



St. Nesson's National School,
Mungret,
Co. Limerick.

14409N

**Relationships & Sexuality
Education
(R.S.E.)
Policy**

Relationships & Sexuality Education (R.S.E.) Policy

Introduction:

St. Nessian's National School is a Catholic Parish School under the patronage and management of the Catholic Church.

All pupils enrolled in the school are equally valued and respected irrespective of sex, social background, religious belief, family circumstances, educational achievement, physical characteristics or level of intellectual functioning. The school seeks to foster the spiritual, moral, intellectual, social and cultural development of the pupils.

The school is a community where moral values such as honesty, truthfulness, justice, fairness, sensitivity to others, and civic responsibility are nurtured and developed, the justification of these values is based on Catholic teaching interpreted by the Church.

The teaching and traditions of the Catholic Church inform the position taken in regard to moral issues, which arise in the teaching of secular subjects. The work of the School is conducted in an atmosphere of tolerance and respect for religious differences. The school nurtures freedom of thought and a personal relationship with God. This is most evident in the teaching of religious education and in the prayer life – of the school community.

Following a process of consultation and discussion, management, staff and parents of St. Nessian's National School are committed to the introduction of RSE in the school. The programme is viewed as an attempt to help the children of the school to learn at home and in school about their own development and about their friendships and relationships with others. This work will be based on the development of a positive self-image, the promotion of respect for self and others, and the provision of appropriate information. The aims of the programme are as follows:

1. To help the pupils of the school develop healthy friendships and relationships.
2. To develop a positive sense of self-awareness, self-esteem and self-worth.
3. To develop some coping strategies to protect oneself and others from various forms of abuse and bullying.
4. To develop strategies to make decisions, solve problems, and implement actions in various personal, social and health contexts.
5. To enable children to acquire a critical understanding of external influences on life styles and decision-making.
6. To facilitate a developing understanding of sexuality.
7. To enable children to develop Catholic religious attitudes and values towards their sexuality and relationships within a moral, religious and social framework.

8. To promote an appropriate knowledge of and respect for reproduction at stages appropriate to the level of the child's understanding, as outlined in this programme.

In the school, RSE will be taught in the context of the Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) curriculum. Stay Safe will be done in Senior Infants, 2nd class, 4th. Class and 6th. Class.

Walk Tall and Bi Follain are also used however SPHE is intrinsic to all areas -the curriculum and every facet of school life. Through teaching and learning experiences in all subjects, children explore many themes and topics that have a social, personal or health perspective, and learn ways of working and communicating with others. Equally the variety of incidental happenings in the everyday life of the school can provide opportunities to address issues that are also relevant to the programme.

As children progress through the school-based programme in SPHE they will encounter a wide range of issues; these include: substance abuse, relationships, sexuality, hygiene, personal safety, citizenship, child abuse prevention, media influence, prejudice and discrimination. The curriculum is structured in such a way that these issues are not explored in isolation; rather it places the emphasis on the development of a set of age-appropriate skills, attitudes, values and understanding that children can apply as required.

SPHE will be organised in three inter-related ways, as follows:

1. In the context of a positive school climate and atmosphere.
2. Through the allocation of a specific time on the timetable in order to address sensitive issues.
3. Through an integral approach across subject areas.

SPHE should not begin or end in school. The family and the home environment significantly influence children's understanding of the world, their own role and place in society, and ways of behaving. While this continues throughout their lives other factors such as media, friends, peers and individual experience become increasingly influential

Underlying principles guiding the teaching of RSE in St. Nessian's National School.

In the formulation of its policy on RSE, St. Nessian's National School reflects Catholic moral teaching on matters of relationships and sexuality. This teaching, enunciated in Church statements, emphasises the following principles, and indicates the attitude that will be taken on certain sensitive issues as they are dealt with directly by the teacher in response to questions raised by children in the course of RSE lessons.

1. Parents of children have the primary responsibility of caring for their children physically and emotionally.
2. The school should be seeking to communicate the Christian vision of human life and human relationships.

This would include such fundamental ideas as the following:

- a. The human body is sacred – the visible image of God.

- b. In the physical world we share, we are called to respect one another and to recognise in one another, bone of our bones and flesh of our flesh (Genesis, 2:23)
3. In our time, children grow up in a world which no longer communicates respect for fundamental values in the area of sexuality. Nor do they find around them a consistent and positive understanding of human dignity.

It is therefore, necessary to help Catholic young people to a deeper Christian understanding of what it means to be human and of the meaning of human relationships. It is a necessary part of the vocation of their parents to share with them the Good News of human worth and dignity in the light of the incarnation and of our redemption in Christ. That sharing of the Good News with the rising generation is also part of the calling of every Christian, of the whole community of Christ followers.

What we need to communicate to young people is good news. It is not primarily about fear, or warnings about the dangers that await them but about reverence and wonder. We have to try to teach them that sexual intimacy is not something shallow and pass; it is not merely about self-fulfilment; it is about full, faithful, permanent self-giving. It is no accident, that,

The language of human love is full of words which belong rightly to religion and can properly used only about God. People in love cannot help speaking of their loved one as divine and adorable and of their love as undying, everlasting, eternal ... The only possible explanation is that, whether we realise it or not, all human love is a longing for God. Only God can give that timeless happiness, that perfect satisfaction, that unchanging loveliness, that unfailing faithfulness which men and women are seeking in one another's love, but cannot fully find there. That is the mystery expressed in the sacramental union of husband and wife.

Guidelines for Implementation:

The dignity, privacy and modesty of each individual child must always be respected.

1. In Relationship and Sexuality Education, parents and guardians have primary rights and responsibilities:
 - a. While all parents/guardians are encouraged to allow their children to participate fully in the programme, it is recognised that parents have a right to withdraw them from particular lessons. In making this decision, parents are urged to distinguish between innocence and ignorance. Lack of correct and appropriate information can leave children vulnerable, anxious and confused.
 - b. Parents/Guardians are entitled to full information on the content of RSE programme and on the teaching materials employed. These will be made available on request to the Principal.
 - c. Information on RSE (including policy guidelines) will be provided at point of entry to the school so that enrolment decisions will be fully informed in this regard.
2. The sensitivity of teachers in the area of RSE is fully recognised.
 - b. While all teachers employed in the school will be encouraged to participate as appropriate in the delivery of the programme, the wishes of those who request to be excused from certain aspects of the programme will be respected.
3. The school respects the dignity, privacy and modesty of each individual member of the school community, particularly in the areas of RSE.
 - a. Pupils and teachers must never feel pressurised to reveal or discuss private matters.
 - b. The fact that children come from widely varying home backgrounds must be dealt with sensitively.
 - c. The emotional, physical and intellectual maturity of the children will govern the stage at which the various topics will be introduced.
4. The RSE programme will be supported and developed by aspects of Religious Education, which are already part of that programme.
 - a. The development of a relationship with God.
 - b. Friendship from a Christian viewpoint.
 - c. Christian marriage – and other forms of marriage.
 - d. The sacredness of human life.
 - e. The limited capacity of individuals and groups to attain and maintain Catholic standards of behaviour.
 - f. The forgiveness of God.

5. The RSE programme in St. Nessian's National School will seek to build on what the children experience at home and outside school. Parents are therefore encouraged to support the programme as appropriate.
 - a. By discussing attitudes, beliefs and values with their children in order to clarify issues and develop relevant general skills in this area.
 - b. By the encouragement of responsible, informed and age-appropriate decision making and the recognition that decisions have consequences.
 - c. By encouraging a positive sense of self worth in their children.
 - d. By discussing issues involved in bullying, in association with the school.
 - e. By using the proper names for parts of the body and bodily functions from the earliest appropriate age.
 - f. By discussing with their children changes in their bodies as they mature and develop, how babies are conceived and born, and other sensitive aspects of the programme. Such discussions should ideally place both before and after such topics are dealt with in school.
 - g. Information on the RSE Programme, policy guidelines will be provided at the point of entry to the school, so that all new parents will be fully informed.
 - h. The lesson plans as devised by the Department of Education and Science, and relevant videos, will be available for consultation in the school on request to the Principal

Classroom Strategy:

Parents have the right to withdraw children from classes pertaining to sexuality.

These children will be supervised as they engage in other curricular activities.

Should you wish your child to be withdrawn from the classes pertaining to sexuality you must inform your child's class teacher in writing before the end of September of any given school year.

All teachers will be involved in the teaching of SPHE and it is taught in a cross curricular manner.

A facilitator with a significant experience in this area will continue to give a talk on sexual development (open to parents) to girls in 5th class and boys and girls in 6th class.

To take into account individual differences in maturity, teachers have devised the following strategies for coping with questions, which may be asked in class.

The teacher explains that the amount of information given is part of that year's programme, and that more information will be given as part of the following year's programme.

If the question is factual and within the programme as agreed on for that age group, the teacher will answer it.

If a question is inappropriate, the teacher may advise the child to ask at home or may ask his/her permission to contact the parents so that the teacher may answer the child's question. Thus, it is hoped that the special bond that exists between parent, teacher and child will be respected.

Information on relationships and sexuality will be given in the context of God's wonderful plan for creation; its importance will be stressed. From the outset children will be asked to be responsible about the information they are given; thus it is hoped to discourage playground gossip.

Many aspects of the existing curriculum are relevant to the SPHE programme. Some school subjects are already used to develop self-awareness in appropriate ways. Decisions regarding the appropriate classes in which to deal with themes relating to sexuality can be found when the relevant curricular materials which have been made available by the Department of Education and Science.

Content Material

After a lengthy consultation process, the Board of Management ratified the content of the Resource materials for RSE with the following changes:

Junior Infants: All the Material in the D.E.S syllabus was approved for use. The use of the word womb is acceptable.

Senior Infants: All the Material in the D.E.S syllabus was approved for use Page 149 of the lesson plans – the words vagina and penis to be taught informally.

First Class: All the Material in the D.E.S syllabus was approved for use:

New life Option 1 page 61 – How long is a baby in the womb? It was agreed that the time span of 9 months be given although it was thought that children of this age would be unable to conceptualize this but that mentioning this informally would be OK.

Page 71: How my body works? Introduce the term “urine” informally.

Page 75: Mention urine only when discussing body excretions.

Second Class: All the Material in the D.E.S syllabus was approved for use apart from the following:

Page 154: although birth is dealt with in this theme “The wonder of new Life” will not be covered until fifth class.

Page 157: “The feeding of baby”. The use of the word ‘vagina’ only when discussing the female genitalia as the other words ‘vulva’ and ‘urethra’ would only bring confusion to the child.

Page 167: When referring to the passing of urine in both boy and girl confine it to the words penis and vagina.

Exclude name for where the baby leaves its mother’s womb.

The use of the terms belly button or tummy button is acceptable when referring to the part of the body where a baby is joined to its mother.

Page 139: The home Activities for the theme “When my body needs special care” – this is to be left to the discretion of parent/guardian as to the biological terms used for the body with the child hopefully using the necessary language and vocabulary as in accordance with the school’s R.S.E. Policy.

Third and Fourth Class: All the Material in the D.E.S syllabus was approved for use apart from the following:

The Theme of **New life** will be left until late fifth class

The Theme **Growing and Changing** to be covered with both boys and girls separately.

Fifth Class: All the Material in the D.E.S syllabus was approved for use with the following changes.

Page 51 Family Scenarios-In this, role playing has mother and father and does not take into consideration the different family situations within the classroom. However as a Catholic School, while being sensitive to the many family setups, we must keep “The Family” as defined by marriage as the ideal.

Page 56 Families on T.V. - The programmes selected must be very specific in what the teacher wants to get across.

The Theme “**New Life**” from the fourth class syllabus will be covered last term in fifth class

The Theme of **Growing and Changing** which was covered in 4th to be revised but the section outlining the changes that occur in boys sexual organs is to be omitted. The girls will continue to have a talk given to them about menstruation and personal hygiene outside of school.

Sixth Class: All the Material in the D.E.S syllabus was approved for use apart from the following changes:

Theme 7: **Relationships and New life** – to be covered in total by an external speaker.

Theme 3: **Families** – Sensitivity needed when discussing this topic.

Theme 4: **Keeping Safe and Healthy** Page 173: Aids – to be incorporated when discussing other common diseases e.g. Flu, etc and also to be mentioned with drug taking. If children ask how Aids is contracted, just state through syringe and blood.

This policy will be reviewed annually during the implementation phase of RSE in the school.

Changes to the fourth and fifth class content to be taught were ratified at B.O.M meeting on 22/3/2010