

St Pius X GNS

Relationship and Sexuality Education Policy

School Details

St Pius X G.N.S is a Roman Catholic single-sex girls' national school serving the parish of St Pius X. It operates under the patronage of the Catholic Archbishop of Dublin. As a Roman Catholic school, the school aims at promoting the full and harmonious development of all aspects of the pupil: intellectual, physical, cultural, moral and spiritual. This Catholic school provides religious education for pupils in accordance with the doctrines, practices and traditions of the Roman Catholic Church and promotes the formation of the pupils in the Catholic faith

Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) encompasses the acquisition of knowledge and understanding, and the development of attitudes, beliefs and values about relationships, sexual identity and intimacy. In St Pius X GNS we seek to promote the overall development of the child, which involves the integration of relationships and sexuality into personal understanding, growth and development as per Department of Education & Skills SPHE curricular guidelines and relevant circulars, and within the context of our Catholic ethos.

Development of this Policy

This policy was reviewed in November 2019. Consultations took place with staff, parents and Board of Management in the reviewing of this policy.

Rationale

St Pius X GNS is committed to the education of children and is a school that respects, values and accommodates diversity across all nine grounds in the equality legislation – gender, marital status, family status, sexual orientation, religion, age, disability, race and membership of the Traveller community. Relationships and Sexuality are integral parts of the human personality and impact biologically, psychologically, culturally, socially and spiritually.

RSE is a lifelong process that involves the acquisition of knowledge, understanding and skills, and the development of attitudes, beliefs, morals and values. While we believe that the primary responsibility for addressing these issues rests with parents, we acknowledge the vital part the school can play in supporting and complementing this.

Introductory Statement

This policy is an approved approach to the teaching of Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) in St Pius X GNS. It was developed to inform teachers and parents as to what material is covered in the RSE programme within SPHE.

School Focus

This policy was developed and will be implemented in ways which are in keeping with the ethos of the school. The ethos of the school is characterised by the following:

- Sensitivity 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.

Definition of RSE

Relationship and Sexuality education (RSE) 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 Parent's Information Booklet, page 4*).

RSE is an integral part of Social, Personal and Health Education 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. It addresses the meaning of human sexuality, relationships, growth and development, relevant to personal and social skills.

(p. 5 NCCA interim curriculum and guidelines for RSE)

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. Through SPHE and RSE, members of the school community should be enabled to enhance their self-esteem and well-being 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.

Approaches & Methodologies

When implementing the programme, staff at St Pius X GNS endeavour 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 (key topics will be revisited in a developmental manner at regular intervals). The materials taught will reflect the needs of the children.

Current Provision included in the school curriculum is:

- SPHE lessons (provided through discrete curricular time and integration)
- Use of the RSE Manuals and Busy Body resources
- Stay safe Programme / Walk Tall Programme
- Religious Education
- Friends for Life/Fun Friends
- Weaving Wellbeing
- Webwise resources
- RESPECT Guidelines (suggested approaches to teaching about different families)
- Adapted resources for SEN www.pdst.ie
- Anti-Bullying guidelines

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- 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 – Senior Classes
- To enable the child to be comfortable with the sexuality of oneself and others while growing and developing
- 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 all types of 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 Safeguarding Policy
- Code of behaviour and discipline
- Anti-Bullying Policy
- Enrolment Policy
- Healthy Eating Policy
- Acceptable Use Policy
- Substance Use Policy
- Mobile phone Policy

Child Safeguarding

This policy is cognisant of all aspects of our current Child Safeguarding Policy. The school follows the DES child protection guidelines and has a child safeguarding policy with the Principal as Designated Liaison Person (DLP) and the Deputy Principal as the Deputy DLP. Where a child protection concern is raised, the procedures outlined in the schools Child Safeguarding Policy will be followed.

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 infants to 6th class. All resources used will be in keeping with the ethos of the school, the whole school plan for SPHE and the RSE policy. Each class teacher will teach the content for their class level.
- Where an outside speaker is used, the class teacher will remain in the classroom, as per circular 22/2010. The speaker will be made aware of the school’s RSE policy.
- The Stay Safe programme will be implemented throughout the school. It will be covered in senior infants, 2nd, 4th and 6th. The class teachers will coordinate the teaching of Stay Safe during the school year.
- The strands Growing and Changing, and Taking Care of my Body are covered in junior infants, 1st, 3rd and 5th. The sensitive lessons are covered as part of these broad topics (as outlined below and see Appendix 1) in 4th, 5th and 6th.
- Special consideration will be taken to ensure that the needs of children with Special Educational Needs are met. Taking into account the pupil’s social and emotional development, instruction will be based on individual needs where possible. Parents will be consulted around sensitive issues.

Topics covered up to 2nd class include:

- Keeping Safe
- An awareness of human growth and development
- Making age appropriate choices
- Appreciating family life
- Recognising and expressing feelings
- Self-care, hygiene, diet, exercise and sleep
- Expressing opinions and listening to others
- Naming the parts of the male/ female body using appropriate anatomical terms (Junior/ Senior Infants)
- Naming the parts of the male/ female body using appropriate anatomical terms and identify some of their functions (1st/2nd)

Topics from 3rd 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
- Changes that occur in boys and girls with the onset of puberty (*Senior Classes*)
- Reproductive system of male/female adults (*Senior Classes*)
- Understanding sexual intercourse, conception and birth within the context of a committed loving relationship (*Senior Classes*)

Organisational matters:

- Parents will be informed in advance of lessons on the sensitive areas of the RSE programme.
- If parents/guardians wish to withdraw their children from the lessons pertaining to the sensitive elements of the RSE programme, they must give a notice in writing to the school, stating their reasons for doing so. This will be centrally filed.

- Parents have a responsibility 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.
- In the class situation children will be encouraged to recognise that certain information is for them only and it would be inappropriate to discuss this with younger siblings/children for example.
- With regard to matters of a confidential nature, the school cannot take any responsibility for what is discussed in the yard or classroom.
- If a teacher has concerns about teaching the sensitive elements in RSE they should consult with the Principal. Any teacher has the right to opt out of teaching the sensitive elements of RSE. It is the responsibility of the BOM to ensure content is covered by another teacher or an outside speaker.
- 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. Parents will be consulted around sensitive issues.

Differentiation

The very nature of RSE education and the differing maturity and growth levels of children mean that some children will need more support to understand the concepts and content. The teacher must use their assessment techniques to determine how to manage this. Usually some simple approaches can aid the teacher and children. Often differentiation can include the teaching strategies you use to teach the same content.

Teachers use assessment and professional judgment to differentiate the programme and content to suit the needs of the class. Some techniques used:

- ensuring that objectives are realistic for the students
- ensuring that the learning task is compatible with prior learning
- providing opportunities for interacting and working with other students in small groups and spending more time on tasks
- organising the learning task into small stages and ensuring that the language used is pitched at the student's level of understanding
- understanding of the activity using task analysis, outlining the steps to be learned/completed in any given task, posing key questions to guide students through the different stages/processes, and to assist in self-direction and correction

- Having short and varied tasks creating a learning environment through the use of concrete, and where possible every day materials, and by displaying word lists and laminated charts with pictures.

Sometimes the stage of development in a class can vary widely and strategies to differentiate in class can support gradual and appropriate teaching;

- group work and discussion
- higher and lower order questioning in groups
- Moderated whole class discussions through use of a Question Box.

Pupils with Special Educational Needs

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 in consultation with parents/guardians.

Dealing with Questions*:

It is natural that children should wish to ask questions in the area of RSE.

All questions answered will reflect the parameters of the curriculum. Questions to the teacher may be oral or written within the group setting and answered within boundaries of the curriculum and school policy. If any questions asked by children are deemed to be outside of the parameters of the curriculum/school ethos, the teacher will refer the child to their parents/guardians, or state that this information may be available at a later stage of the curriculum, or in post-primary school. The school cannot guarantee confidentiality if a child asks a question of a personal nature or discloses personal information. With regard to matters of a confidential nature, the school cannot take any responsibility for what is discussed in the yard or classroom outside of the RSE lesson.

The following considerations will be made when responding to children's questions:

- Awareness of circumstances in which the question has arisen
- Clarification of what information is required
- Determination of whether the question is appropriate or relevant/who it is relevant to

- Provision of an age appropriate answer
- Deferral of the question to be answered at home or in the future

*Best Practice Guidelines for staff in RSE attached as Appendix 1

Parental Involvement

- Parents have a responsibility 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.
- Contact will be made with parents prior to the teaching of lessons involving the 'sensitive elements' of the RSE programme.
- Parents will be informed in advance of formal lessons on the sensitive areas of the programme being taught and will be asked to discuss these issues with their child prior to the lessons in school.
- The school acknowledges that parents have the primary responsibility for educating their children in sexual matters. The school RSE programme acts as a support to parents, and parents retain the right to withdraw their children from classes.
- If parents/guardians wish to withdraw their children from the lessons pertaining to the sensitive elements of the RSE programme, they must give a notice in writing to the school, stating their reasons for doing so. This will be centrally filed.

Resources

Careful attention needs to be brought to resources used to teach RSE education, due to the sensitive nature. The RSE Resource Materials, Walk Tall Books, Stay Safe and Busy Bodies are the only resources sanctioned by the Department of Education. Each class teacher has a copy of the appropriate manual or access to it in online / pdf format. However, there are numerous other resources available to teach the content of RSE. It would be important to have criteria when selecting relevant resources (retrieved from SPHE Teacher Guidelines page 103)

Other resources that support the broader aims of RSE include:

- Stay Safe programme.
- Walk Tall Programme.
- Anatomical Dolls

- Anatomical Terminology Guide
- Grow In Love
- Respect Guidelines
- Different Families Same Love poster
- Busy Bodies DVD and Booklet. This DVD and booklet were developed to support the teaching of the 3rd, 4th, 5th and 6th class component of RSE within the context of SPHE.
- Making the Links & Beyond

Provision of Ongoing Support

- Opportunities provided by our Education Centre will be brought to the attention of staff members. Teachers will be encouraged to attend CPD in RSE.
- Application for in-school support from PDST sought when necessary.
- Staff meetings utilised as a platform for discussion and development of RSE materials.

Confidentiality

During RSE lessons often children may wish to connect and disclose personal or related stories and information. It is important to protect children and families and their privacy. This can be done by ensuring there are ground rules for the sharing of information in relation to the topics covered in RSE. Confidentiality cannot be offered for the content covered from children whose parents have chosen not to have them included in the sensitive lessons. It is important to note that disclosures must be dealt with in line with Child Protection Procedures.

- The school follows 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 discuss the content of the lessons with that child.

Assessment

The assessment process should be a positive experience for children and enable the teacher to modify curriculum content according to the needs of the child and so maximise the learning potential of each individual. It is the way in which progress can be communicated to the child, parents and other teachers.

Teachers use;

- Observation and questioning to assess the child's engagement and interest;
- Teacher designed tasks such as worksheets quizzes and games
- Use of reflective and learning logs

- Self-assessment.

Review

- This policy will be reviewed 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.

Ratified by the Board of management on.....

Signed..... Chairperson, Board of management

APPENDIX 1 - RSE Policy

Best Practice Guidelines for Staff

Language

Language reflects values, attitudes, beliefs, prejudices and principles. It not only helps to express a culture but influences and shapes that culture as well. It is essential that children are enabled to use language in a precise and appropriate manner. The language that is promoted in the school must be one that nurtures both children and adults as unique and valuable human beings. It should respect cultural and other differences between people and be used in a way that encourages inclusiveness. Language can significantly contribute to building positive self-esteem, whereas if used in a negative manner it can cause frustration and hurt.

These messages about language will be communicated to children in the school primarily by the manner in which language is used. The way in which children are addressed in class, the manner in which they are reproached or affirmed and the tone of voice used in exploring issues of a personal nature will all reflect the values that are upheld in the school.

The words 'gay' and 'lesbian' are sometimes used to hurt others and the use of such language in a derogatory way diminishes respect for gay and lesbian people. There are no formal lessons on being gay taught in RSE. However, as part of The Anti-Bullying Procedures 2013, schools must address identity based bullying such as homophobic and transphobic bullying and include preventative educational strategies.

In order for the RSE policy to be fully in line with these procedures, if questions arise as to the definition of gay and lesbian, and attitudes or opinions about gay people are expressed, age appropriate definitions will be given (from Stay Safe programme) and children will be informed that being gay is okay, and that all people in various types of relationships and families deserve respect. If the teachers deem it necessary, any moral questions around same sex relationships, will be directed to home.

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 formal RSE lessons
- Appropriate vocabulary in formal teaching relating to sexuality, growing up, physical changes, parts of the body and feelings will be used and the use of slang will be discouraged
- Anatomical terms and language introduced is consistent with RSE Materials Book

Questions

Staff should not invalidate questions but use limits.

The main aim of talk and discussion is to create an atmosphere where children feel comfortable to ask important questions and that the relationship fostered in these sessions is open controlled and safe for all pupils. While you may not be able to answer all questions, your hope is that children will not be put off seeking answers in the school setting but will talk to their parents and ask the questions again at different stages of schooling or education, and are not put off because they perceived the topics or questions be embarrassing.

We use some simple principles when fostering discussion and questioning

- No personal questions of the teacher
- The Question Box will 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.

For older children a 'question box' will be used as part of a structured RSE lesson. Teachers can follow up on the written questions at a later date, thus allowing time to prepare suitable answers, consult with colleagues, etc.

Question Box

During the delivery of each section of the sensitive lessons– children will be encouraged to place their questions into a box in the classroom. These questions will then be monitored and screened with the teacher answering the questions the following week taking into account the following;

- Questions arising from lesson content will be answered in an age-appropriate manner
- The class teacher cannot answer questions which do not relate to the particular curriculum objectives for a class
- Pupils will be informed if a question/issue is not on the programme and they will be advised to talk with their parents
- Teachers may exercise discretion to contact parents themselves if they feel that a question is very inappropriate or needs to be communicated with home because of other reasons
- No personal questions will be answered and children will be reminded not to share personal information about their families or others – but can share with teacher after the lessons.

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

