

Relationships and Sexuality Education Policy

School Details

St Thomas' Senior National School is a mixed sex school in Jobstown, Tallaght, Dublin 24. The school's ethos is "Every Child Is Valued". The school caters for children from 3rd to 6th Class.

Introductory Statement

This policy statement is an approved approach to the teaching of Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) in St. Thomas' SNS. It was initially 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 further developed in the school year 2018/2019 by the SPHE Focus Group led by Eimer O'Leary and in consultation with PDST advisor. It was developed to inform teachers and parents as to what material is covered in the RSE programme within SPHE.

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. All policies in our school are developed and implemented in ways which are in keeping with the ethos of the school. Through our SPHE programme and subsequently through RSE, we 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 individual 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

Relationships and Sexuality Education 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.

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 feeling and those of others, developing a sense of empathy and experience 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

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:

- SPHE lessons
- Stay Safe Programme
- Walk Tall Programme
- Use of the RSE Manual and Tom's Flower Power/Busy Bodies
- An outside speaker is currently invited to work with 5th and 6th Class. Prior to this programme, 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.
- Restorative Practice
- Resource Teachers
- Learning Support Teachers
- Access to Support Teacher (school based)
- Access to Art Therapist
- Social skills training
- SCP team
- HSCL Coordinator
- Religious Education
- 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

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

Broad Objectives

When due account is taken of abilities and varying circumstances, the RSE 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.

Links to other policy areas

- Child Safeguarding Statement
- Substance Use Policy
- Code of Behaviour
- Enrolment Policy
- Acceptable Use Policy
- Healthy Eating Policy
- SPHE Policy
- Anti-Bullying Policy

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 3rd to 6th 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 in accordance with Circular 42/2018.

Management of RSE

- The strands of Growing and Changing, and Taking Care of my Body are covered in Year One of a 2 year SPHE plan
- The sensitive lessons are covered as part of these broad topics (as outlined in letter to be sent home see Appendix 2)
- Special arrangements exist for the delivery of the sensitive elements of the programme (see below)
- Special consideration will be taken to ensure that the needs of children with SEN are met
- Taking into account the pupil's social and emotional development, instruction will be based on individual needs where possible.
- In cases where a disclosure is made the school will follow the Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post Primary Schools 2017.

Parental Involvement

- Parents/guardians will be informed prior to the teaching of the lessons involving sensitive issues

- Parents of children in 5th and 6th class will be given the Busy Bodies booklet 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 5th and 6th class pupils, parents/guardians will be notified in advance. A teacher will remain with the class during the lesson in accordance with Circular 42/2018
- Where parents wish to take their child out of the lessons on the sensitive issues they must put this in writing with their reasons for doing so to the school principal. The child will be accommodated elsewhere in the school.
- Outside speaker/s will facilitate an information meeting beforehand to inform them of the content of the sensitive areas of the RSE programme
- If any child has been withdrawn from sensitive lessons by their parent(s)/guardian(s) the school cannot guarantee that they won't hear some lesson content from other pupils following these lessons
- 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.

Organisational and Curriculum Planning

RSE forms part of the national curriculum for SPHE by NCCA and will be taught from 3rd Class to 6th Class.

Whole School Teaching of SPHE

Month	Year One	Year Two
September/October	Myself and my family (Myself and others)	Self –identity (Myself)
November/December	Relating to others (Myself and others)	My friends and other people (Myself and others)
January/February	Growing and changing (Myself)	Safety and protection (Myself)
March/April	Taking care of my body (Myself)	Making decisions (Myself)
May/June	Developing citizenship (Myself and the wider world)	Media education (Myself and the wider world)

RSE will be covered under the 'Growing and Changing' and 'Taking Care of my Body' strand units of the SPHE curriculum.

The RSE programme is divided into two main parts:

- 1) The general programme which contains content covered through SPHE strands and strand units and compliment the aims and objectives of RSE
 - Friendship
 - Self-identity
 - Family
 - Self-esteem
 - Growing up
- 2) The second section will deal with any sensitive/specific content covered through RSE strands and strand units. The sensitive aspects are in **bold**.

- **Bodily changes**
- Healthy eating, personal hygiene and exercise
- Keeping safe
- Expressing feelings
- Appreciating the variety of family types within our school and community and how these family relationships shape us
- Making healthy and responsible decisions
- Forming friendships
- **Discuss the stages and sequences of development of the human baby in the womb (3rd, 4th Class)**
- **Introduction to puberty and changes**
- **Changes that occur in boys and girls with the onset of puberty**
- **Reproductive system of male/female adults**
- **Understanding sexual intercourse, conception and birth within the context of a committed, loving relationship**

Sensitive Content

Class	Strand/Strand Unit	Content Objectives <i>Consult curriculum for complete objectives in <u>Growing and changing</u> and <u>Taking care of my body</u></i>	Language
3 rd /4 th Class	Myself <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Growing and changing Taking care of my body 	Growing and changing <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Understand the physical changes taking place in both the male and female body Realise that changes do not occur at the same time but nonetheless are predictable and natural and that being different is normal Taking care of my body <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recognise and discuss how feelings and emotions are affected by the physical changes that take place during puberty Discuss the stage and sequence of development of human baby from conception to birth 	Revise Junior Infants – 2 nd class (womb breastfeeding penis vulva vagina urethra) umbilical cord changes in puberty menstruation
5 th /6 th Class	Myself <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Growing and changing Taking care of my body 	Growing and changing <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Understand sexual intercourse, conception and birth within the context of a loving committed relationship Taking care of my body <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify and discuss the physical changes that occur in boys and girls with the onset of puberty and understand that these take place at different rates for everyone Understand the reproductive system of both male and female adults 	Revise above wet dreams <u>Busy Bodies</u> <u>language</u> Semen sexual intercourse

Approaches and Methodologies

When implementing the programme, staff at St Thomas SNS will endeavour to display respect for and sensitivity toward the different cultural 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 3rd to 6th Class. It will be taught through a spiral curriculum (key topics will be revisited in a developmental manner at regular intervals). The material taught will reflect the needs of the children.

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 Circular 42/2018)

Differentiation

Teachers use assessment and professional judgement to differentiate the programme and content to suit the needs of the class. Sometimes the stage of development in a class can vary widely and strategies to differentiate in class can support gradual and appropriate teaching.

Pupils with Special Educational Needs

Adaption to the way in which the content is delivered will be made for children with Special Educational Needs. We are using a programme that has been developed in St Thomas SNS for children with additional needs. Children may be pre-taught language or concepts in anticipation of whole class work. Children may work in smaller groups or on a one-to-one basis on adapted and suitable material. Any different or specific objectives related to the pupils own learning needs should be detailed in their School Support (Plus) Plan.

The school follows the DES child protection guidelines and has a Child Safeguarding Statement where the Principal is the Designated Liaison Person (DLP). In cases where a disclosure is made the school will follow the Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post Primary Schools 2017.

Language

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

Questions

- All questions answered will reflect the parameters of the curriculum. 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. A question box will be used in every classroom.
- 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 of 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) (see Appendix 3)
- 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. The teacher, depending on the developmental age of the child can use an appropriate explanation (see Appendix 4).
- An integral part of RSE is learning to respect others; this will include respect for all families.
- The Equal Status Acts 2000 - 2015 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.

- Where appropriate children can write questions and place them in a question box. 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.
- 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.

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 interests
- Use of teacher-designed tasks such as worksheets, quizzes or games
- Use of reflection or learning log.

Confidentiality

The school follows the Children First Guidelines 2017 and the Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post Primary Schools 2017

If a child is withdrawn from the teaching of sensitive issues, we cannot guarantee that the other children will not tell or inform him/her about what happened.

Resources

Relationships and Sexuality Education Resource Materials (DES) – Each class teacher has a copy of the appropriate manual or access to it online/PDF format. Other resources that support the broader aims of RSE include

- Stay Safe programme
- Walk Tall programme
- Story books
- Tom’s Flowers (3rd and 4th)
- Busy Bodies (5th and 6th)

- Picture books across the 9 grounds of equality
- INTO Different Families, Same Love poster
- RESPECT Guidelines – Creating a Welcoming and Positive School Climate to Prevent Homophobic and Transphobic Bullying

Provision of Ongoing Support

- PDST support
- PDST advisor
- Opportunities provided by our Education Centre will be brought to the attention of staff
- Teachers are encouraged to attend CPD in RSE
- Staff meetings utilised as a platform for discussion and development of RSE materials
- SEN advisor
- Promotion and communication of resources available from www.pdst.ie
- SPHE focus group in school
- **Review**

This policy will be reviewed in 2021 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. This plan was ratified by the Board of Management at a meeting.

Signed: Mary Dale
Chairperson Board of Management

Date: 8/3/19.

Signed: C. M. O. Mear
Principal

Date: 8/3/2019.

Appendix 1

Topics from 3rd to 6th Class include:

- **Bodily changes**
- Healthy eating, personal hygiene and exercise
- Keeping safe
- Expressing feelings
- Appreciating the variety of family types within our school and community and how these family relationships shape us
- Making healthy and responsible decisions
- Forming friendships
- **Discuss the stages and sequences of development of the human baby in the womb**
- **Introduction to puberty and changes**
- **Changes that occur in boys and girls with the onset of puberty**
- **Reproductive system of male/female adults**
- **Understanding sexual intercourse, conception and birth within the context of a committed, loving relationship**

Appendix 2

Dear...

Relationships and Sexuality Education is integral parts of the SPHE program me. The sensitive elements of the Relationships and Sexuality program me are covered under the Strand Units, 'Growing and Changing' and 'Taking Care of my Body'. We will be completing these Strand Units with all class levels in the forthcoming weeks.

Topics from 3rd to 6th Class include:

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The class teacher will send home appropriate home school links pages from the Relationship and Sexuality manual which will outline the material that will be covered in class and encourage further discussion of the topics at home.

If you have any questions, please make an appointment to see the class teacher.

Yours sincerely

PDST Advice for Primary Schools – Sexual Orientation

General Points

- Schools can foster a culture that is accepting of difference. This can be expressed where appropriate, rather than making the assumption that everyone understands it.
- An integral part of RSE is learning to respect others; this will include respect for families or individuals who are different.
- The Equal Status Acts 2000 - 2015 provide protection against discrimination on nine grounds, one of which is sexual orientation. The Acts oblige those who manage schools to protect students and staff from discrimination or sexual harassment.
- If children are using the word ‘gay’ in a negative fashion it is better not to ignore it in the hope that it will go away. The same advice for any instance of bullying.
- Schools are advised to develop a strategy for responding to children who have questions about sexual orientation or who are taunting others about being gay. This should be done 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.

Practical Suggestions

- Depending on the context and the age group of the children, the teacher could ask a child or class group what they mean by the word ‘gay’.
- A school could decide on a response to this question, such as ‘The majority of people are attracted to people of the opposite sex. This called being heterosexual. Some people are attracted to people of the same sex. This is called being homosexual or gay’.
- To give factual information like this in an open and straightforward way may help to remove the secrecy which is necessary for bullying to flourish.
- Homophobic insults should be 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.

Glossary of Terms and Class-Appropriate Explanations

	Junior Infants to 2 nd Class	3 rd to 6 th Class
LESBIAN	A women who loves another woman and they can be a family together.	A women who has or wants to have a loving relationship with another woman.
GAY	A man who loves a man and they can be a family together.	A man who has or wants to have a loving relationship with another man. Sometimes this term is also used to refer to lesbians.
BISEXUAL	A person who can love a man or a woman and form a family with a person of either gender	A person who can have or wants to have a loving relationship with either a man or a woman.
TRANSGENDER (OR TRANS* FOR SHORT)	A girl who feels like a boy/A woman who feels like they are a man. A boy who feels like they are a girl/A man who feels like they are a woman.	A person who was born with the physical characteristics of a boy/girl but deep inside they feel like they are a different gender and want to live their life as that gender.
HETEROSEXUAL (OR STRAIGHT)	A man who loves a woman or a woman who loves a man and they can be a family together.	A man who has or wants to have a loving relationship with a woman or a woman who has or wants to have a loving relationship with a man.
HOMOPHOBIC BULLYING	When people are hurtful to others because they are lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender or because people think they are.	When people hurt others (verbally, psychologically, physically, cyber bullying, etc.) because they are lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender or because people think they are.
TRANSPHOBIC BULLYING	When people are hurtful to others because they are transgender or because people think they are.	When people hurt others (verbally, psychologically, physically, cyber bullying etc.) because they are transgender or because people think they are.
LGBT	A short way to say lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender	An acronym used to refer to the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender communities.
HOMOSEXUAL	This is another term for gay or lesbian, sometimes used by scientists or doctors. LGB people generally prefer the terms lesbian, gay or bisexual to be used.	This is another term for gay or lesbian, usually used in scientific or medical references. LGB people generally prefer the terms lesbian, gay or bisexual to be used.