**Relationships and Sexuality Education**

**RSE Policy**

**2023**





Policy Review

Date ratified by Board of Governors on: Oct 23

Signed by Chair of Governors: M Niall Addis

Next Review Date: Oct 26

 **Mission Statement**

**‘A lifelong process which encompasses the acquisition of knowledge, understanding and skills, and the development of attitudes, beliefs and values about personal and social relationships and gender issues.’**

**THE SCHOOL ETHOS**

The ethos of our school is founded on principles where tolerance and respect for others is paramount. It is our intention that everyone feels valued and our pupils are encouraged to develop their full potential in a caring and supportive environment.

This policy reflects the ethos of our school.

**Definition of RSE**

Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) is a complex and vitally important area of a school’s curriculum. RSE is about mor than simply education children about biological sexual reproduction, particularly in primary schools. Although it is often referred to as ‘sex education’, this terminology is misleading. Relationships and Sexuality Education is defined as a lifelong process encompassing:

**The acquisition of knowledge, understanding and skills; and the development of attitudes, beliefs and values about sexual identity, relationships and intimacy.**

RSE is life-long learning about physical, moral and emotional development. RSE should provide young people with the information they need to help them develop healthy, nurturing relationships of all kinds, not simply intimate relationships. It should enable them to know what a healthy relationship is like and what makes a good friend.

**Rationale**

St Joseph’s Primary School is committed to the education of children regardless of race, religion, gender or status. All pupils have a right to an education which adequately prepares them for adult life, and RSE plays an integral part. In the Northern Ireland Primary School Curriculum, one of the areas of learning is Personal Development and Mutual Understanding (PDMU). An integral part of the PDMU curriculum is the provision of RSE. As a Catholic school, Primary School advocates the promotion of a ’Personal Development’ approach to RSE whereby children in our care are given the skills to help them resist peer and media pressure, and make informed decisions based on their own internal self-respect and self-esteem. Pupils are encouraged to recognise their individual needs to respecting the needs and wants of others. RSE is a lifelong process that involves the acquisition of knowledge, understanding and skills and the development of attitudes, beliefs, morals and values.

**Special Education Needs (SEN)**

RSE is a priority for our pupils in St joseph’s PS, and this includes learners with SEN who have social, emotional and mental health needs and learning disabilities.

We are committed to the education of children which adequately prepares them for adult life, regardless of their age, gender, culture, sexual orientation, disability status, religion or social class.

We will ensure that children with SEN in St Joseph’s PS will have appropriate, accessible and relevant Relationships and Sexuality Education.

We recognise that pupils with SEN are more vulnerable to all forms of abuse and exploitation. Perpetrators often target the most vulnerable people, who as a result may experience exploitation, abuse or bullying as they:

* Are often more dependent on others for the personal needs.
* May not be aware that what is happening to them is wrong
* May not be aware that help is available; or
* May have difficulty in communication or expressing concerns about what is happening to them.

Therefore, in St Joseph’s PS we will ensure learners with SEN have the opportunity to understand what is right and wrong from an early age, through RSE that is appropriate for their age and ability.

At St Joseph’s PS we will use everyday opportunities to develop the knowledge, understanding and skills of SEN pupils to enable them to:

* Identify inappropriate and exploitative behaviour
* Help develop their own prevention strategies to stay safe
* Recognise and build healthy relationships and
* Know who they can talk to and go to for help

**Teaching RSE should provide opportunities which enable pupils to:**

* Form values and establish behaviour within a moral, spiritual and social framework
* Examine and explore the various relationships in their personal lives
* Learn how to develop and enjoy personal relationships and friendships which are based on responsibility and mutual respect
* Build the foundations for developing more personal relationships in later life
* Make positive, responsible choices about themselves and others and the way they live their lives

**LINKS TO OTHER POLICIES**

* Teaching and Learning
* Safeguarding Children and Child Protection Policy
* Pastoral Care
* Drugs Policy
* RE
* RDMU
* The World Around Us
* Internet Safety
* Confidentiality Policy
* Health Education
* Anti – Bullying Policy
* Positive Behaviour Policy
* Homework Policy
* Use of outside agencies and vetting arrangements

**MORALS AND VALUES**

RSE should enable pupils to clarify what they believe and why they believe it and develop a respect for and interest in the beliefs of others. Pupils need opportunities to explore values and attitudes and to consider how they affect them, and others.

Children should be taught RSE within a framework which models and encourages the following values:

* A respect for God and creation
* A respect for self
* A responsibility for one’s own actions and an understanding of the long term and short-term consequences of their actions
* A respect for others
* Non-exploitation in relationships
* Commitment, trust and bonding within relationships
* Mutuality in relationships
* Honesty with self and others
* A development of critical self-awareness for themselves and others
* An exploration of the rights, duties and responsibilities involved in relationships
* Compassion, forgiveness, mercy and care when people do not conform to their way of life
* Self-discipline

**Aims**

**The aims of RSE are to:**

* Enhance the personal development, self-esteem and well-being of the child
* Help the child develop healthy and respectful friendships and relationships
* Foster an understanding of, and a healthy attitude to, human sexuality and relationships in a moral, social and spiritual framework
* Promote responsible behaviour and the ability to make informed decisions
* Help the child come to value family life and marriage
* To help the children to appreciate their worth, dignity and uniqueness as children of God
* To foster the growth of values which impact on moral behaviour personally and socially
* To enable the children to appreciate that sexuality is a gift from God
* To enable the children to identify and manage a range of feelings
* To foster and develop mutual respect and understanding for themselves and others
* To foster an understanding of and a healthy attitude to human sexuality and relationships in a moral, social and spiritual framework
* To develop a respect for difference, gender and race within the school and community
* To learn about the changes that occur as they progress towards adolescence, particularly the emotional and physical changes at puberty
* To learn about keeping themselves safe and know what to do or who to go to if they feel unsafe

**Learning Objectives**

**The RSE curriculum should enable pupils to:**

* Acquire and develop knowledge and understanding of self
* Develop a positive sense of self awareness, self -esteem and self –worth
* Develop an appreciation of the dignity, uniqueness and well-being of others
* Understand the nature, growth and development of relationships within families, in friendships and in wider contexts
* Develop an awareness of differing family patterns
* 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 at an age-appropriate level , that their developing sexuality is an important aspect of self-identity
* Develop personal skills which will help to establish and sustain healthy personal relationships
* Develop some coping strategies to protect self and others from various forms of abuse
* Acquire and improve skills of communication and social interaction
* Acquire and use an appropriate vocabulary to discuss feelings, sexuality, growth and development

**SKILLS**

The RSE curriculum should enable pupils to develop the skills necessary to form and maintain relationships and to make informed choices and decisions regarding health and well-being. Pupils should also be helped to develop skills to critically evaluate the wide range of information, opinions, attitudes and values.

They need opportunities to develop:

* Communication skills – learning to listen, listening to others points of view; putting one’s own view forward clearly and appropriately; giving and receiving feedback; handling and resolving conflict peacefully; being assertive
* Decision-making and problem-solving skills for sensible choices made in the light of relevant information; making moral judgements about what to do in actual situations and putting these judgements into proactive; acting responsibly and with initiative as an individual or as a member of a variety of groups
* Inter-personal skills for managing relationships confidently and effectively; for developing as an effective group member or leader

**Meeting the needs of pupils**

We ensure children with SEN have appropriate, accessible and relevant Relationships and Sexuality Education. We engage in the careful planning and adapting of resources and teaching activities to ensure that there are no barriers to participation or learning for pupils with SEN compared to their peers. We communicate with parents or carers of young people with SEN about the content of lessons and the date when classes will cover certain teaching activities/themes. This communication allows for parents or carers to reinforce learning at home. It is widely recognised that pupils with SEN are more vulnerable to all forms of abuse and exploitation. We do our utmost to try to ensure that they develop the knowledge. Understanding and skills of pupils to enable them to:

* Identify inappropriate and exploitative behaviour
* Help develop their own prevention strategies to stay safe
* Recognise and build healthy relationships
* Know who they can talk to

**The Classroom Environment**

Teachers create a classroom environment which is supportive, where self-esteem is fostered and where the pupils feel valued and affirmed. The climate promotes mutual respect and the dignity of each individual and is aimed at enabling all pupils to feel comfortable to express opinions and feelings in a secure and safe manner and to explore issues which may be sensitive and personal.

**Board of Governors**

The Board of Governors should foster and support the development of an RSE policy and programme by collaborating with teachers and parents. It should also facilitate the consultative process whereby the school community can respond and contribute. The governors should examine and approve the completed policy and programme prior to their implementation in the school and review the policy at regular intervals.

**Principal and Senior Management Team**

It is the role of the Principal to make possible a coherent and co-ordinated approach to RSE in keeping with the ethos of the school.

The Principal and Senior Management Team co-ordinate the school’s approach to RSE and consults the Board of Governors, staff, parents / carers and health professionals as appropriate.

**Staff**

The staff will deliver the Alive O programme and keep parents fully informed about the content of the programme through curriculum meetings and any other appropriate means. They are involved with planning and implementation of the programme and will use Grow in Love series and PDMU programme.

**Parents**

* Will be provided with an opportunity to consult on the policy
* Have a right to access to teaching materials relating to our RSE programme
* Are accommodated in regard to RSE and their wishes respected
* Are kept fully informed about the school policy and the content of the school’s programme
* New parents will be made aware of the RSE policy

**Pupils**

Pupils will be involved at regular intervals to ensure that the RSE programme meets their needs eg through circle time / oral discussions and consultation with the P6/7 members of the school council

**RSE Curriculum**

RSE is taught from P1-P7 through:

The Grow in Love Programme

The wonder of My Being Programme using RSE

PDMU Programme, Living, Learning Together

Physical Education

The world Around Us

Flourish

**Boundary Setting**

It is essential to set parameters for the teaching of sensitive issues. Having an agreed Code of Conduct will ensure that the right to privacy for both pupil and teacher is always respected. In terms of such a Code of Conduct, it is important that schools:

* Teach the fundamental principle of respect for human persons
* Challenge any discriminatory remarks
* Deal firmly with any acts of bullying, including homophobic, transphobic and cyberbullying
* Follow school procedures for accessing outside support for any pupil requiring additional help
* Support the parents. Parents may want to speak to someone at the school about one or more of these issues
* Arrange a meeting with the parents and relevant support agencies to consider any appropriate measures of support that may be needed to ensure the needs of the pupils are met
* Follow school procedures for monitoring the well-being of pupils
* Provide time and safe spaces for young people, in an age and stage appropriate way, to engage at a deep level with these issues, to dialogue with their peers and their teacher around them and to be invited into a rich understanding of the Church’s teaching in these areas

**Relationships between Home, school and Community**

The effectiveness of this policy and its implementation is dependent on a collaborative process involving teachers, parents/carers, governors and other educational and health professionals. Each of the partners has distinctive contributions to make.

Keeping parents/carers informed about the school’s provision for health education is a vital element of RSE. Informal sessions may then be arranged so that interested parents/carers could consider issues such as the readiness of children for aspects of the RSE programme, the appropriateness of resources, the content and methodologies proposed, and the handling of sensitive topics.

The delivery of RSE must prepare pupils to view relationships in a responsible and healthy manner and should be taught in harmony with the ethos of the school and reflect the moral and religious principles.

Department of Education Circulars providing advice on developing or reviewing their RSE policy is provided in:

* Circular 2001/15 Relationships and Sexuality Education
* Circulars 2001/15a and 2001 / 15b
* Circular 2013/16
* Circular 2015/22 Relationship and Sexuality Education

These circulars are available on the department’s website: [www.deni.gov.uk](http://www.deni.gov.uk) Guidance and resources on RSE are also provided on the NI Curriculum website at www.nicurriculum. org.uk

In primary schools, RSE builds, in a developmentally appropriate way, on children’s existing knowledge and experience of their bodies, relationships and the world around them. RSE and Health Education are complementary since both emphasise the development of a positive self-image, and a respect for self and for others, as well as the provision of appropriate and accurate information.

An RSE programme for primary schools should provide structured opportunities for pupils to learn about:

* Themselves as unique human beings
* Their spiritual, social, emotional and physical growth
* Their friendships and relationships with others and
* The various changes that occur as they progress towards adolescence and adulthood, particularly the emotional and physical changes which occur at puberty.

**RSE Programme**

RSE will be delivered in a holistic, cross curricular way, ensuring that teaching is at all times appropriate to the maturity and understanding of the pupils. Teachers will be ever alert to the personal and emotional circumstances of the pupils. RSE will include the physical and emotional changes that occur at puberty but will not include sex education.

However, the children may link up with other schools for a talk on puberty in the summer term of their P7 year. Only children with written parental/carer consent receive this talk. The school nurse delivers the talks with a member of the teaching staff present in each case.

**Curriculum organisation and delivery**

The following outline teaching programme illustrates the topics covered through the delivery of the Northern Ireland Curriculum in Primary school. Many of the aspects included below are also part of the Health education curriculum, PDMU, RE, The World Around Us, PE, Drama or in reaction to specific situations. All teachers will deliver the RSE programme. Topics and themes are often repeated at regular intervals. The sequence in which ideas are presented below is not intended to imply a teaching order.

**Foundation stage and Key stage 1**

**Myself**

* Myself: how I grow, fed, move and use my senses; caring for myself, for example, hygiene, sleep, exercise
* Naming parts of the body(basic) – developing an agreed language for our bodies
* Being myself – I am unique, my self-esteem, self-confidence, independence, respect and caring for myself
* Similarities and differences between myself and others, for example, uniqueness, fingerprints, gender issues, different rates of growth
* An introduction to the stages of human development – changes as we grow, for example, baby, child, teenager, adult, mother/father, grandparents
* Recognising moods, feelings and concerns and developing a language and an appropriate manner of expressing them, for example, what do I do if I feel sad or angry?
* Personal likes and dislikes

**My Relationships**

* My family, special people in my life – what they do for me and what I do for them
* Friendships, getting on with each other, for example, communicating, playing together, listening, co-operating and sharing
* Ageing – how do we know that things are alive, dead, young and old
* Loss and mourning – death of a person or a pet (Note: the situations of the pupils should be taken into account prior to introducing this topic)
* Respect and caring for family members and friends, for example, caring for a new baby
* Bullies and what to do about them
* Personal safety – simple skills and practices to maintain personal safety
* The difference between good and bad touches
* Realise that adults and older children are not always friends, the potential danger of relationships with strangers or acquaintances
* Strategies which pupils might use to protect themselves from potentially dangerous situations

**My Community / Environment**

* Awareness of different types of families and the roles of individuals within families
* Keeping safe, for example, dangerous places, dangerous situations, the adults who will help, how to get help form others
* Rules at home, at school and in the community
* Respect and caring for people in the community eg elderly people

**Key stage 2**

**Myself**

* My body, how it works and how to keep it healthy
* The physical social and emotional changes that occur during puberty (girls and boys)
* Myself and my peers – different rates of growth and physical development, maturity
* Valuing and respecting myself, identifying personal strengths and weaknesses
* Feelings, for example, things that make me happy, sad, excited, embarrassed, angry, scared; expressing our feelings, showing love and affection
* Gender roles
* Making choices – the influences on me and the consequences of actions for oneself and others
* Distinguishing between right and wrong
* Secrets – knowing the difference between good and bad secrets, what to do about bad secrets

**My Relationships**

* Identifying the positive traits of friendship and their corresponding values
* Differences and similarities in people, the need to respect other people’s views, emotions and feelings
* Families and how they behave – what family members expect of each other
* The meaning of friendship and loyalty; making and maintaining friendships and social relationships, for example, identifying and understanding pressures and influences, taking account of other people’s point of view
* Handling difficult situations, for example, teasing, bullying, death of a family member
* The meaning of relationships within families, between friends and in the community
* Behaviour – what constitutes appropriate and non-appropriate physical contact
* Identifying dangers and risks within relationships
* Being assertive in defending individual rights and beliefs
* People who can help pupils when they have anxieties, concerns or questions

**My Community/Environment**

* Appreciation of the family in relation to the school and the wider community
* Cultural differences in families and family relationships
* Helping agencies which can support families and individuals in different circumstances
* Messages and images about health, gender roles and sexuality from the media, family and peers

**SELECTION OF TEACHING RESOURCES**

The selection of teaching resources should be:

* Consistent with the school’s RSE policy and the aims and objectives of the RSE programme
* Consistent with the school’s morals and values framework
* Appropriate to pupils’ age, level of understanding and maturity
* Factually correct and respectful of its audience
* Likely to appeal to pupils in terms of appropriate language level, images, attitudes and values, maturity, contests and situations, and the knowledge required
* Complementary to the existing programmes which the school offers
* Encouraging consideration of a range of issues, attitudes and beliefs pertinent to the topics covered; In St Joseph’s we believe it is essential that teachers create a classroom environment which is supportive, where self-esteem is fostered and where the pupils feel valued and affirmed. The climate of the classroom needs to promote mutual respect and the dignity of each individual. It is important to create an atmosphere in the classroom which allows all pupils to feel comfortable to express opinions and feelings in a secure and safe manner and to explore issues which may be sensitive and personal. Every effort should be made to ensure that the whole group is at ease, with pupils showing respect for each other and realising their responsibilities to each other.
* Ground rules should be agreed to help to minimise embarrassment and encourage the respect of each other’s opinion. Realistic scenarios, case studies, role-play, drama, videos and stories can be used to enable pupils to discuss issues without personal disclosure

**Important considerations are the:**

* Degree of trust, respect and positive regard for pupils
* Relationships between the teacher and pupil, and between the pupils themselves
* Need for clear expectations, goals and learning objectives
* Use of teaching and learning methods which involve pupils actively in their own learning and encourage the consideration of attitudes and values and the ability to make informed and healthy decisions
* Need to be aware and take account of the current youth culture

**Confidentiality**

The child’s right to privacy must be respected at all times by both the teacher and all other pupils in the class but staff cannot give a guarantee of confidentiality to pupils on issues relating to Child Protection. Where a teacher suspects that a child is a victim of or is at risk of abuse, they are required to follow the school’s safeguarding policy and immediately inform the designated teacher for child protection

**Specific Issues**

**Th**rough RSE, children will be taught ‘keeping safe’ messages about how to behave safely and responsibly in the digital world which plays such an integral role in their lives – internet safety

**INTERNET SAFETY**

Due to continuous advances in technology, RSE is very closely aligned to Internet Safety. There will be age – appropriate lessons taught in relation to internet safety and this will be complimented with parental awareness.

**Status of the Family**

The model of family life and marriage remain at the centre of our RSE Programme particularly as it is taught through the Grown In Love Programme. We do realise that this mode may not truly reflect the home life of all our children. Therefore, we feel that it is crucial to take a sensitive approach in the delivery of the RSE programmes and we endeavour to appreciate diversity in family life.

* Single parent families
* Families who have suffered bereavement
* Parent separation
* Families where parents are not married
* Adoptive families
* Foster care families
* Kinship arrangements
* LAC
* Gender specific relationships

**The Sanctity of Life**

Life from the very moment of conception is sacred and this tenant of belief is reflected in RSE and based upon moral and spiritual principles, in no way can that life ever be compromised

**Terminology**

Use of proper biological terms and language is vital and when these terms are placed in the context of family love, respect and self-respect, then their essences is understood.

**Sexual Orientation and gender Identity**

As a school, the issue of sexual orientation and gender identity will be dealt with in a sensitive, non-confrontational and reassuring way. We will do this very effectively by teaching about difference in Relationships and Sexuality Education and in the wider Personal Development and Mutual Understanding curriculum.

In keeping with our Catholic ethos which reflects the gospel values of inclusivity, equality and respect, all pupils, regardless of their sexual orientation, have the right to learn in a safe and secure environment, and not to be treated any less favourably on grounds of their actual or perceived sexual orientation. Homophobic bullying is ‘any language, conduct, or behaviour including online used to exclude, demean or threaten a person based on their actual or perceived sexual orientation’(The Rainbow Project, 2010). The word ‘gay’ is often used in a negative and belittling way by many children. This abusive language is often tolerated, the argument being that children are too young to know what they are saying; however, not only is this wrong, but it can have a devasting impact on children who may be questioning their sexual orientation or who may have lesbian, gay or bisexual parents of carers/relatives. Schools should ensure that young people are aware that using this kind of language is not acceptable; it must be challenged in a way that children understand, any issues of bullying on the grounds of sexual orientation will be dealt with appropriately in line with the schools anti-bullying policy.

**Pastoral Care of Young People with Gender Dysphoria**

The disclosure of gender dysphoria by a child or young person is first and foremost a pastoral and welfare issue. As such, the priority of the school is to create a safe environment in which the vulnerable child can receive the support that they require. Expert help will be sought in such cases.

**EQUAL OPPORTUNITES**

Generally RSE will be taught in mixed groups, so that boys and girls are encouraged to work with each other and gain an understanding of each other’s perspectives. However, there will be times that teachers or the school nurse will work with single gender groups, eg P7 Love for Life programme, to explore puberty related physical and emotional changes in boy boys and girls. The programme of RSE delivered will be accessible to all pupils regardless of age, culture, disability, sexual orientation, gender or social class.

**WITHDRAWAL FROM RSE**

The NI Curriculum Relationships and Sexuality Education Guidance 2015 states that, whilst RSE is a statutory component of the NI Curriculum, parents or carers have a right to have their children education in accordance with their wishes. However, whilst there is no legislative provision permitting parental withdrawal from sex education, the school will take account of parent/carer concerns. Concerns may be addressed by inviting parents into the school to discuss ore fully what we are trying to achieve. And the approaches we intend to use. Parents will be reassured that the programmes is not intended as a substitute for their role in education their children about relationships and sexuality. Rather it aims to build on the foundations laid by them. The programme has links for parents, and it is hoped that they will play an important role in the successful delivery of it. If a parent or carer still chooses to withdraw a child from all or part of Relationships and Sexuality Education, this may mean that child going into another class or may involve parents taking responsibility during the times for RSE

**OUTSIDE AGENCIES AND INDIVIDUALS**

In consulting with an outside agency or an individual regarding the RSE programme St Joseph’s will ensure:

* Agency personnel are vetted to comply with our Child Protection Policy
* Advise all agency speakers of confidentiality regarding sensitive issues
* All reasons such as videos/role plays will be closely vetted for suitability to age range
* All visiting personnel are provided with the schools RSE policy
* Parents will be advised when outside agencies are being used by the school
* The school management team and RE co-ordinator will monitor and evaluate the success or otherwise of outside agencies / individuals input in order to inform future planning
* Children will be involved in evaluation of the programme

**STAFF TRAINING**

This is provided by RSE co-ordinator in consultation with the Principal where deemed necessary the Diocesan Education Advisors, and the EA and other outside agencies may be consulted.

**CONCLUSION**

Our school believes that the proper implementation of the RSE programme would involve the co-operation of pupils, parents, teachers, parish, BOG and outside agencies. We endeavour to maintain a sensitive and caring approach to the RSE Programme, mindful of our responsibilities in the development of the whole child, at all times we are aware of our responsibilities as Catholic Educators. We appreciate the privilege of being involved with parents in the development of the children entrusted to our care.

**FLOURISH**

Flourish is an RSE programme, which has been developed for use across the island of Ireland and approved by the Irish Episcopal Conference. This programme is approved for use in Catholic schools and is available as a free online resource for all school. Resources and materials can be found at this link:

[www.catholiceducation-ni.org/about-us/rse-resources/](http://www.catholiceducation-ni.org/about-us/rse-resources/)

**This policy will be reviewed on a regular basis.**