

Relationships
and Sexuality
Education
Policy

School Details

Scoil Mhuire Abbeyside is a mixed gender school in Ireland. The school has a catholic ethos.

Introductory Statement

All schools are required to have an RSE policy to detail how RSE is taught in the school, including the sensitive aspects. This policy is an approved approach to the teaching of Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE). It was developed to inform teachers and parents as to what material is covered in the RSE programme within SPHE both formally and informally. The first RSE policy was developed in 2003 with revisions in 2008 and again in 2019.

School Philosophy

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 ethos means that we value respect, tolerance and openness through the lived experience of the children and school community. Parents 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.

Definition of RSE

Relationships and Sexuality Education is an integral part of SPHE 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. 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 his/her 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.

RSE is an integral part of SPHE. SPHE is taught through school atmosphere and culture, integration and discrete teaching time. Formal RSE lessons and informal RSE messages must be consistent with the whole school approach to SPHE. child and his/her environment, with appropriate adaptations made within the curriculum to suit individual requirements and individual school situations.\

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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 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.

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Current Provision Included in the School Curriculum is:

- SPHE lessons (provided through discrete curricular time and integration)
- Use of the RSE Manuals and Busy Bodies resource
- Stay Safe Programme
- Walk Tall Programme
- Webwise resources
- All Together Now – Homophobic and Transphobic bullying lessons
- RESPECT Guidelines (suggested approaches to teaching about different families) ▪ Adapted resources for SEN from www.pdst.ie
- Religious Education.

Aims of our RSE Programme

- 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

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

- 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 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 Statement
- Substance Use Policy
- Code of Behaviour
 - Anti-Bullying Policy
- Enrolment Policy
- Acceptable Use Policy
- Healthy Eating Policy.

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 each year as laid out in the curriculum, and utilising the RSE manuals to complement their teaching.

Management of RSE

- The strands Growing and Changing, and Taking Care of my Body are covered in Year One of a 2 year SPHE plan
- The sensitive lessons are covered as part of these broad topics (as outlined below and see appendix 1)

- Special arrangements exist for the delivery of the sensitive elements from 4th class up
- 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.

Parental Involvement

- Parents will be informed that the school fully implements the RSE strands of the SPHE programme including sensitive aspects of the programme at enrolment
 - Parents will be informed in advance of lessons on the sensitive areas of the RSE programme, with a letter relevant to what will be taught at their child's class level, example of letter see Appendix 2
 - The letter will be issued in advance, giving parents an opportunity to meet with relevant class teachers if they so wish, to discuss or clarify what is covered and to prepare their children, it also gives parents 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 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 have the primary responsibility for educating their children about growing and changing
 - Following discussion with Principal and Class Teacher, if a parent wishes to withdraw their child from the sensitive lessons it should be given in writing stating their reasons for doing so

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”. Your policy must detail how you hope to include and foster a relationship to support parents in their RSE education of the children in the school. Open communication at various intervals is important. 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. However, with open communication and systems of dialogue, withdrawal can be avoided. The school needs to develop effective strategies for dialogue between teachers and parents. It will be essential to SPHE that parents and teachers find ways of listening to each other and taking the opinions and concerns of both home and school into account. Examples of strategies that could be considered are:

- creating structures for individual consultation with parents and with members of the community

- arranging meetings at appropriate times
- creating a balance between class meetings (for example to introduce the curriculum and/or classroom strategies) and larger group meetings
- ensuring clarity of language in any form of written communication from the school.

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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.

Topics covered up to 2nd include:

- 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 (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 6th include:

- 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).

Sensitive content 4th – 6th

Sensitive content is taught as per 2 year SPHE plan – here is a standard 2-year plan for SPHE taken from The Making the Links resource

Month Year 1 Year 2
 September / October Self-Identity (Myself) Myself and my Family (Myself and Others)
 November / December My Friends and Other People (Myself and Others) Relating to others (Myself and Others)
 January / February Safety and Protection (Myself) Growing and Changing (Myself)
 March /April Making Decisions * (Myself)

Taking Care of my Body (Myself)
 May / June Media Education (Myself and the Wider World)
 Developing Citizenship (Myself and the Wider World)

Approaches & Methodologies

When implementing the programme, staff at Scoil Mhuire Abbeyside 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 will 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 42/2018).

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/ online content

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 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.

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.

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 or IPLP in consultation with parents/guardians.

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, 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. 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)

Language

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 your 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 (see Appendix 1)

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 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.

Questions

We use some simple principles when fostering discussion and questioning

- No personal questions of the teacher
- 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 that was used was slang language, what they meant to ask was....

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.

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 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.

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.

Confidentiality

- 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 tell or inform him/her about what happened.

Resources

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 ^[L]_[SEP]

- 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
 - Picture books across the 9 grounds of equality
 - INTO Different Families, Same love Poster.

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. It would be important to have criteria when selecting relevant resources (retrieved from SPHE curriculum)

- Free of bias and gender stereotyping - Demonstrate equality and equity - Child friendly

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.

- RESPECT guidelines 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

- 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.

Review

The policy will be reviewed after 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 mad

Sometimes, RSE, initially, can cause some worry to teach. However on-going training and review can alleviate this. PDST provide in-school training as well as seminars in the first and second term throughout the education centres.

The nature of RSE means that the needs of children change from year to year. Flexibility within your RSE policy can allow for this. However on-going review and evaluation of the policy and programmes in place are necessary to ensure it is meeting the needs of the children in your school.

Appendix 1

Topics covered up to 2nd include:

- Keeping Safe • Bodily changes from birth (birth-9)
- Making age appropriate choices
- Appreciating the variety of family types and an 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 (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 6th include:

- Bodily changes • Healthy eating, personal hygiene, exercise • Keeping Safe • Expressing Feelings • Appreciating the variety of family types within our school and community and how we 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/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)

Appendix 2

Dear Parents/Guardians

Relationships and Sexuality education is an integral part of the S.P.H.E programme. The sensitive elements of the Relationships and Sexuality education programme are covered under the Strand Units, 'Growing and Changing' and 'Taking Care of my Body'. We will be completing these Strand Units with all class levels in the forthcoming weeks.

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- Naming the parts of the male/ female body using appropriate anatomical terms and identify some of their functions (1st/2nd) The Language at taught at this level will be.....

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The class teacher will send home appropriate home school links pages from the Relationships and Sexuality manual which outline the material that will be covered in class and encourage further discussion on the topics at home.

If you have any questions, please make an appointment to see the class teacher.

Yours sincerely

Bibliography

- RSE Training Support Service for schools (1995), Relationships and Sexuality Resource Materials, Department of Education , Dublin
 - Child Abuse Protection Programme (2016), Stay Safe Programme, PDST publications
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- 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]