

Relationships and Sexuality Education (R.S.E.)

St. Mary's Boys' National School is a Boys' primary school with over 500 pupils on roll between the ages of four and thirteen. There is a large staff which includes an administrative principal, a number of resource teachers and a teacher of English for non-nationals. In addition to the teaching staff our school has a number of ancillary staff which includes a caretaker, cleaning staff, two school secretaries and a number of Special Needs Assistants.

Maynooth BNS is managed by a Board of Management and the ethos is Roman Catholic. It is this ethos which will inform the R.S.E. policy. The school ethos is one which values and respects the contribution of the entire school community. It sets out to promote good working relations between teachers, management and parents all of whom work together for the benefit of children. The school provides a curriculum and a working atmosphere to help each child develop his potential to the full.

The school community believes in the holistic development of the child - academic, social, spiritual, physical, psychological and emotional, recognising that each child is unique with a culture history and background that is also unique. It is the pupil's right to have access to the entire range of education which the school provides.

The school recognises that the parents are the primary educators of their children and supports them in that role. In the area of R.S.E. the school's role is subsidiary to that of parents and its supports and complements their work in this area. This policy is the result of a partnership between parents, teachers and management.

Definition of R.S.E.

R.S.E. is the process of acquiring knowledge and understanding and of developing attitudes, beliefs and values about relationships, intimacy and sexual identity. In the school context, structured opportunities will be provided for pupils to acquire a knowledge and understanding of human relationships and sexuality through processes which will enable them to form values and establish behaviors within a moral, spiritual and social framework.

Aims of R.S.E.

At primary level R.S.E. aims to help children learn more at home and in school about their own development and about their friendships and relationships with others. This work will be based on developing a good self-image, promoting respect for themselves and for others and providing them with appropriate information. Central to R.S.E. is the fostering of self-esteem through which the pupil becomes more responsible in making choices and decisions in all aspects of life and particularly in those relating to sexuality and relationships.

Broad Objectives of R.S.E.

The broad objectives of the RSE programme are to:

- Enable the child to acquire and develop knowledge and understanding of self.
- Develop an appreciation of dignity, uniqueness and wellbeing of others.

Understand the nature, growth and development of relationships within families, in friendship and in wider contexts.

Develop an awareness and understanding of differing family patterns.

Come to value family life and appreciate the responsibilities of parenthood.

Develop strategies to make decisions, solve problems and implement action in various personal, social and health contexts.

Become aware of a variety of ways in which individuals grow and change and understand that their developing sexuality is an aspect of self-identity

Develop personal skills which help to establish and sustain healthy personal relationships.

Develop some coping strategies to protect self and others from various forms of abuse and acquire and improve skills of communication and social interaction.

Acquire and use an appropriate vocabulary to discuss feeling, sexuality, growth and development.

Develop a critical understanding of external influences on lifestyle and decision making.

Planning and Implementation

In planning and implementing the R.S.E. programme we will have regard to the following:

- (1) The child's entitlement to appropriate R.S.E.
- (2) The right to confidentiality and privacy of pupils, parents and staff.
- (3) The rights and responsibilities of parents.
- (4) The professional judgment and expertise of teachers.
- (5) That materials/teaching aids, information and speakers used to teach the programme shall conform with policy and ethos.

R.S.E. in the context of Social Personal and Health Education

S.P.H.E. provides opportunities for pupils to learn basic personal and social skills and to foster integrity, self-confidence and self-esteem while nurturing sensitivity to the feelings and rights of others. Aspects of S.P.H.E. have always been taught in the school in Social and Environmental Studies, Religious Education, Physical Education, Stay Safe Programme and R.S.E. in 5th and 6th classes.

In order that S.P.H.E. will be taught in a more structured way, a curriculum in S.P.H.E. has been prepared by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment as part of the Revised Curriculum. R.S.E. is an integral part of S.P.H.E. and will be taught in a series of lessons within the S.P.H.E. Programme.

Current Provision in S.P.H.E.

A Code of Discipline and Behaviour and a Policy on Bullying have been drawn up for the school with co-operation of teachers, parents and management. In keeping with the sentiment and spirit of these policies the school informally supports many of the aims on which S.P.H.E./R.S.E. are modelled.

It encourages good behaviour, open communication, understanding and tolerance of differences and respect for self and for others. A sense of responsibility is fostered and attention is paid to the well-being of all members of the school community.

The Alive O programme is used in all classes. This programme extensively covers many of the topics of the S.P.H.E. and R.S.E. Programmes. The topics that particularly relate to self-esteem and inter-personal relationships, are dealt with as they arise in the programme.

Topics related to hygiene, care of the body, diet, adequate sleep, etc. are all dealt with in the context of Physical and Health Education and on an informal basis at appropriate levels in the classroom.

The Stay Safe programme is taught in the school. Children in the school are taught the programme at appropriate levels four times during their primary school cycle – in Senior Infants, 1st Class, 3rd Class and 5th Class.

For many years children in senior classes have been offered the opportunity of participating in a short programme on R.S.E. at a level suited to their age and in conformity with ethos of the school. These programmes have been conducted by visiting specialists with training in conducting such courses. The content of these programmes will cover what is currently proposed in the R.S.E. curriculum.

Prior to this programme taking place each year, parents of children in 5th & 6th class have been informed about the course and asked to signal their agreement to their son taking part. Parents have always had the right to withdraw children from this programme.

Management and Organisation of R.S.E.

The Principal, in consultation with the staff, will make provision for the delivery of the R.S.E. Programme.

Parents will be advised of the content of this programme. They may withdraw their child if they so wish, but must be mindful of their duties to provide for education in this area.

Where a teacher has a conscientious objection to delivery of the core lessons provision will be made for that part of the Programme to be delivered by a colleague/visiting speaker.

Classroom strategy questions that may arise in class:

Teachers will explain that the amount of information given will be part of this year's programme and further information will be given at a later stage. If the question is factual and within the agreed programme for that age group, the teacher will answer it.

If the question is a moral one, Catholic Church teaching will be adhered to.

If it is felt that the question is genuine the teacher may advise the child to ask at home or may consult the parents to get their permission to answer the question.

Teachers will not answer personal questions. The child's and teacher's right to privacy will be respected at all times.

Ongoing Support, Development and Review -

Where opportunities arise, in-career development will be sought for teachers.

Parents' Association may be able to access training for parents.

Working Group

This Policy statement was drawn up by the RSE Policy Committee of the school and approved by the Board of Management in 2000.

The policy was reviewed in December 2005.

This policy statement was reviewed in September 2013