) strangers (b) the internet
- **Inter – personal skills** for managing relationships confidently and effectively; for developing as an effective group member or leader
- **Practical skills** – for everyday living; for supporting others; for future parenting ; for keeping safe

MORALS AND VALUES:

The RSE curriculum promotes the moral values of our Catholic faith and enables the children to begin to develop:

- A respect for self
- A respect for others
- Honesty with self and others
- Self-discipline
- The difference between right and wrong; being safe and unsafe
- The responsibility for ones' own actions
- The recognition of the moral dimension to situations
- An understanding of the long term and short term consequences of their actions

HOW WILL WE ACHIEVE OUR AIMS?

Children will also learn on a day-to-day basis from the Christian example set by adults:

- At home:
As first educators, parents are expected to lay the foundations for all acceptable patterns of behaviour, leading by example, and sharing with school the joint task of bringing the child through to the age of eleven with a balanced understanding of life and a healthy appreciation of the human relationships they form in years to come.
- At school:
 - The friendly school environment created by staff who work in the building

- The implementation of the PATHS programme (P.1-P.7); the PD and MU Programme – Living, Learning Together Programme; Internet Safety Programme.
- The messages we give out to children through celebrations, assemblies, discussions, workshops etc
- The encouragement we give and the standards we uphold in terms of sportsmanship, fair play, accepting decisions ; taking both winning and losing in the same spirit
 - The respect we have for and show to all members of our community.

RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN HOME, SCHOOL AND COMMUNITY

The effectiveness of this policy and its implementation is dependent on a collaborative process involving teachers, parents/carers, governors and other educational and health professionals. Each of the partners has distinctive contributions to make.

Keeping parents/carers informed about the school's provision for health education is a vital element of RSE. Informal sessions may then be arranged so that interested parents/carers could consider issues such as the readiness of children for aspects of the RSE programme, the appropriateness of resources the content and methodologies proposed, and the handling of sensitive topics.

The delivery of RSE must prepare pupils to view relationships in a responsible and healthy manner and should be taught in harmony with the ethos of the school and reflect the moral and religious principles.

- Department of Education Circulars providing advice on developing or reviewing their RSE policy is provided in:
 - ☐ Circular 2001/15 Relationships and Sexuality Education;
 - ☐ Circulars 2001/15a and 2001/15b);
 - ☐ Circular 2013/16.
 - ☐ Circular 2015/22 Relationships and Sexuality Education;

These circulars are available on the Department's website: www.deni.gov.uk. Guidance and resources on RSE are also provided on the NI Curriculum website at www.nicurriculum.org.uk/.

EQUAL OPPORTUNITES:

Generally, RSE will be taught in mixed groups, so that boys and girls are encouraged to work with each other and gain an understanding of each other's perspectives. However, there will be times that teachers or the school nurse will work with single gender groups, e.g. P7 to explore puberty related physical and emotional changes in both boys and girls. The programme of RSE delivered will be accessible to all pupils regardless of age, culture, disability, sexual orientation, gender or social class. If parents do not wish their children to avail of the P7 Programme their decision will be supported by the school.

MEETING THE NEEDS OF PUPILS

Children are exposed to information and messages from the television, Internet, film, music, videos, books and magazines. They are influenced by family and friends and significant adults. Part of our role is to ensure that children are able to understand and not misinterpret the information they acquire and to provide contexts where they are able to consider and evaluate the information they receive.

To ensure that the learning experiences are effective, positive and relevant to all pupils, our RSE programme will be developmental, accessible and be appropriate to the age and maturity of the pupils. It should meet the needs of both genders and be a positive experience for all participants.

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

- The Board of Governors examines and ratifies the school's RSE Policy.
- The Principal and staff co-ordinates the school's approach to RSE and consults with the Board of Governors, staff, pupils, parents/carers, and health professionals.
- The staff provide a link and have a complementary role with parents/carers and deliver the school's RSE programme within the context of the Northern Ireland Curriculum.

CONTENT / DETAIL

RSE will be delivered in a holistic, cross curricular way, ensuring that teaching is at all times appropriate to the maturity and understanding of the pupils. Teachers will be ever alert to the personal and emotional circumstances of the pupils. RSE will include the physical and emotional changes that occur at puberty but will not include sex education.

MONITORING REVIEW AND EVALUATION OF THIS POLICY:

This policy will be under periodic review. Any changes in provision or policy will be relayed appropriately. The review process will be assisted by the information from teachers, which will have been gained through the teaching situation. Feedback from parents, governors, outside agencies and pupils will also impinge on the process. Necessary changes in policy will be implemented.

This policy will be consulted and reviewed in conjunction with other relevant policies.

SELECTION OF TEACHING RESOURCES

The selection of teaching resources should be:

- ☐ consistent with the school's RSE policy and the aims and objectives of the RSE programme;
- ☐ consistent with the school's morals and values framework;
- ☐ appropriate to pupils' age, level of understanding and maturity;
- ☐ factually correct and respectful of its audience;
- ☐ likely to appeal to pupils in terms of appropriate language level, images, attitudes and values, maturity, contexts and situations, and the knowledge required;
- ☐ complementary to the existing programmes which the school offers;
- ☐ encouraging consideration of a range of issues, attitudes and beliefs pertinent to the topics covered;

In St. Mary's Primary School we believe it is essential that staff create a classroom environment which is supportive, where self-esteem is fostered and where the pupils feel valued and affirmed. The climate of the classroom needs to promote mutual respect and the dignity of each individual. It is important to create an atmosphere in the classroom, which allows all pupils to feel comfortable to express opinions and feelings in a secure and safe manner and to explore issues which may be sensitive and personal. Every effort should be made to ensure that the whole group is at ease, with pupils showing respect for each other and realising their responsibilities to each other.

Ground rules should be agreed to help to minimise embarrassment and encourage the respect of each other's opinion. Realistic scenarios, case studies, role-play, drama, videos and stories can be used to enable pupils to discuss issues without personal disclosure.

Important considerations are the:

- ☐ degree of trust, respect and positive regard for pupils;
- ☐ relationships between the teacher and pupils, and between the pupils themselves;
- ☐ need for clear expectations, goals and learning objectives;
- ☐ use of teaching and learning methods which involve pupils actively in their own learning and encourage the consideration of attitudes and values and the ability to make informed and healthy decisions; and
- ☐ need to be aware and take account of the current youth culture.

Confidentiality and Child Protection/Safeguarding Children

Confidentiality cannot be guaranteed. Where there is disclosure by a child of abuse, Child Protection/Safeguarding Children procedures will be implemented.

The classroom is an open environment and confidentiality cannot be maintained. Therefore, staff and pupils are not encouraged to talk about their personal relationships or experiences during class discussions.

The child's right to privacy must be respected at all times by both the teacher and all other pupils in the class. A key rule to agree in advance of any discussion is that no one will be expected to ask or answer any personal questions. It is equally important that the teacher shares this right and never feels obliged to impart information about his/her own personal life. However:

☐ teachers cannot promise confidentiality. A child does not have the right to expect that incidents in the classroom or in the wider context of the school will not be reported, as appropriate, to his or her parents/carers and/or the principal. **(Refer to our Child Protection/Safeguarding Children Policy).**

☐ the principal or designated teacher for Child Protection/Safeguarding Children Policy must be informed of any disclosures which might suggest that a pupil is at risk or that physical or sexual abuse is suspected. If a child confides in a member of staff and requests that the information is kept secret, the child must be told, sensitively, that the matter must be reported to the

appropriate agencies. Decisions can then be taken in accordance with the procedures detailed in the school's Child Protection/Safeguarding Children Policy.

□ teachers can provide general educational advice to all pupils as part of the curriculum. This general advice can be given to pupils individually or within group situations. It is important that the type of advice and the manner in which it is given is supportive of the role of the parents/carers;

□ there will be occasions when teachers will have to exercise their discretion and judgement about how to deal with particular issues raised by an individual or by a group of pupils. An initial judgement will need to be made about whether or not it is appropriate to deal with the issues with the whole class. The teacher may wish to discuss the issues with the parents/carers to see how they would like the matter to be handled. Teacher colleagues or a member of the school's Leadership Team/Safeguarding Team might also provide useful guidance. It may be appropriate to respond to the issues with individual pupils or to arrange time for group discussion outside class time. In all cases, teachers should encourage pupils to discuss any issues and concerns they might have with their parents/carers;

□ teachers are not medical professionals and will not give detailed personal medical advice to any pupil. Only doctors and health professionals should give medical advice to pupils;

□ Teachers encourage young people, where possible, to discuss their concerns with parents/carers.

WITHDRAWAL FROM RSE

Since RSE is a statutory requirement, it should be inclusive. As a school we actively promote the implementation of RSE and strongly discourage withdrawal. The school will, however, take account of parent/carer concerns.

SACREDNESS OF LIFE

The value of human life and the uniqueness of each individual will be at the heart of RSE teaching.

SPECIFIC ISSUES

There will be no direct teaching of issues such as homosexuality, gender, etc. However, if these issues are raised by pupils, the teachers will address them sensitively.

USE OF VISITORS

Where appropriate, we may use the skills and expertise of outside agencies and professionals as agreed in advance with the board of governors of the school. Where this occurs, the school will be satisfied that contributions from

informed outsiders are an integral part of the whole programme and in harmony with the aims and ethos of the school.

STAFF TRAINING

Training needs will be considered and will be accessed using the EA, Public Health Agency and/or other appropriate health agencies. Where outside Agencies are used for training purposes, their remit will be clear and will reflect the ethos of the school.

CURRICULUM ORGANISATION and DELIVERY

Many of the aspects of RSE will be taught as part of the Health Education curriculum, PDMU, RE, the World Around Us, PE, Drama or in reaction to specific situations.

Adopted by the Board of Governors of St. Mary's Primary School at a meeting held on

January 2024

Signed.....(Chairperson)

Reviewed in January 2027

Signed..... (Chairperson)

Review Date: January 2027

