



Monkstown Educate Together  
National School

# Relationships & Sexuality Education Policy

Monkstown Educate Together N.S.

April 2019

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## **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 RSE policy was first developed in the early years of the school and more recently, revised as a full policy in 2010, reviewed in 2014 and reviewed and revised in 2019.

## **Our school philosophy**

Monkstown Educate Together National School strives to create a happy, safe, inclusive and nurturing environment where the uniqueness of each child is celebrated. We aim to provide a space where children are educated and where all members of the school community can grow, develop and achieve their full potential. We aspire to excellence in an atmosphere of respect, openness and joy.

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 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. SPHE and RSE are key components in supporting our school and children to develop into healthy young adults.

A programme of relationships and sexuality education in Monkstown Educate Together National School will: recognise that the primary responsibility for relationships and sexuality education lies with each child's parents or guardians; be consistent with and promote the fundamental principles and ethos of Monkstown Educate Together National School (i.e. multi-denominational, co-educational, democratic, and child-centred); be implemented in consultation with the full school community including family I teachers and the patron; be subject to ongoing review and development.

## **Definition of R.S.E.**

“Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) is a lifelong process of acquiring knowledge and understanding and of developing attitudes, beliefs and values about sexual identity, relationships and intimacy. This education is delivered consciously and unconsciously by parents, teachers, peers, adults and the media.”

*Relationships and Sexuality Education: Policy Guidelines* p. 4 (1997)

## **The relationship of R.S.E. to S.P.H.E.**

In Monkstown Educate Together National School, the R.S.E. programme will be administered in the context of Social, Personal and Health Education.

S.P.H.E. promotes the health and well-being of all children. It does so in a manner which encompasses their physical, social, moral, emotional and spiritual growth. S.P.H.E. supports the child as his/ her understanding of the world and their place within it develops. In M.E.T.N.S. we strive to create a happy, warm school environment where the curriculum can be delivered fully and effectively. The objectives of the R.S.E. programme – such as the development of healthy relationships, and an understanding of the changes we go through emotionally and physically as we grow – are contained within the wider aims of the S.P.H.E. curriculum.

## **What the school currently provides**

R.S.E. forms part of social, personal and health education, which is allocated approximately thirty minutes per week as per the N.C.C.A. curriculum guidelines. As with other subjects, teachers may choose to integrate R.S.E. with other subjects, or to block off chunks of time over a short period, to administer a series of specific lessons to which they wish to allocate further time. Many of the themes and topics covered under the relationships and sexuality education are also dealt with in other parts of the S.P.H.E. and science curricula, and as part of the Learn Together curriculum.

The school currently provides for R.S.E. delivery in a variety of ways, both discrete (formal) and integrated (informal). Class teachers are the primary administrators of relationships and sexuality education in school. Where it is deemed appropriate, an external person or persons may be invited into the classroom to support the teachers’ on-going work. All speakers and external groups must adhere to the school’s policy on the administration of R.S.E., in compliance with the school’s inclusive ethos.

### Informal provision for R.S.E. in our school

- Monkstown Educate Together National School has a strong ethos of inclusivity, where difference is celebrated.
- We treat all children equally, and seek to create a caring and safe school environment for the pupils.
- Through our value of the month, we aim to engender values such as respect and responsibility in our school environment. These values encourage healthy, happy relationships between our pupils. It also promotes a positive sense self-esteem.
- As we are a democratic school, we offer children a role in the running of their school, and facilitate their voice at a whole-school level through frameworks such as the student council. At a class level, children are involved in the creation of the class rules, and our positive behaviour policy focuses on encouraging the child to make good choices, whilst developing their sense of self-worth. Rewards – such as those for pupils who show great kindness, have good attendance, who embody the value of the month – help to develop self-awareness and self-esteem.
- Parents, guardians and other members of our school community are also invited to contribute to our school through faith-based and cultural assemblies and open days such as *Special Relatives and Grandparents' Day*.

### Programmes used for the provision of R.S.E.

- In our school, teachers use a selection of programmes to assist them in the provision of R.S.E. including *Stay Safe* (personal safety skills and abuse prevention program taught in the second year of each band; PDST); *Relationships and Sexuality Education* books (resource materials for relationships and sexuality education for all levels; DES); *Walk Tall* (classroom materials to support SPHE; DES, PDST) and All Together Now (addressing LGBTI+ issues and bullying for 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> Classes; belong<sup>TO</sup>, St. Pats DCU, DES). Additional programmes relating to the children's development of their relationships with others such as the Weaving Wellbeing programme, Friends For Life, Sticks and Stones, Quality Circle Time and other relevant interventions take place throughout the school as appropriate. Some of these have been facilitated by persons other than the class teacher; however, the class teacher is always involved with and present during their administration. Support for such programmes may also come from other members of staff including the principal.

### The provision of R.S.E. for children with special education needs

- Where a need is identified, learning support time may be used for social groups to assist children in the development of social and play skills, leading to healthy relationships in school and in the future. R.S.E. may also be considered for inclusion as part of children's I.E.P.'s, where it is identified as an area of need beyond the provision made for it in the classroom. Additional materials may be used where appropriate to support this such as 'Healthy Bodies' (Vanderbilt) resources, specific RSE guidelines and materials from the PDST to support 'students with mild general learning disabilities' and Stay Safe guidelines for children with learning difficulties (PDST).

#### Professional development

- Staff will engage in on-going professional development as available, and teachers are offered the opportunity to attend courses to further their training in this as in other curricular areas.

#### The evaluation and review of programmes and courses

- All programmes and practices used in the school are subject to review, critique and change. Where a teacher or group of teachers is/are involved in administering a programme, they will be invited to provide feedback to the principal on it, and use their evaluation of the success of a programme to judge the suitability and efficacy of that programme for the administration of R.S.E. going forward.

## **The aims of our R.S.E. programme**

1. To enhance the personal development, self-esteem and well-being of the child.
2. To help the child to develop healthy friendships and relationships.
3. To foster an understanding of and a healthy attitude towards human sexuality and relationships.
4. To enable the child to acquire an understanding of and respect for human love, sexual intercourse, and reproduction.
5. To develop and promote in the child a sense of wonder and awe at the process of birth and new life.
6. To enable the child to be comfortable with his/her sexuality and that of others, fostering respect for difference in keeping with our Educate Together Ethos.

*Relationships and Sexuality Education Guidelines, D.E.S.*

## **Broad objectives of the RSE programme**

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 worth
- Understand the nature, growth and development of relationships within families, in friendships and wider contexts
- Develop and 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 RSE**

- Anti-Bullying Policy
- Child Protection Policy
- Child Protection Policy Statement
- Child Safeguarding Statement
- Ethical Curriculum Policy
- Garda Vetting Policy
- Health and Safety Policy
- Healthy Eating Policy
- IT policy
- Mobile Phone Policy
- Parental Involvement Policy
- Positive Behaviour Policy
- Special Educational Needs Policy
- SPHE Policy
- Stay Safe Policy
- Substance Use Policy
- Acceptable Use Policy
- Special Educational Needs Policy
- Working Together Policy



# Guidelines for the management and organisation of R.S.E. in our school

## Teachers

- Guidelines as laid down by the Department of Education and Science as discussed in this document will be followed. It is recognised that during the year a special teacher-pupil relationship develops within a class. A trust and understanding of each other is acquired and having regard to this special relationship we recognise the need to allow teachers flexibility/discretion as the need may arise when dealing with certain areas of the curriculum.
- It is envisaged that the programme will be taught in an integrated manner where possible.
- Parents are to be informed in advance of programme content.
- Parents are also to be informed in advance regarding when the formal lessons on the sensitive areas of the programme, e.g. puberty, will be covered in school.
- Visiting speakers may be used at a senior level to cover certain areas of the programme or, indeed, to reiterate or elaborate on certain aspects already covered. The visiting speaker will be advised of the school's R.S.E. policies.
- Teachers will neither give nor request personal information. A respect for personal privacy will be emphasised.
- Parents may be informed if the teacher feels that a particular child will benefit from more in-depth discussion at home of a topic covered in class.
- The correct biological terminology will be used for body parts and processes at all class levels (see attached appendix for overview of sensitive content at each class level, including specific terminology used at each level)
- Correct terminology for all types of gender identity and sexuality choices will be used where appropriate at all class levels
- Sensitive issues will be dealt with in the following class groups, in line with the class teachers' best judgement on the children's maturity and readiness:

- |                         |  |
|-------------------------|--|
| ○ Fourth Class          | Puberty will be discussed with both girls and boys; developmental stages of the foetus in the womb. Busy Bodies books are given to parents/guardians of all children in fourth class in September/October. |
| ○ Fifth and Sixth Class | Puberty, intercourse and birth will be discussed with boys and girls; issues of gender and sexuality; LGBTI+ safety and support.   |

(See attached appendix for overview of sensitive content at each class level, including specific terminology used at each level)

- Students with particular learning needs/ difficulties: each student's social and emotional development will be taken into account, and instruction will be designed based on their individual needs. Parents will be consulted around sensitive issues before they are included in a child's IEP.
- Students who have identified themselves or come out as LGBTI+ and their parents will be consulted regarding the most appropriate provision for the teaching of sensitive material in the senior classes. Material for all children will be presented in a way that respects older children becoming aware of and exploring their own gender identity and sexuality.
- Children's questions will be dealt with taking the following criteria into account, when relevant:
  - The circumstances in which the question has arisen
  - Clarifying what information is required
  - Deciding, if the issue is relevant, who it is relevant to
  - Giving an age-appropriate answer
  - Deferring the question as one which will be answered in the next lesson, one which should be answered at home, or one which will be answered more fully in the future.
- It is recognised that individual teachers have a right to opt out of teaching some parts of the RSE programme. In this case alternative arrangements will be made to ensure that the programme is taught to all classes.

## Parents

- Parents have the responsibilities to: become involved; inform themselves of the programme content; to prepare the children for the information they will acquire around the sensitive areas of the R.S.E. programme; and to discuss areas covered in school in R.S.E./ S.P.H.E. with their child(ren).
- The decision to withdraw a child from an R.S.E. class may only be taken **after a consultation meeting with the class teacher**, in which the parent will be informed of the content of a particular lesson or unit. If a parent wishes to withdraw their child from the sensitive lessons, this decision should be given in writing stating their reasons for doing so and this will be centrally filed. Every effort will be made to withdraw the child and he/she will be sent to another classroom for the duration of the lesson. 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, eg what they may hear on the yard.

NOTE: the Department of Education does not allow children to absent themselves from school while R.S.E. is being taught.

- If a parent has a particular concern or issue which has arisen as a result of an R.S.E. discussion in school they would be encouraged to discuss same with the teacher or the principal.
- Due to the sensitive nature of some R.S.E. topics, and the fact that they deal with topics like feelings and family relationships, the school encourages parents/ guardians to alert the class teacher to any unusual or potentially upsetting situations in the child's family or life beyond the school. Any information given to a class teacher may be passed on to the principal. Beyond this necessary communication, the child's right to privacy will be respected.

## **Children**

- Children will be encouraged to discuss the material being covered in class with their parents/ guardians, or older siblings. The home-school links pages which accompany the R.S.E. programme will be provided to parents to facilitate this discussion.
- In a class situation, children will be encouraged to recognise that certain information is for them only, i.e. that it is inappropriate for them to discuss the information they receive about puberty, intercourse, gender and sexuality etc. with younger siblings, friends from outside school and so on. It will be explained that other children will be given this information by their own parents and teachers when they reach the appropriate age.
- Children will also be taught to recognise that certain personal disclosures are inappropriate in the whole class setting. A respect for personal privacy and personal information will be emphasised.
- Should questions surrounding LGBTI+ gender and sexuality issues present themselves, teachers will answer questions in a factual, age-appropriate, inclusive and respectful manner.
- In light of our ethos of inclusiveness, same-sex relationships and the 'different families, same love' approach will be included when dealing with the section about families in the programme.

## Child Protection

This policy is cognisant of all aspects of our current Child Protection Policy. The school follows the DES child protection guidelines and has a child protection policy with the Principal as Designated Liaison Person (DLP) and the Deputy Principal as the Deputy DLP. Where a child protection concern is raised, the procedures outlined in the schools Child Protection Policy will be followed.

## Organisation and Curriculum Planning

RSE forms part of the national curriculum for SPHE by NCCA and will be taught from infants to sixth class. RSE will be covered both integrated with SPHE topics and discretely under the following strands and strand units of the SPHE curriculum:

**The general programme contains content covered through SPHE strands and strand units that complement the aims and objectives of RSE:**

- Self-identity
- Self-esteem
- Growing up
- Safety and protections
- Making decisions
- Family
- Friendship
- Media

**The ‘sensitive content’ section deals with any sensitive/specific content covered through the following RSE strand and strand units:**

- Myself:
- Taking care of my body
- Growing and changing
- Safety and protection

The ‘sensitive content’ as covered at each class level, including specific terminology and language used is included in an appendix to this policy along with links to further information. The RSE, Walk Tall and Stay Safe Programs are also available online. Busy Bodies books are given to parents/guardians of all children in fourth class in September/October. This material is covered in school during fifth class.

Note that specific content and topics covered for all class levels are available online here:  
Social, Personal and Health Education Primary School Curriculum  
Resource Materials for RSE Manuals for all class levels  
Appendix of sensitive content and language used attached to this policy

## **Approaches and Methodologies**

When implementing the programme, staff at Monkstown Educate Together NS 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 infants to sixth class. It will be taught through a spiral curriculum. The materials taught will reflect the needs of the children.

A variety of approaches and methodologies will be used such as stories and poems, classroom discussion, group work, games, art activities, reflection, circle time and others.

## **Differentiation**

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

- Ensuring objectives are realistic for students
- Ensuring that learning tasks are compatible with prior learning
- Organising the learning tasks into small stages and ensuring that the language used is pitched at an appropriate level
- Having short and varied tasks creating a learning environment through the use of concrete, and where possible everyday materials, and by displaying word lists, charts and pictures in the classroom environment
- Including higher-order and lower-order questioning
- Moderating whole class discussions through the use of a Question Box

## **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 in some cases to ensure learning is meaningful. Where appropriate:

- 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 relevant different or specific objectives related to the pupils own learning needs will be detailed in their IEP or SSF in consultation with parents/guardians

## **Language**

The 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 relationships and everyday interactions. Language is a powerful tool and should be used with respect and integrity for the dignity of every 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 formal RSE lessons
  - Appropriate vocabulary in formal teaching relating to sexuality, gender, 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

## **Questions**

We use some simple principles when fostering discussion and questioning

- No personal questions of the teacher or classmates
- A Question Box is often used by the children\*
- 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 any personal questions
- Somebody asked a question and the language they used was slang language, what they meant to ask was...
- A question was asked, and we cannot talk about that particular topic but I think that question was about...

### **\* 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

During the delivery of each section of the sensitive lessons children are encouraged to place their questions into a box in the classroom. These questions will then be monitored and screened with the teacher answering the questions the following week and taking into account the following:

- Questions arising from lesson content will be answered in an age-appropriate manner
- The class teacher will be sensitive to questions which do not relate to the particular curriculum content and objectives for a class and limit discussion or redirect the child to talk with their parents where necessary
- 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 the teacher after the lessons

*If issues arise which might be seen to contravene the 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 a variety of assessment tools such as:

- Observation and questions to assess the children's engagement and interest
- Use of teacher-designed tasks such as worksheets, quizzes and games
- Use of reflection or learning logs

## **Confidentiality**

Monkstown Educate Together follows Children First Guidelines 2011 and The Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Secondary Schools 2011.

If a child is withdrawn from the teaching of sensitive issues, we cannot guarantee that other children will not tell him/her what has been spoken about or what happened during these lessons

## **Resources**

Monkstown Educate Together NS chooses its resources with an eye to demonstrating equality and equity, child-friendly content and materials that are free from bias and gender-stereotyping.

Each class teacher has a copy of the appropriate RSE manual and resource materials from the DES as well as access to it online in pdf format. Other resources available in our school that support the broader aims of RSE include:

- Stay Safe Programme
- Walk Tall Programme
- Anatomical Dolls
- Busy Bodies (this DVD and booklet were developed by the HSE to support the teaching of 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> class components of the RSE programme within the context of SPHE. At Monkstown Educate Together NS, as well as using this as a teaching resource in school, we give the parents/guardians of each 4<sup>th</sup> class child a copy of Busy Bodies at the class information meetings in Sept/Oct)
- Picture books and teaching resources themed around the nine grounds of equality
- Picture books and teaching resources themed around all kinds of families, gender identity and sexuality choices
- INTO Different Families, Same Love
- RESPECT guidelines
- All Together Now belong<sup>TO</sup> Primary School Lessons and ‘Stand Up ‘ program
- Healthy Bodies: Girls and Healthy Bodies: Boys (Vanderbilt)

## **Provision for on-going support, development and review**

- Monkstown Educate Together is committed to promoting and supporting on-going professional development in relation to the teaching of R.S.E.
- Opportunities provided by our Education Centre will be brought to the attention of staff members and teachers will be encouraged to attend CPD in RSE.



- The content and implementation of the Relationships and Sexuality Programme will be reviewed by the Board of Management, Principal and teaching staff regularly according to the ongoing schedule of review of school policies.
- Should the need arise a more comprehensive review can be carried out comprising consultation between the Board of Management, parents and all staff.
- Parents and staff will be informed of any amendments made to the policy.

## **Appendix**

\*OVERVIEW OF SENSITIVE CONTENT ATTACHED AS AN APPENDIX TO THE END OF THIS POLICY

## **Review**

This policy will be reviewed regularly according to the ongoing schedule of review of school policies.

The policy was ratified by Board of Management, METNS in April 2019.