



Bandonbridge N.S.

Relationships and Sexuality Education Policy

(to be read in conjunction with the S.P.H.E. Policy)

Ratified by the BoM: 2001

Date of review: January 2023

Introductory Statement:

Bandonbridge N.S. is a co-ed primary school under the patronage of the Church of Ireland bishop of Cork, Cloyne and Ross. There are 8 mainstream classrooms catering for Junior Infants to 6th class.

This policy details how Relationships and Sexuality Education is taught in the school, including the sensitive aspects. The policy is an approved approach to the teaching of RSE and was developed to inform teachers and parents as to what material is covered in the RSE programme with SPHE both formally and informally. The first RSE policy was developed in 2001 and has been reviewed regularly to reflect changes to the structure of the classrooms which moved from multigrade rooms to single grade rooms and as new/revised programmes and resources became available.

The current review involved creating a whole-school plan in a 2 year cycle to ensure that there is continuity and consistency across the classroom. A document outlining the language children will encounter in the more sensitive areas of the RSE programme was created so that the whole school community is aware of what is covered.

Relationship to the Characteristic Spirit of the School:

We recognise that SPHE is intrinsic to the teaching and learning that occurs both formally and informally in school and in the classroom. Through our SPHE programme and subsequently through RSE, we wish to 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 individuals within a caring school community. Our Christian ethos means we value respect, tolerance and openness through the lived experience of the children and school community. Parents/guardians 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. Throughout the teaching of RSE and SPHE, pupils' wellbeing is central to all preparation and planning for teaching.

What is RSE?

The definition of RSE used is from the Interim RSE Guidelines 1996 and Going Forward Together Parents Information Booklet. 'RSE is an important part of the education of young people, and schools provide a safe context within which young people can learn about themselves and the wider world. This makes access to RSE in schools all the more important' – (Mayock, Kitching and Morgan 2007, p2). The policy guidelines state that schools can develop a working definition within the context of both the NCCA's and the policy guidelines definitions. This definition must be in line with the SPHE Curriculum and other relevant policy documents.

Relationships and Sexuality Education is an integral part of SPHE and is taught in this context in our school. 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 their 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 feelings and those of others, developing a sense of empathy and experiencing and supporting healthy relationships.

Through SPHE and RSE, members of the school community should be enabled to enhance their self-esteem and wellbeing through developing:

- A sense of identity
- A sense of purpose
- A sense of belonging
- A sense of security
- A sense of competence.

The school ensures that its curriculum is free of bias and that issues of equality 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 to live in an intercultural society.

Current Provision included in the School Curriculum:

- SPHE lessons (provided through discrete curricular time and integration)
- Use of RSE manuals and other resources from the PDST website [Relationships and Sexuality Education | PDST](#)
- Stay Safe Programme
- Walk Tall Programme
- Webwise resources
- Adapted resources for SEN from www.pdst.ie
- Church of Ireland religious education programme – Follow Me

Aims of our RSE Programme (taken from the Interim Guidelines for RSE Education 1996):

- To enhance the personal development, self-esteem and wellbeing of the child
- To help the child to develop healthy friendships and relationships
- 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
- 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 of our RSE Programme (from the Interim Guidelines for RSE Education 1996):

When due account is taken of abilities and varying circumstances, the RSE education curriculum (in conjunction with the SPHE curriculum) should enable the child to:

- 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 on 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 the members of the school community.

Policies which support SPHE/RSE

- Child Safeguarding Statement
- Substance Use Policy
- Code of Behaviour
- Anti-bullying Policy
- Enrolment Policy
- Acceptable Use Policy
- Healthy Eating Policy
- Administration of Medication Policy
- Safety Statement
- Critical Incident Policy
- SEN and EAL Policies

Guidelines for the Management and Organisation of RSE in our School:

Curriculum:

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 each year as laid out in the curriculum and utilising the RSE manuals (and other resources from PDST) to complement their teaching.

Management:

- The strands Growing and Changing and Taking Care of My Body are covered as part of our whole-school SPHE plan
- The sensitive lessons are covered as part of these broad topics (as outlined in our whole-school plan)
- Infant classes may explore these topics as part of Aistear with EAL teachers and/or SETs assisting with the lessons

- Special arrangements exist for the delivery of the sensitive elements from 4th class up. Boys and girls may be grouped separately for certain aspects of the programme and work together on others.
- Special consideration will be taken to ensure that the needs of children with SEN are met
- Support teachers and the Principal may assist with these lessons where pupils are split into smaller targeted groups
- Taking into account the pupils' social and emotional development, instruction will be based on individual needs where possible. Parents will be consulted around sensitive issues
- This policy document and a document outlining the vocabulary which will be covered in "sensitive areas" of the RSE programme are available to parents/guardians on the school website

Parental Involvement

Going Forward Together (Parents' Booklet) states that – *"As a parent, you are the first teacher of your child. You hand on values and attitudes to each new generation of children."*

Our RSE policy endeavours to include and foster a relationship to support parents/guardians in their RSE education of the children in the school. Open communication at various intervals is important.

In line with the Education Act 1998, section 30, subsection 2 (e): ***shall not require any student to attend instruction in any subject which is contrary to the conscience of the parent of the student.*** Therefore, parents/guardians have the right to withdraw their child from the sensitive aspects of RSE, if they so wish.

As RSE is an integral component of SPHE, **consent is not needed.** However, to avoid withdrawal of pupils, where possible, the school has put in place effective strategies to engage with parents/guardians to consult on their opinions and concerns.

- Parents/guardians will be informed that the school fully implements the RSE strands of the SPHE programme, including details of the sensitive aspects of the programme, on enrolment
- Parents/guardians will be informed, by the class teacher, in advance of lessons on the sensitive areas of the RSE programme
- Parents/guardians have an opportunity 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
- Parents/guardians are invited/welcome to view the curriculum and may speak to the class teacher if they have any concerns at any time during the year. The school acknowledges that parents/guardians have the primary responsibility for education their children about growing and changing

- Following discussion with the Principal and class teacher, if a parent/guardian wishes to withdraw their child from the sensitive lessons, it should be given in writing stating their reasons for doing so and this will be filed in the pupil's personal file
- If a child has been withdrawn from the sensitive RSE lessons, the school takes no responsibility for what the child may hear following on from the teaching of the lessons: e.g. what they might hear in the playground, on the school bus etc.

Organisation and Curriculum Planning

RSE will be covered under the following strand and strand units of the SPHE curriculum:

Strand

Strand Unit

Myself

Growing and Changing
Taking care of my body

The RSE programme is divided into two main parts:

1. The general programme which contains content covered through SPHE strands and strand units and complement 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**. For a more detailed overview, please read our whole-school plan for SPHE where you will see which topics are covered in specific classes.

Topics covered up to 2 nd class include:	Topics covered from 3 rd – 6 th include:
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● Keeping safe ● Bodily changes from birth (birth – 9) ● Making age-appropriate choices ● Appreciating the variety of family types and the variety of family life that exists in our school and community ● Recognising and expressing feelings ● Self-care, hygiene, diet, exercise and sleep ● Expressing opinions and listening to others ● Naming the parts of the female/male body using appropriate anatomical terms (Junior and Senior Infants) ● Naming the parts of the female/male body using appropriate anatomical terms and identify some of their functions (1st/2nd)	● 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 of development of the human baby on the womb (3rd/4th class) ● Introduction to puberty and changes (3rd – 6th class) ● Changes that occur in boys and girls with the onset of puberty (5th/6th) ● Reproductive system of male/female adults (5th/6th) ● Understanding sexual intercourse, conception and birth within the context of a committed loving relationship (5th/6th class)
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Approaches and Methodologies

Active learning methodologies are an integral part of teaching SPHE and RSE. An agreed contract about what is allowed and not allowed might be used by class teachers. This is particularly useful in the older classes. Any or all of the following techniques will allow the pupils to play an active role in the learning process:

- Discussion
- Role play
- Aistear activities
- Interviewing friends, other school pupils, family members etc.
- Surveys of attitudes
- Analysing and evaluating media, including social media
- Projects
- Modelling
- Writing captions
- Ranking statements
- Describing photographs

- Viewing and discussing video clips, recordings etc.
- Stories and poems
- Art activities
- Reflection
- Circle time
- Worksheets
- Questioning by the pupils
- Guest speaker (the class teacher has primary responsibility for the teaching of RSE and supervision of the children. The class teacher will stay in the classroom at all times in accordance with Circular 42/2018)

When implementing the programme, staff at Bandonbridge N.S. will endeavour to display respect for and sensitivity towards the different cultural and family backgrounds experienced by the children.

Differentiation

Teachers use assessment and professional judgement to differentiate the programme and content to suit the needs of the class and individual pupils. Some techniques used are:

- ensuring the 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 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, everyday materials, and by displaying word lists and laminated charts with pictures.
- liaising with parents/guardians

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

If learning activities are to be made meaningful, relevant and achievable for all students, it is important that the teacher finds ways to respond to students' diversity by using differentiated approaches and methodologies. Consultation with and/or involvement in the School Support Plan and SSP Plus planning process, as well as teacher observation, will assist the teacher in organising an appropriate learning programme for students with learning difficulties. Such an approach will assist the teacher in selecting suitable differentiated methods for the class. When planning for teaching and learning in the area of SPHE, a variety of teaching strategies needs to be considered. These will

respond to the particular challenges faced by students with learning difficulties in engaging fully in the stages of learning in SPHE. (NCCA MGD guidelines)

Adaptations to the way in which the content is delivered will be made for children with special educational needs. Consultation with parents 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 needs should be detailed in their SSP or SSPP in consultation with parents/guardians.

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 gender identity taught in RSE. However, as part of The Anti-Bullying Procedures 2013, schools must address identity-based bullying such as homophobic bullying and include preventative educational strategies. In order for the RSE policy to be fully in line with these procedures, if questions arise about gender identity, and attitudes or opinions about gender identity 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 the formal RSE lessons

Appropriate vocabulary in formal teaching:

- Relating to sexuality, growing up, physical changes, parts of the body and feelings will be used. The use of slang will be discouraged
- Anatomical terms and language introduced is consistent with RSE Materials Books

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 perceive the topics or questions to be embarrassing.

We use some simple principles when fostering discussion and questioning:

- No personal questions of the teacher
- A question box may be used
- The teacher will be mindful of individual pupil's 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 that was used was slang language, what they meant to ask was....

Question Box

For older children, a 'question box' may 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.

- 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.

Assessment

Assessment is essential to RSE as it is to any other subject. In the development of an RSE policy there should be agreement on the role of assessment in RSE, the tools to be used in assessing children, and the ways in which the child's progress can be communicated to the child, to parents and to other teachers.

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:

- adapt learning and teaching strategies used in the classroom to ensure that they are appropriate to the objectives of the curriculum and the ways in which children learn
- assess the effectiveness of learning through the school climate and atmosphere, in the discrete time and throughout other subjects discover what the child knows, understands and can do
- promote self-assessment in the child, where he/she learns the value of monitoring his/her own progress and develops some responsibility for his/her own learning. The child is helped to set realistic goals and targets and to become aware of his/her own strengths and difficulties
- explore how the child transfers learning from one situation to another
- communicate with the child, parents and others regarding the child's abilities, strengths and overall progress in RSE.

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 interest
- Use of teacher-designed tasks such as worksheets, quizzes or games

- Use of reflection or learning log.

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. It might be appropriate to encourage children to tell you anything private after lessons. 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 2017.

- The school follows Children First Guidelines 2017 and the revised Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post Primary Schools 2023
- 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

Teachers will ensure that all resources used are free of bias and gender stereotyping, demonstrate equality and equity, and are child friendly. The primary resources used are from the PDST website.

Relationships and Sexuality Education Resource Materials (DES) - each class teacher has a copy of the appropriate manual or access to it in online/pdf format.

Other resources that support the broader aims of RSE include:

- ❖ Stay Safe programme
- ❖ Walk Tall Programme
- ❖ Anatomical Dolls and Story books
- ❖ Busy Bodies Booklet. This booklet was developed to support the teaching of the 3rd, 4th, 5th and 6th class component of RSE within the context of SPHE
- ❖ INTO Different Families, Same love Poster.
- ❖ RESPECT guidelines
- ❖ All Together Now
- ❖ Making the Links and Beyond

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. However, there are numerous other resources available to teach the content of RSE.

Teacher Support for RSE Teaching

- Opportunities provided by our Education Centre will be brought to the attention of staff members.
- Teachers will be encouraged to attend CPD in RSE.
- Staff meetings utilised as a platform for discussion and development of RSE materials
- Support from a PDST Advisor
- Promotion and communication of resources available from www.pdst.ie.

Bibliography and Reference Guide

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- Education Act 1998, section 30, subsection 2 (e)
- National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (2007), Guidelines for Teachers of Students with General Learning Difficulties, Department of Education, Dublin
- Talking to Your Young Child about Relationships, Sexuality and Growing Up [accessed on www.pdst.ie/RSE]

Review

The policy will be reviewed when the new curriculum for SPHE and Wellbeing is introduced or when Child Protection guidelines are updated.