

# *Athlone Mixed N.S.* *Relationships and Sexuality Education* *(RSE) Policy*

This policy statement is an approved approach to the teaching of RSE in Athlone Mixed N.S.. It was revised in 2019 by the staff and Board of Management. It was developed to inform teachers and parents as to the material covered in the RSE programme within the SPHE curriculum.

## **School Philosophy**

Athlone Mixed N.S. is a Church of Ireland school. The school's 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:

- a) relationship with God
- b) relationship with family
- c) relationship with teachers
- d) relationship with self
- e) relationship with others
- f) 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 compliment 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). 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.
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## **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.

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

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.

As stated previously, the content of all lessons will be governed by the schools' ethos as taught in the Follow Me programme.

### **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 Athlone Mixed N.S. is:

- Religious Education (Follow Me Programme)
- SPHE
- Stay Safe Programme

### **Stay Safe Programme**

We teach the Stay Safe Programme to provide children with personal safety skills. We aim to reduce vulnerability to child abuse and bullying through the provision of personal safety education for the children and training for teachers and other school partners where possible.

#### **Training:**

In the school year 2017-2018 Ms Stephanie Bradley engaged in stay Safe Training. Other teachers had previous training.

#### **Teaching the Programme:**

It is the policy in our school, for all classes, to teach the Stay Safe Programme in the final Summer Term.

Parents are made aware that the programme is being taught and are updated on the content of the lessons by receiving worksheets sent home for their perusal and signature.

#### **Stay Safe Lessons**

The Stay Safe Programme is developed mentally tailored and contains four sets of lessons suited to the various classes.

The lesson plans are divided into the five stay Safe Topics

1. Feeling Safe and unsafe
2. Friendship and bullying
3. Touches
4. Secrets and telling
5. Strangers

### **Policies which support SPHE/RSE**

- Code of behaviour and discipline policy
- Anti-Bullying Policy
- Child protection policy
- Enrolment Policy
- Healthy Eating Policy
- RE Policy
- SPHE Policy
- School Tour Policy
- School Visitors Policy
- Internet Safety Policy
- Administration of Medicines Policy.

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
- 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 6<sup>th</sup> class – (see Appendix A for further details). The curriculum will be taught from Infants to 6<sup>th</sup> class. It will be ideally be taught by the teaching staff. The class teacher addresses the “sexually sensitive issues” i.e. puberty, reproductive system, conception, birth and sexual intercourse on the 5<sup>th</sup> & 6<sup>th</sup> Class curriculum. 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 4<sup>th</sup> during the month of February. Topic 1 on the fifth class programme (menstruation) is generally delivered in April, with Topic 2 (puberty) in May. The sixth class programme is delivered during the child's final term in school
- In a multi class situation, the younger class will be withdrawn when topics being taught are not age-appropriate
- When an outside speaker is used, the SPHE coordinator/principal will make them fully aware of school policy. Parents/guardians will be notified of the name of this speaker in advance of the lesson. 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 letter with an accompanying outline of the lesson (including vocabulary to be used)
- It is a parents/guardians right to withdraw a pupil from these lessons. This request for withdrawal must be made in writing.
- If parents/guardians request the withdrawal of a child from RSE lessons, provision will be made for them to leave the classroom at that time. Supervision will be provided. 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 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 responsibility of 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.

### **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. 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 to be 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*

### **Parental Involvement**

Parents/Guardians are the primary educators of their children and as such the school supports them in this role. As stated parents/guardians will be given the option of withdrawing their child from a particular lesson if they so wish. The Parents' Association 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.

### **Resources**

programme, 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.

### **Provision for Ongoing Support**

- Parents are welcome to view curriculum if they so wish.
- 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 will review this policy every three years. This policy will also be reviewed should the need arise.

### **Ratification and Communication**

This policy was ratified by Board of Management on

Date: 16<sup>th</sup> January 2019

Signed: William J Steacy

Chairperson, Board of Management.