

# **Relationships and Sexuality Education Policy**

## **Introductory Statement & Rationale**

This policy statement is an approved approach to the teaching of Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) in St. Thomas' SNS. It was developed in 2004 by the RSE Policy Committee which included two teachers, two representatives of the Board of Management, and two parent representatives and it was reviewed and amended in 2014/2015 school year. It was developed to inform teachers and parents as to what material is covered in the RSE programme within SPHE.

## **School Philosophy**

St Thomas' SNS is a Catholic school and all policies developed are implemented in ways which are in keeping with the ethos of the school. The positive ethos of the school is characterised by the following:

- Sensitive to reality of our children's lives in a changing world
- Mutual respect between all partners in education
- Child-centred
- Aims to ensure each child reaches full potential in the holistic sense
- Hopes that children are equipped with high self-esteem to enable them to go to live happy and fulfilled lives
- The school ethos affirms and supports close links between school and home.

## **Definition of RSE**

RSE is an integral part of Social, Personal and Health Education and is taught within this context. It aims to provide opportunities for children and young people to learn about relationships and sexuality in ways that help them think and act in a moral, caring and responsible way (Going Forward Together Parents Information Booklet p.4).

## **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. (NCCA; Interim Curriculum and Guidelines for RSE; p.4).

## **Current Provision**

In the school setting, RSE will be taught in the context of SPHE which includes:

- Stay Safe Programme
- Walk Tall Programme
- Use of the RSE Manual and Busy Bodies DVD and Busy Bodies Booklet
- Religious Education through the Alive O Programme
- An outside speaker is currently invited to work with sixth class. Prior to the programme for the children, parents are invited to a session which covers information on the programme as well as input on the area of adolescence and parenting the teenager. The outside speaker visits in the spring term.
- Rainbows Programme
- Restorative Practice
- Resource Teachers
- Learning Support Teachers
- Access to Support Teacher (school based)
- Access to art therapist
- Social skills training
- SCP team
- HSCL Coordinator

## **Aims of our RSE programme**

- To help young people develop healthy friendships and relationships
- To promote a healthy attitude to sexuality and to relationships
- To enhance the personal development, self-esteem and well-being of the child
- 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- Fifth and Sixth Class
- To understand the physical changes taking place with the onset of puberty- Senior Classes
- 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

## **Guidelines for the Management and Organisation of RSE in our School**

Curriculum Content – The curriculum by NCCA will be followed as published, and will be taught from 3<sup>rd</sup> to 6<sup>th</sup> class. All resources used will be in keeping with the ethos of the school

and the policy and will reflect the developmental needs of the child. Each class teacher will teach the content for their class level.

When an outside speaker is used, the class teacher is responsible for making them aware of school policy and that teacher will remain in the class during the lesson.

Topics from 3<sup>rd</sup> to Sixth include:

- Bodily changes
- Healthy eating, personal hygiene, exercise
- Keeping Safe
- Expressing Feelings
- Family relationships
- Making healthy and responsible decisions
- Forming Friendships
- Discuss the stages and sequence of development of the human baby in the womb (*Fourth class*)
- Changes that occur in boys and girls with the onset of puberty (*Fifth/Sixth Class*)
- Reproductive system of male/female adults (*Fifth/Sixth Class*)
- Understanding sexual intercourse, conception and birth within the context of a committed loving relationship. (*Fifth/ Sixth Class*)

## **Organisational Matters**

- Parents/guardians will be informed prior to the teaching of the lessons involving “Sensitive issues”
- Parents of children in 6<sup>th</sup> class are given the Busy Bodies booklet at the Parents Teacher meeting prior to the talk on the sensitive areas of the RSE Programme
- In the event of an outside speaker/s being used to deliver “sensitive” areas of the RSE programme to 6<sup>th</sup> class pupils, parents/guardians will be notified in advance. Class teacher will remain with the class during the lesson
- Where parents wish to take their child out of the lessons on the sensitive issues they must put this in writing to the school principal The child will be accommodated in another teacher’s classroom in the school.
- Outside speaker/s will meet parents beforehand to inform them of the content of the sensitive areas of the RSE programme
- With regard to matters of a confidential nature, the school cannot take any responsibility for what is discussed in the yard or classroom.
- Any teacher has the right to opt-out from teaching the sexually sensitive issues in RSE. It is responsibility of Board of Management to ensure that the curriculum will be taught to the children by another teacher or an outside speaker.
- Parents are invited/welcome to view the curriculum and may speak to the class teacher if they have any concerns.

## Dealing with Questions

- All questions answered will reflect the parameters of the curriculum. Topics such as homosexuality, contraception, abortion, masturbation are not in the primary RSE/SPHE programme, but children may ask questions about these subjects. Teachers should respond to such questions by saying that these are topics which they will learn about as they get older or to give the child a brief age appropriate response.
- When deciding whether it is appropriate to answer a question or not the teacher should consider
  - The age and stage of development of the children
  - The ethos the school
  - The RSE policy
  - The content objectives of the SPHE curriculum guidelines]
- Suggested ways of setting limits are to say:
  - I'll do my best to answer your questions but I may not be able to answer all of them
  - Would you be able to talk to your mum or dad about that?
  - That's something you'll learn about as you get older.
- The strategy implemented by the school responding to children who have questions about sexual orientation or/and who are being taunted about being gay is as advised by the Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST) – Sexual Orientation – Advice for Primary Schools in relation to anti Bullying Policy.
- The strategy is in the context of the school's ethos and RSE policy and with the awareness that primary school children are probably too young to engage in any detailed discussion of sexual identity.
- Homophobic insults are treated in exactly the same way as racist or other insults – the teacher can calmly explain to the child that such insults are hurtful to the other person and are not acceptable.
- Depending on the context and the age group of the children, the teacher could ask a child or a class group what they mean by the word 'gay'
- The school response is that '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.'
- An integral part of RSE is learning to respect others; this will include respect for families or individuals who are different from the norm.
- The Equal Status Acts 2000 and 2004 provide protection against discrimination on nine grounds, one of which is sexual orientation. As such, St Thomas' Senior school is obliged to protect students and staff from discrimination or sexual harassment.
- Questions to the teacher may be written or oral within the group setting and answered within the boundaries of the curriculum and policy. Should any questions be asked by the children that are judged to be inappropriate, the teacher will refer the child to their parents or will explain that this will be covered at second level school.

## Provision for Ongoing Support

- Parents welcome to view curriculum if they wish
- Regular contact with parents prior to the teaching of lessons involving “sensitive issues” in the form of the home/school link page accompanying such lessons in the RSE Resource Books OR Contact will be made with parents prior to the address by the outside speaker. 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.

## Links to other policy areas

- Child Protection Policy
- SPHE Policy
- Child Protection
- Anti-Bullying Policy

The school follows the DES child protection guidelines and has a child protection policy with the Principal as Designated Liaison Person (DLP). In cases of disclosure, the DLP will follow the procedures as set out in Children First.

## Ratification and Communication

The Board of Management of St Thomas’ SNS will officially ratify this updated version of the RSE policy at the BOM meeting on 27<sup>th</sup> March 2015 after which it will be circulated to teachers. It will be made available to parents on request and will be uploaded on the school website.

## Review

This policy will be reviewed in 2017 by the RSE Policy Committee, and every two years thereafter otherwise this policy will be reviewed should a need arise. Parents and staff will be informed of any amendments made to the policy by the RSE Policy Committee.

Signed: Mary Delaney  
Chairperson Board of Management

Date: 27/3/15

Signed: Ennis Shee  
Principal

Date: 27/3/15