

# RSE Policy

## **Introductory Statement.**

All schools are required to have an RSE policy to detail how RSE is taught in the school, including the sensitive aspects. This policy is an approved approach to the teaching of Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE). It was developed to inform teachers and parents as to what material is covered in the RSE programme within SPHE both formally and informally. The first RSE policy was developed during 2001 with a committee, revised in 2009, 2016 and again in 2022.

## **Rationale:**

This policy statement is the approved approach to the teaching of RSE in St Michael's N.S. This revised policy further informs teachers and parents of the RSE content that will be taught at each class level and outlines the organisation and management of the RSE programme across all class levels in St Michael's N.S.

## **Mission Statement**

St Michael's aims to provide the fullest development of each child- socially, emotionally, spiritually, physically and intellectually so that he/she may lead a full, enjoyable life as a child and go on to contribute to society as an adult.

## **School Philosophy**

We recognise that SPHE is intrinsic to the teaching and learning that occurs both formally and informally in school and in the classroom. Through our SPHE programme and subsequently through RSE, we wish to assist children to develop feelings of self-worth and self-confidence while encouraging their ability to relate to others in a positive way. The curriculum also encourages children to be aware of their rights as an individual while at the same time accepting responsibility for their actions as members of the school and the wider community. Our school values the uniqueness of all individuals within a caring school community. Our ethos means that we value respect, tolerance and openness through the lived experience of the children and school community. Parents have the primary role in the social, personal and health education of their children so their involvement will be encouraged as much as possible. SPHE and RSE are key components in supporting our school and children to develop into healthy young adults.

## **Definition of RSE**

RSE is an integral part of SPHE and must be taught in this context. It provides structured opportunities for pupils to acquire knowledge and understanding of human sexuality and relationships through processes which will enable them to form values and establish behaviours within a moral, spiritual and social framework. In particular, it addresses the meaning of human sexuality, relationships, growth and development, relevant to personal and social skills.

## **Aims:**

- To enhance the personal development, self-esteem and well being of the child.
- To help the child 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 and understanding of, and respect for, human love, sexual intercourse and reproduction (5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> class).
- To understand the physical changes taking place with the onset of puberty
- To develop and promote in the child a sense of wonder and awe at the process of birth and new life.
- To enable each child to gain an understanding of and a respect for human love, reproduction and sexual activity in a sensitive and measured way.
- To develop and promote in the child a sense of wonder and awe at the process of birth and new life.
- To enable the children to be comfortable with, and understand their own growth and development.

### **Relationship of RSE to SPHE**

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 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 spiral 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
- 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.

In an ever-changing world, RSE encourages children through consistent messages that are taught in line with SPHE. The school has a responsibility to ensure that its curriculum is free of bias and that issues of inequality in any form are addressed and dealt with (SPHE Teacher guidelines, p25). 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.

### **Current Provision Included in the School Curriculum is:**

- SPHE lessons (provided through discrete curricular time and integration)
- Use of the RSE Manuals and Busy Bodies resources
- Stay Safe Programme
- Walk Tall Programme
- Webwise resources
- All Together Now – Homophobic and Transphobic bullying lessons
- RESPECT Guidelines (suggested approaches to teaching about different families)
- Adapted resources for SEN from [www.pdst.ie](http://www.pdst.ie)
- Religious Education.

### **Aims of RSE Programme**

- To enhance the personal development, self-esteem and wellbeing of the child
- To help the child to develop healthy friendships and relationships
- To foster an understanding of, and a healthy attitude to, human sexuality and relationships in amoral, 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.

### **Broad Objectives**

When due account is taken of abilities and varying circumstances, the RSE education curriculum should enable the child to (in conjunction with the SPHE curriculum)

- Acquire and develop knowledge and understanding of self
- Develop an appreciation of the dignity, uniqueness and wellbeing of others
- Develop a positive sense of self-awareness, self-esteem, and self-worth
- 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
- 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 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.

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.

### **Policies which support SPHE/RSE**

- Child Protection Policy
- Substance Use Policy
- Code of Behaviour
- Anti-Bullying Policy
- Enrolment Policy
- Acceptable Use Policy
- Healthy Eating Policy

### **Organisation within the school.**

Every two years during January/ February the RSE programme will be taught in all classes. Parents will be informed regarding the RSE programme during Parent Information evenings held every September.

All parents will also receive a letter outlining the content which will be taught in each specific class grouping. This will provide parents an opportunity to become involved, to inform themselves of the programme content and to prepare their children for the information they will acquire. The RSE programme will be taught over a six-eight week period. RSE content will be taught developmentally with age- appropriate lessons being taught at each class level as per the curriculum guidelines.

Parents have the primary responsibility for educating their children in sexual matters. The school RSE programme acts as a support only to parents and parents retain the right to withdraw their children from classes. If a parent does not wish for their child to partake in the programme, he/she must inform the school in writing and confirm that they as parents will provide their child with the appropriate information at home.

If a child has been withdrawn from the sensitive RSE lessons, the school takes no responsibility for what he child may hear following on from the teaching of the lessons e.g. what they may hear on the yard/bus.

It may be necessary to split class groupings and gender so that all content of the RSE programme can be covered.

### **Parental Involvement**

- Parents will be informed that the school fully implements the RSE strands of the SPHE programme including sensitive aspects of the programme at enrollment.
- 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, example of letter see Appendix 2.
- The letter will be issued in advance, giving parents an opportunity to meet with relevant class teachers if they so wish, to discuss or clarify what is covered and to prepare their children, it also gives parents an opportunity 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.
- Home-school links pages will be shared with parents and parents will be encouraged to discuss content with children.
- Parents are invited/welcome to view the curriculum and may speak to the class teacher if they have any concerns at any time during the year. The school acknowledges that parents have the primary responsibility for educating their children about growing and changing.
- Following discussion with Principal and Class Teacher, if a parent wishes to withdraw their child from the sensitive lessons it should be given in writing stating their reasons for doing so and this will be centrally filed.

If a child has been withdrawn from the sensitive RSE lessons, the school takes no responsibility for what the child may hear following on from the teaching of the lessons. eg. What they may hear on yard.

### **Content of RSE programme.**

The lesson plans being used are those provided by the NCCA.

### **Approaches and Methodologies.**

When implementing the programme, staff at St Michael's N.S. will endeavor to display respect for and sensitivity towards the different cultural and family backgrounds experienced by the children. The curriculum will be taught in an age-appropriate manner at all times. The curriculum will be taught from Junior Infants to 6th class. It will be taught through a spiral curriculum. The materials taught will reflect the needs of the children.

The acquisition of appropriate language in RSE is crucially important to enable children to speak confidently about themselves and their relationships. Acquiring the appropriate vocabulary related to sexuality, growing up, physical changes and feelings

gives the child the means by which these issues are discussed in an age- appropriate way. The RSE programme will encourage the use of proper terms for body parts from the earliest age so that these terms are given status and acceptability.

SPHE curriculum provides a context in which children are given opportunities to develop and enhance their language skills and to increase their vocabulary related to SPHE. 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 can hurt, diminish and demean. Children need to recognise and become sensitive to the ways in which they themselves use language in their relationship and their everyday interactions. Language is a powerful tool and should be used with respect and integrity for the dignity of each person. There are two areas where the use of language is applied in RSE lessons;

The formal use and teaching of language generally throughout the school

The use of language in discussion through your formal RSE lessons

Appropriate vocabulary in formal teaching

Relating to sexuality, growing up, physical changes, parts of the body and feelings will be used, the use of slang will be discouraged

Anatomical terms and language introduced is consistent with RSE Materials Books.

We use some simple principles when fostering discussion and questioning

No personal questions of the teacher

During the RSE lessons the teacher will only answer questions which come within the scope of the agreed programme/curriculum for each particular age group.

The Question Box may 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

Sample responses;

- I'll do my best to answer your questions but I may not be able to answer all of them
- That's something you'll learn about as you get older
- Is that something you could talk to your parents / guardians / family about?
- We agreed in our contract that we wouldn't ask anyone personal questions
- Somebody asked a question and the language they used was slang language, what they meant to ask was....
- A question was asked, and we cannot talk about that particular topic but I think that question was about.

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

The RSE curriculum will be taught through:

- stories and poems
- classroom discussion
- group work
- games
- art activities
- reflection
- circle time
- guest speaker (The class teacher will stay in the room at all times in accordance with Circular22/2010).

Adaptions to the way in which the content is delivered will be made for children with Special Educational Needs. Consultation with parents/ guardians in advance and anticipation of the children's needs will be central to ensuring learning is meaningful.

- Children may be pre-taught language or concepts in anticipation of whole class work
- Children may work in smaller groups or 1:1 on adapted and suitable material
- Any different or specific objectives related to the pupils own learning needs should be detailed in their IEP or IPLP in consultation with parents/guardians.

### **Assessment**

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

The teacher uses;

Observation and questions to assess the children's engagement and interest  
Teachers will record lessons taught in Monthly Records

### **Resources**

- Relationships and Sexuality Education Resource Materials (DES) - Each class teacher has a copy of the appropriate manual or access to it in online / pdf format. Other resources that support the broader aims of RSE include:
- Stay Safe programme
- Walk Tall Programme
- Anatomical Dolls and Story books
- Busy Bodies DVD and Booklet. This DVD and booklet were developed to support the teaching of the 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> class component of RSE within the context of SPHE.
- Picture books across the 9 grounds of equality
- INTO Different Families, Same Love Poster
- RESPECT guidelines.



***Topics covered in Junior and Senior Infants:***

Look what I can do  
 These are my friends.  
 This is my family.  
 I can be safe.  
 Other people have feelings too.  
 Caring for new life. The word womb will be introduced.  
 My body. The words vagina and penis are introduced.  
 I grow and change.  
 Making decisions.

***First and Second class.***

Things I like to do.  
 My friends.  
 My Family.  
 Keeping Safe.  
 Showing/coping with our feelings.  
 The Wonder of New Life. (The word womb is used)  
 My Body Works. (The words penis, vulva, vagina, urethra will be used)  
 Growing means changing.  
 Decisions and their consequences.

***Third and Fourth class.***

Myself and others.  
 Bullying Behaviour.  
 My Family.  
 Reasons for rules  
 Feelings and emotions.  
 The Wonder of New Life.  
 Keeping Healthy.  
 As I grow I change.  
 Problem-solving  
 Growing and changing (4<sup>th</sup> class only this includes menstruation. Development of body hair, voice changes and skin changes)

***Fifth and sixth class.***

My Family  
 Feelings and emotions.  
 Growing and changing. Physical changes in girls: breasts develop. menstruation begins, underarm and pubic hair grows, hips broaden. perspiration may increase, oily skin and dimples may develop. The following vocabulary will be used: ovaries, fallopian tubes, womb. uterus, cervix and menstruation.  
 Physical changes in boys: a growth spurt occurs, testicles, scrotum and penis enlarge, pubic, facial and other body hair begins to grow, voice deepens, nocturnal emissions occur, perspiration may increase. Oily skin and dimples may develop. The following vocabulary will be used: penis, testicles, scrotum, sperm production, erection, wet dreams (nocturnal emissions)  
 The Wonder of New life. (conception and development in the womb)



Relationships and New Life.

A Baby is a miracle

Choices and decision making.

In 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> classes the teacher will utilise the Busy Bodies DVD to help the children gain an understanding of body changes and the creation of new life. External facilitator may be involved while teaching content to 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> class.

### **Provision of Ongoing Support**

Teachers will be encouraged to attend CPD in RSE

Opportunities provided by Sligo Education Centre will be brought to the attention of staff members

PDST support

Promotion and communication of resources available from [www.pdst.ie](http://www.pdst.ie)

### **Evaluation:**

Teacher observation.

Parental feedback.

### **Implementation.**

This policy is fully implemented in our school

The principal teacher has overall responsibility for the implementation of this plan.

Class teacher has responsibility for implementing the policy within his/her class.

Parents/guardians have responsibility to familiarise themselves with the policy.

The school recognizes that parents/guardians are the primary educators of their children. The RSE programme is not intended to replace the role or responsibilities of parents/guardians in this area, but rather to support and complement them.

### **Review**

The policy will be reviewed after every two years. The policy may also be reviewed at an earlier time should a need arise

Parents and staff will be informed of any amendments made

This plan was ratified by the Board of Management at a meeting.

### **Ratification and Communication**

This policy is available on our school website.

**Chairperson: Fr Peter Gallagher**

**Principal: Deirdre Kelly**

*Next Review Date: 2024*

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Dear Parents,

Every two years the RSE programme will be taught in our school. It is our school's obligation to provide this programme to comply with regulations. This school recognises that parents/ guardians are the primary educators of their children. The RSE programme is not intended to replace the role of parents in this area, but rather to support and complement them. In your child's class the following themes will be discussed:

Yours sincerely,

\_\_\_\_\_  
Principal.