

Policy Statement for RSE: reviewed Feb 2019

School Name: St. Anthony's Special School

Uimhir Rolla: 19248R

Enrolment: Special School for children with Mild General Learning Disabilities who may also have co-morbid difficulties such as ADHD, ASD, Sensory Impairments or Physical Disabilities.

School Ethos/ Philosophy: The characteristic spirit of our school as stated in our Mission and Vision Statement is inspired by the vision of a holistic view of the child and the school strives to enable pupils to develop a sense of dignity and self-worth in an environment where the intellectual, spiritual, moral, cultural and physical needs of the pupils are identified and addressed in accordance with each pupil's level of development and ability. It is our goal to assist in the growth of self-esteem among each of our pupils in a child centred and child safe environment. We work towards this goal through cross-curricular strategies which support the personal growth of the child in academic, social, emotional and moral areas.

Definition of RSE:

RSE encompasses the acquisition of knowledge and understanding, and the development of attitudes, beliefs and values about relationships, sexual identity and intimacy. It also 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.¹

This policy has been drawn up with reference to Department of Education Circulars 42/2018, 43/2018 on Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) & Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) - Best Practice Guidelines for Primary and Post Primary Schools. In this policy document all references to gender are taken to be inclusive and the term "parent" is taken to include "guardian".

Rationale:

The school has a responsibility to put in place an R.S.E. policy as part of the wider, Social, Personal + Health Education curriculum. 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 issues, and the need for extra care and education in matters of personal safety for children with special needs who may be more at risk of abuse or who may be more vulnerable to sexual exploitation due to the following reasons:

¹ RSE, Guidelines Booklet, Page 7

St. Anthony's School, Humbert Way, Castlebar, Co. Mayo

1. possible communication difficulties
2. sensory difficulties
3. vulnerability due to isolation
4. dependence on goodwill of carers
5. power differences
6. limited assertiveness
7. limited ability to recognise inappropriate sexual behaviour
8. need for intimate care such as washing and toileting
9. contact with multiple care services and carers
10. frequent staff turnover
11. compliant behaviour towards adults
12. limited understanding of sexuality or sexual behaviour
13. need for attention, friendship or affection
14. limited sense of danger and inability to see warning signs
15. fear of not being believed
16. perceived limited reliability as witnesses.

Some pupils in our school may require more help than others in coping with the physical and emotional aspects of growing up. They may also need more help in learning what are acceptable and unacceptable behaviours. Through the provision of RSE and Stay Safe within the SPHE curriculum pupils should become more aware of and better able to recognise and report signs of abuse to them and others. They should also become more aware of how their behaviour, regardless of their intentions, may appear to others.

Context:

All of the RSE will be delivered within the context of the SPHE curriculum, which has been timetabled on our curriculum from September 2004. Sensitive (sexual) issues will be covered within the Strand Units 'Taking Care of my Body,' 'Growing and Changing,' and 'Safety and Protection.' Current provision included in the school curriculum is

- discrete SPHE lessons
- use of RSE manuals and Busy Body resources
- Stay Safe Programme
- Walk Tall Programme
- Religious Education
- Level 2 Learning Programme (JCPA Post Primary Level)

St. Anthony's School, Humbert Way, Castlebar, Co. Mayo

Aims: (see also SPHE Curriculum Guidelines Pg. 9 and 10 - detailed in the school SPHE plan)

- a) To enhance the personal development, well being and self-esteem of each child.
- b) To enable the child, understand and develop healthy friendships and relationships.
- c) To promote a healthy positive attitude and understanding of sexuality and relationships
- d) To understand the physical changes taking place with the onset of puberty
- e) To enable each child to gain an understanding of, a healthy attitude to, and respect for human love, reproduction and sexual activity in a sensitive and measured way.

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 members of the school community. The school ethos affirms and supports close links between school and home. To this end parents are encouraged to play a meaningful role in the R.S.E. programme. Parents also have the right to withhold their children from participating in R.S.E classes but will have to confirm in writing stating that they have opted to provide their own RSE programme to their own child.

Child Protection

This policy is cognisant of all aspects of our current Child Safeguarding Policy. The school follows the DES Child Protection Procedures and has both DLP and DDLP in place. Where a child protection concern is raised the procedures outlined in the schools Child Safeguarding Policy will be followed.

Guideline for the Management and Organisation of RSE in our school:

- Parents have the primary responsibility for educating their children in sexual matters. In this context parents are acknowledged as primary educators of their children and the school will work in a supportive role.
- All content objectives will be covered by the time the children leave school at age eighteen.
- Teachers' rights to opt out from teaching the sensitive sexual issues will be respected.
- The programme is taught within the ethos of the school and contemporary issues/topics are dealt with by the teacher at a level appropriate to the age and stage of development of pupils within a moral and spiritual framework.
- If no member of staff is available to teach the sensitive sexual issues, we leave it to the discretion of the Principal and class teachers to arrange for the education to be made available. A suitable guest speaker may be invited in to deliver the contents of the programme to classes. Teachers will remain present at all times when guest speakers are visiting a class as per circulars 42/2018 and 43/2018. Guest speakers will be made aware of the schools RSE policy.
- All information delivered will be informed by the content objectives of the SPHE Curriculum as detailed above.
- Should a pupil require information that is not in line with the curriculum content and considered not to be age appropriate for the general body of pupils the school will refer the question home to parents and parents can decide if the question should be answered and who would be the best person to answer the question. This is done on an individual basis.
- An outline of the content objectives will be available to parents before the commencement of the programme each year.

Methodology

Circle time is used extensively in all classes to build confidence and address fears. Boys and girls are taught together in all classes. Senior pupils are treated in a mature way and are encouraged to

St. Anthony's School, Humbert Way, Castlebar, Co. Mayo

discuss issues that arise with their parents. Teachers may also work with small groups which may be same sex or mixed sex as appropriate to needs.

School Curricular Provision

Strand Units of the SPHE/RSE Primary Curriculum:

(As per all Primary Schools for children from 4 - 12 years of age)

Myself - Self identity; Taking care of my body; Growing and changing; Safety and protection.

Myself and Others - Myself and my Family, Friends and Relating to other people.

Taking Care of My Body includes 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)

Growing and Changing includes 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).

Teachers do not cover topics such as contraception and homosexual relationships at this stage as they are not on the Primary Curriculum. Children who ask questions in class on content outside the curriculum are talked to individually and discreetly. Parents are always informed and asked to talk to their child.

The Stay Safe and Walk Tall programmes.

The Stay Safe programme covers personal safety skills and is taught in all classes on alternate years. Aspects of the programme such as bullying are revised in all classes regularly.

The Walk Tall programme covers substance misuse and aspects of this programme are covered throughout the SPHE curriculum.

Guest speakers may deliver sections of the SPHE/RSE curriculum programme to pupils/classes where issues such as physical and emotional development, bodily changes and sexual awakening are explored. The cost of the lectures is borne by the B.O.M. and teachers will remain in classrooms with guest speakers as per Circulars 42/2018, 43/2018.

FREEDOM Relationships & Sexuality Education Programme:

The "Freedom" Programme is a Relationships and Sexuality Education programme designed for working with students with a mild learning disability who are between the chronological ages of 14 and 18. This programme is used in conjunction with the Relationships & Sexuality Education Policy developed by the school. The programme is based on the Department of Education & Science's SPHE Curriculum and uses resources from the RSE resource materials for 5th & 6th classes and the Junior Cycle Programme for Post-Primary Schools. It was developed and piloted by a Special School for Students with Mild Learning Disabilities in Limerick in 2002.

Junior Cycle - Learning Programmes Level 2:

The Junior Cycle Level 2 Learning Programme for students aged 12-18 supports RSE through the Priority Learning Unit: Personal Care and through the Element: Becoming aware of one's sexuality. The Wellbeing programme at Junior cycle level also supports the aims and goals of RSE.

PROPOSED CONTENT FOR ST. ANTHONY'S SCHOOL RSE PROGRAMME

- **Topics covered in RSE are based on the content of the RSE-Primary School Curriculum and for Junior Primary classes in our school include:**
 - Keeping safe.
 - Naming bodily parts using correct terminology.
 - Bodily changes during growth and development.
 - Appreciating family life/family relationships.
 - Recognizing and expressing feelings.
 - Self-care, hygiene, diet, exercise and sleep (link with P.E. Healthy Eating Policy and S.P.H.E.)
 - Healthy eating, personal hygiene, exercise.
 - Expressing feelings.

- **Topics covered in RSE are based on the content of the RSE-Primary School Curriculum and for Senior Primary classes in our school include:**
 - Bodily changes
 - Healthy eating, personal hygiene and exercise
 - Keeping safe
 - Expressing feelings
 - Family relationships
 - Making healthy and responsible decisions
 - Forming friendships
 - Changes that occur in boys and girls with the onset of puberty
 - Reproductive system of male/female adults

- **Topics covered in Post Primary classes in our school are based on the content of RSE-Post Primary Junior Cycle and TRUST resource materials for RSE at Senior Cycle that build on work previously covered at the Primary level and include:**
 - Developing good daily personal care
 - Developing healthy eating habits
 - Developing a healthy lifestyle
 - Being able to manage stress
 - Knowing how to stay safe
 - Recognising emotions
 - Making personal decisions
 - RSE Specific Topics: Becoming aware of one's sexuality:
 - Identify the standard names of the sexual organs
 - Describe the functions of the sexual parts of the body
 - Recognise the physical and emotional changes which occur in boys and girls during adolescence
 - Recognise the difference between appropriate and inappropriate ways of expressing feelings
 - Recognise the difference between a friendship and a more intimate relationship
 - Understanding sexual intercourse, conception and birth within the context of a committed loving relationship

St. Anthony's School, Humbert Way, Castlebar, Co. Mayo

- Understanding the stages and sequence of development of the human baby in the womb, birth and caring for a baby.
- Relationships and taking time to think.
- Sexual health.

Students in the post primary classes may need further opportunities to discuss topics as may be relevant and this will take place with parental approval. They may also use programmes such as "Up2Us" which deal with anti-bullying and cyberbullying as these topics are cross curricular and also have RSE aspects to be considered e.g. "sexting", sharing pornographic pictures etc

Organisational Matters:

Parents will be informed in advance of lessons on the sensitive areas of the RSE programme.

Consent to participate in the RSE programme:

Consent is sought during the enrolment meeting with parents of all new pupils. The policy is available on the school website and parents will always be provided with a full copy following a request to do so.

The school R.S.E. programme acts as a support only to parents, and parents retain the right to withdraw their children from classes. Parents do not have to give reasons for withdrawal, but we respectfully invite them to do so - sometimes we can resolve any misunderstandings. A parent's right to withdraw a pupil from the process will be respected on the understanding that the parent is taking full responsibility for this aspect of education themselves. It is the responsibility of the parent to inform the school of this decision and they will have to acknowledge and confirm this decision in writing.

- Parents have a responsibility 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 welcome to view the curriculum and may speak to the class teacher if they have any concerns.
- In the class situation children will be encouraged to recognise that certain information is for them only and it would be inappropriate to discuss this with younger children/siblings for example.
- With regard to matters of a confidential nature, the school cannot take any responsibility for what is discussed in the yard or classroom.
- Special consideration will be taken to ensure that the needs of all our children are met, due to their special educational needs. Taking into account the pupils' social and emotional development, instruction will be based on individual needs where possible. Parents may be consulted around sensitive issues.

Dealing with questions:

It is natural that children should wish to ask questions in the area of RSE.

All questions answered will reflect the parameters of the curriculum. Certain topics are not in the primary RSE/SPHE curriculum and will not be discussed i.e. abortion or contraception. If any questions asked by pupils are deemed inappropriate the teacher will refer the pupil to their parents, or state that this information may be available at a later stage of the curriculum or in the post primary level when they are older. The school cannot guarantee confidentiality if a child asks a question of a personal nature or discloses personal information. It is school policy that where a pupil

St. Anthony's School, Humbert Way, Castlebar, Co. Mayo

is considered at risk of any type of abuse or in breach of the law the teacher/school must refer this immediately to the DLP/DDLP and/or TUSLA.

While masturbation is not taught about as part of the curriculum it is acknowledged that some children do require explicit teaching around appropriate and inappropriate behaviours which may include masturbation. Specific age-appropriate resources may be used here in consultation with parents and if relevant other multi-disciplinary team personnel.

Homosexuality is taught about in the context of a loving relationship and through fostering diversity, inclusion and tolerance throughout the school culture. This is explored through the Stay Safe Topic 2: Friendship and Bullying.

Teacher Choice/Staff Training

The teacher's right to choose is enshrined in the policy and if teachers do not wish to teach specific aspects of the programme or require additional resources, a suitable speaker will be employed by the B.O.M. The teacher may need to plan the specific material to be covered and should be present during the talk.

School staff have availed of training and are encouraged to attend in-service training in: -

- The Child Abuse Prevention Programme (Stay Safe)
- Relationships and Sexuality Programme (R.S.E.)
- Walk Tall Programme (S.M.P.P.)

PDST also support teachers in the provision of SPHE/RSE/Stay Safe in our school through the use of facilitators to support the school as required.

Evaluation

- Teacher observation.
- Regular review of what needs to be changed.
- Ensuring all SPHE strands are covered over a two-year programme of SPHE.
- Teacher designed tasks and tests and self-evaluation.
- Staff feedback.
- Parental feedback.

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

This policy was originally reviewed and ratified by the B.O.M. at a meeting on Thursday 1st May 2008 and is effective from that date. Reviews are held bi-annually as detailed below.

Implementation

Implementation is ongoing since 2004-2005 and the RSE programme is carried out every second year in all class levels in the school at the same time.

Review

This policy was originally reviewed by the teaching staff at a meeting on Wednesday 2nd February 2011 in preparation for the implementation of the RSE programme to be done in March 2011. All staff agreed that the principles and aims of the policy had not changed, that the implementation of the programme in 2008-2009 went well and that current policy and procedures did not need to be altered at this time.

This policy was again reviewed by teachers prior to the RSE lessons in 2013 Spring Term. There are no changes to policy. Reviewed again prior to 2015 lessons - no fundamental changes.

Staff reviewed policy at a meeting on 1/2/2017 where some minor changes were added relating to Up2US and cyberbullying due to the increase in awareness of how RSE may link with such topics. All else is still valid and relevant.

This version was reviewed by staff in consultation with RSE facilitator Nuala Dalton from PDST on 31st January 2019 and updated to include the new Junior Cycle Level 2 programme and resources on offer in the school and to ensure compliance with new Child Safeguarding Procedures 2017. It was approved by BOM at a meeting on 11th February 2019.

Signed: _____ Johnny Mee _____
Chairperson

Date: _____ 11/2/2019 _____

Resources:

- 1999 Primary Curriculum - SPHE
- NCCA Curriculum for Students with General Learning Difficulties.
- RSE Primary Resource Manuals 2017 - Jnr Infants to 6th Class
- RSE Post Primary: Junior Cycle
- Wellbeing for Junior Cycle
- "Freedom" Relationships & Sexuality Education Resource Book for Teachers & Facilitators of Students with a Mild Learning Disability - *Brothers of Charity Services, Limerick*
- TRUST: Talking Relationships Understanding Sexuality Teaching Resource for RSE Senior Cycle
- Puberty & Sexuality for Children & Young People with a Learning Disability - Leeds NHS
- Child Protection Guidelines and Procedures 2017 - *Department of Education & Science*
- Stay Safe Programme *New 2016-2017 programme
- Walk Tall Programme *New in 2017
- Videos/DVDs e.g. Busybodies Adolescent Development Programme - HSE
- Library Books
- Invited speakers (See P. 33 of SPHE T.G. re guidelines and Circular 22/2010)
- Up2Us Anti Bullying Kit
- Appendix 1: RSE Special Needs Resource List (see https://sphe.ie/downloads/rse/rse-learning_diff.pdf)