

Relationships and Sexuality Education Policy

School Details

Scoil Mhuire Gan Smál is a primary school in Inchicore, Dublin 8. Our school is mixed gender and has classes from Junior Infants to Sixth. The school is a designated DEIS school.

Introductory Statement

This policy statement is an approved approach to the teaching of RSE in Scoil Mhuire Gan Smál. It was developed in 2017 by the RSE Policy Committee, which included two teachers, two representatives of the Board of Management and two parent representatives, and was reviewed and amended in 2019. It was developed to inform teachers and parents as to the material covered in the RSE programme (both the relationships and sensitive aspects) within the SPHE curriculum. The policy was updated, amended, and presented to the school staff at a meeting in November 2019. This was following a major review of RSE in primary and post-primary schools carried out by the NCCA (National Council for Curriculum and Assessment). This policy was again presented to school staff in March 2023 and amendments were taken into account and fulfilled.

School Mission Statement

Our school, in partnership with parents, aims to educate and prepare children for life in their community. We propose to do this by fostering independence, confidence and self-worth and by promoting Christian values in a safe, supportive, happy and caring environment for all.

School Philosophy

Scoil Mhuire gan Smál is a Catholic school under the patronage of the Bishop of Dublin. It is managed by a Board of Management, elected according to the procedures agreed by the Partners in Education. The school has a Catholic ethos and this ethos is a guiding principle in the formulation and implementation of this RSE Policy. This ethos recognises the value and dignity of each pupil and all those working in the school community, and aims at promoting the full and harmonious development of all aspects of the person, including:

- Relationship with God
- Relationship with family
- Relationship with teachers
- Relationship with self
- Relationship with others
- Relationship with the environment.

This ethos also acknowledges the cultural and religious values of all the pupils attending the school. The school recognises that the parents are the primary educators of their children and we support them in that role.

In the area of RSE, above all, the schools' role is subsidiary to that of the parents. We support and complement their work.

Definition of RSE

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 (p. 5 NCCA curriculum and guidelines for RSE). In particular, it addresses the meaning of human sexuality, relationships and growth and development relevant to personal and social skills. RSE is the formal approach to educating children in:

- Relationships with others – parents, siblings, friends and the community in general
- Respect for themselves and others
- Physical development – bodily functions and changes, and personal hygiene
- Emotional development – maturing in society
- Parenting, personal and social skills and relationships
- Sexuality in context – part of a loving relationship.

Relationship of RSE to SPHE and Religion

Social, Personal and Health Education contributes to developing the work of the school in promoting the health and well-being of children and young people. This happens in the context of their emotional, moral, social and spiritual growth, as well as their intellectual, physical, political, religious and creative development. ('Relationships and Sexuality Education in Primary School – Tips for Parents Booklet' - PDST).

The key characteristics of this programme are that SPHE is a lifelong process and is a shared responsibility between family, school, health professionals and the community. The main strands of the SPHE programme are:

- Myself
- Myself and Others
- Myself and the Wider World

RSE should include an input from all and is based on the needs of the child. It is clear that the Relationships and Sexuality Programme is correctly defined as being an integral part of the programme outlined above. Sexually sensitive issues will be covered within the strand units:

- Taking care of my body
- Growing and changing
- Safety and protection (All within the strand 'Myself')
- Media Education (Within the strand 'Myself and the Wider World')

As stated previously, the content of all lessons will be governed by the school's Catholic ethos as taught in the Grow in Love Religion programme.

The RSE programme in our school is spiral in nature and is revisited at different stages throughout the child's time in school. This will provide opportunities to consolidate and build on previous learning. It also allows for issues and topics to be explored and treated in a manner appropriate to the children's needs, abilities and levels of maturity.

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

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

Traditionally we have been a child-centred school. The educational and emotional needs of the children in our care are central to our planning and policy making processes. We have always, and will always, continue to put the welfare of the children first.

Included in the school curriculum in Scoil Mhuire Gan Smál/ Policies that support SPHE and RSE are:

- Religious Education (Grow in Love)
- SPHE lessons (provided through discrete curricular time and integration)
- Stay Safe Programme
- Walk Tall Programme
- Webwise Resources
- Weaving Well-Being
- Wellbeing Policy
- Anti-Bullying Policy
- Code of Behaviour
- Child Protection Policy and Risk Assessment
- KOAR values initiative
- Roots of Empathy (SCP personnel trained)
- Enrolment Policy
- Mobile phone policy
- Healthy Eating Policy
- School Tour Policy
- School Visitors Policy
- Internet Safety Policy
- RESPECT Guidelines (suggested approaches to teaching about different families) e.g. Different Families, Same Love
- Adapted resources for SEN from www.pdst.ie

In keeping with the sentiment and spirit of these policies, we informally support many of 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 well being of all of the members of the school community.

Aims of our RSE programme

When due account is taken of intrinsic abilities and varying circumstances, the Relationships and Sexuality Education curriculum should enable the child to:

- 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
- 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, change and understand that

- their developing sexuality is an important aspect of self-identity
- To enable the child to be comfortable with the sexuality of oneself and others while growing and developing
- Develop personal skills, which will help to establish and sustain healthy personal relationships
- Develop some coping strategies to protect themselves 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
- Develop a critical understanding of external influences on lifestyles and decision-making

Guidelines for the Management and Organisation of RSE in our School

Curriculum Matters

The curriculum as published by the NCCA will be followed. All content objectives will be covered by the time each pupil leaves 6th class – (**see Appendix A for further details**). The curriculum will be taught from Infants to 6th class. It will be taught by the teaching staff. Occasionally it may be deemed necessary for an outside speaker to address the “sexually sensitive issues” i.e. puberty, reproductive system, conception, birth and sexual intercourse. All resources used will be in keeping with the ethos of the school and this policy.

- Sensitive issues classes are generally taught from infants to 6th during the two weeks leading up to Easter throughout the school.
- If, for any reason, an outside speaker is used, the SPHE coordinator/principal will make them fully aware of school policy. The class teacher will remain with the class during the lesson.

Organisational Matters

- Prior to the teaching of lessons involving ‘sensitive issues’, parents will be informed (by Aladdin message).
- With regard to matters of a confidential nature, the school cannot take any responsibility for what is discussed in the yard or classroom. Should a child who is withdrawn from the sexually sensitive classes (at parents’ request) receive inappropriate information from others outside of these classes, it will be the responsibility of the parent/guardian to address the issues.
- Any teacher has the right to opt-out from teaching the sexually sensitive issues in RSE. It is the responsibility of the Board of Management to ensure that the curriculum will be delivered to the children by another teacher or an outside speaker.
- Parents are welcome to view the curriculum and may speak to the class teacher if they have any concerns.

Parental Involvement

Parents/Guardians are the primary educators of their children and, as such, the school supports them in this role. The Parents’ Council may on occasion arrange for speakers/meetings to help them in the task of communicating with their children on aspects of their development. Parents/Guardians may access copies of the policy from the school office or school website.

It should be noted 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 or in the case of a student who has reached the age of 18 years. Therefore, parents have the right to withdraw their child out of the sensitive aspects of RSE if they so wish.

As RSE is an integral component to SPHE, consent is not needed. Parents will be informed that the school fully implements the RSE strands of the SPHE programme including sensitive aspects through the school’s policy.

Parents will be informed in advance of lessons on the sensitive areas of the RSE programme,

with a letter (attached to the Aladdin message) relevant to what will be taught at their child's class level.

Parents 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 curriculum can be found at [Relationships and Sexuality Education | PDST](#) The school acknowledges that parents have the primary responsibility for educating their children about growing and changing.

Following discussion with the principal and the class teacher, if a parent wishes to withdraw their child from the sensitive lessons, it should be given in writing and this will be centrally filed. Alternative arrangements will then be made. **(Please see Appendix B.)**

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 hear on yard/ in the school community.

Communicate before sensitive strand units are covered – notice sent home (Aladdin message)

Meet and listen to any concerned parents and go through lessons

Assistance from H/S/C/L teacher

Distribute copies of 'Busy Bodies'/ 'Tom's Flower Power' (as appropriate)

Dealing with Questions

It is natural that children should wish to ask questions in the area of RSE. However, this area is treated somewhat differently from other subjects due to its sensitive nature.

All questions answered will reflect the parameters of the curriculum. Certain topics will not be covered explicitly but may arise in discussion i.e. abortion and contraception. Questions to the teacher may be written or oral within the group setting and answered within the boundaries of the curriculum and school policy. If any questions asked by the children are judged inappropriate, the teacher will refer the child to their parents, or state that this information may be available at a later stage of the curriculum. The school cannot guarantee confidentiality if a child asks a question of a personal nature or discloses personal information.

At all times the child's and teacher's right to privacy will be maintained.

Curriculum Planning

RSE forms part of the national curriculum for SPHE by NCCA and will be taught from infants to 6th class. RSE will be covered under the following strands and strand units of the SPHE curriculum:

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 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.**

<p>Topics covered up to 2nd include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• 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 male/ female body using appropriate anatomical terms (Senior Infants)• Naming the parts of the male/ female body using appropriate anatomical terms and identify some of their functions (1st/2nd).	<p>Topics from 3rd to 6th include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• 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 sequence of development of the human baby in the womb(3rd, 4th class)• Introduction to puberty and changes (3rd, 4th, 5th and 6th class)• Changes that occur in boys and girls with the onset of puberty (5th and 6th Class)• Reproductive system of male/female adults (5th and 6th class)• 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 of SPHE and RSE Any or all of the following techniques will allow the child to play an active part in the learning process:

- Discussion
- Role play
- Interviewing friends, or other school pupils, family members
- Surveys of attitudes
- Analysing and evaluating newspapers and magazines, agony columns, television schedules
- Hosting visitors
- Projects
- Modelling
- Designing advertisements
- Writing captions
- Ranking statements
- Describing photographs
- Viewing and discussing videos.

When implementing the programme, staff at SMGS National School will 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.

The RSE curriculum may 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 22/2010).

Resources

Lesson plans from the DES have been assessed and amended where necessary in line with this school policy. The Grow in Love, the Stay Safe programme, and a selection of other appropriate resources will also be used. All resources are available for parents/guardians to view if they so request prior to the delivery of the lesson. Lesson resources are available online. Other resources:

- Anatomically correct dolls
- Busy Bodies parents' manual
- Tom's Flower Power pupil booklet
- Relationships and Sexuality Education books on-line resources and other on-line resources
- Walk Tall

Assessment.

Teacher may select from the following:

- Pupil feedback and self-assessment
- Teacher observation
- Teacher questioning
- Teacher designed tasks
- Portfolio work

Differentiation

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 with 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. Examples:

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

Pupils with Special 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 Individual Education Planning process/ Student Support File, 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 suitably 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.

Adaptions to the way in which the content is delivered will be made for children with Special Educational Needs. Anticipation of the children's needs will be central to ensuring learning is meaningful and may involve consultation with parents/ guardians in advance.

- 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/ SSF in consultation with parents/guardians.

Provision for Ongoing Support

- Parents are welcome to view curriculum if they so wish (on-line links).
- Funding will be sought for the provision of suitable materials when deemed necessary.
- Opportunities provided by our Education centre will be brought to the attention of staff members. Career development will be sought for staff when required, or as requested.

Review

The staff, under the guidance of the Principal and SPHE Coordinator will review this policy every two years. This policy will also be reviewed should the need arise. This policy was reviewed on 27th March 2023.

Ratification and Communication

The Board of Management of Scoil Mhuire Gan Smál ratified this amended plan in _____.

Signature: _____

Graham Finlay
Chairperson of the Board of Management

Date: _____

Signature: _____

David Gough
Principal, Scoil Mhuire Gan Smál

Date: _____

Appendix A

RSE - Sensitive Areas

Junior Infants

New Life – mention of baby in the womb.

Senior Infants

My Body – specific names for male and female sex organs – vulva/ vagina, penis, womb.

First Class

New Life – New baby. Baby joined to mother by umbilical cord – mention breast-feeding.

Second Class

Birth of baby through vagina. Mention umbilical cord and breast-feeding.

Third Class

As for second class, but in more detail.

Fourth Class

Language around baby's development in womb i.e. fertilised egg, cord. Pictures of foetuses (in RSE manual/ Walk Tall books) to be used.

Fifth and Sixth Classes

Menstruation in the context of hygiene and growth from a girl to a woman.

Boys and girls development – puberty.

How does new life begin? (6th class only)

Biological facts as follows: (6th class only)

- What journey does the egg make?
- What journey does the sperm make?
- Where do they meet?
- What happens when they meet?
- Optional videos : Fifth class – Growing
- Sixth class – Busy Bodies.

Appendix B

Scoil Mhuire Gan Smál,
Tyrconnell Road,
Inchicore,
Dublin 8.

Dear Parents and Guardians,

Relationships and Sexuality Education is a key part of Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) in our school. The Department of Education requires all schools to teach RSE and to have an RSE policy. The RSE programme is not a new programme but it is obligatory for schools to teach this part of the curriculum.

- The RSE programme aims to provide opportunities for children to learn about relationships and sexuality in ways that help them to think and act in a moral, caring and responsible way. It teaches children about their own growth and development. About 90% of RSE is relationships/ friendships; 10% sexually sensitive issues.

Topics are explored with children in an age-appropriate way that takes into account their level of development.

Topics addressed in RSE include feelings, friendships, families, bodily changes, puberty, pregnancy and conception – according to the class level.

In our school, the sensitive/ sexuality aspects of the RSE programme are taught in the period leading up to the Easter break. The information taught is covered in a series of lessons, always appropriate to the age and maturity level of the children and as approved by the Department of Education.

During the teaching of the sensitive lessons, worksheets are sent home so that all parents and guardians are aware of the content.

If you wish for your child to **opt out** of these lessons, please fill out and sign this letter.

You can opt out of the RSE programme on the understanding that you undertake to complete it at home. All RSE curricular content can be found at

<https://www.pdst.ie/primary/health-wellbeing/RSE>

Please make an appointment with your child's class teacher if you wish to make further enquiries.

To whom it concerns,
I do not wish my child _____ (child's name)
to participate in the sensitive/ sexuality lessons of the RSE programme in my
child's school and I undertake to complete these lessons at home.

Signed: _____

Date: _____