



*St Joseph's Special School*

***Relationships and Sexuality Education Policy***

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### **Introduction**

This policy was written in May 2017. It builds on the policy adopted in 1999 by staff and parents and subsequently amended in 2003 and 2009. The initial draft was completed by Mary Cunningham and Siobhán Butler. It was amended at a teacher's meeting on May 29<sup>th</sup>. The draft document was made available for review to SNAs and the school nurse and input was invited from them. The draft policy was emailed to parents who were requested to respond through the officers of Parents' Association. The policy provides clarity and consensus on how RSE is taught and it should be read in conjunction with the following documents:

Code of Behaviour

Child Protection Policy

Intimate Care Policy

Substance Abuse and Misuse Policy

The Social Personal and Health Education Curriculum (SPHE) Plan

Information Technology Acceptable Use Policy

Anti- Bullying Policy

### **School Ethos**

St Joseph's School is committed to creating and maintaining an orderly, trusting, and caring environment for its pupils. Our mission is to provide for the unique academic, physical, social and emotional needs of our pupils. To this end we provide each pupil with opportunities to develop attitudes and skills that will enable him or her to experience a quality of life which embraces personal choice, relationships, personal development, integration and participation in community life.

The school recognises that 'sexuality is an integral part of the personality of everyone: man woman and child, it is a basic need and aspect of being human that cannot be separated from other aspects of life' (World Health Organisation 1975).

In cooperation with parents/guardians the school aims to: develop the individual pupil's understanding of his/her physical and emotional development; develop his/her ability to form and maintain relationships; and foster self-esteem. The school recognizes its responsibility in developing a child protection policy which sets out to maximize the safety and welfare of each pupil. In conjunction with the parents, a curriculum which will develop pupils' ability

to protect themselves will be implemented. The school community promotes an environment which fosters self-esteem and promotes clear, effective communication.

The 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.

### **Definition of Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE)**

RSE is an integral part of Social Personal and Health Education (SPHE) which is taught in all classes. Under the umbrella of this subject structured opportunities are provided for pupils to learn about self-identity; relationships; growing and changing; safety and protection; and social behaviour.

### **Relationship of RSE to SPHE**

SPHE focusses on promoting the health and well-being of the pupils. The key characteristics of the 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 in the Primary Curriculum are:

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

Sensitive issues- Taking care of my body; Growing and Changing; Safety and Protection are addressed within these strand units.

The Junior Cycle programme delivered to pupils in the senior school includes Personal Care - a priority learning unit incorporating the following elements which contribute to RSE:

- Developing good daily personal care
- Knowing how to stay safe
- Being able to manage stress
- Recognising emotions
- Becoming aware of one's sexuality
- Making personal decisions

A spiral approach is taken in lessons where issues are revisited in different ways according to the age, stage of development and readiness of the pupil.

### **Current Provision**

SPHE is allocated 30 minutes a week as per Department of Education and Skills (DES) guidelines for all schools. Since the school recognises the importance of this subject in developing pupils' personal and social skills additional time is allocated to it in St Joseph's.

The learning outcomes addressed in the SPHE programme are integrated with other subjects. (see SPHE plan).

SPHE is an integral part of the school day. Birthdays and individual achievements are publically celebrated at assembly; appropriate social behaviour is expected from and is modelled for pupils; pupils are encouraged to participate in group activities.

The Curriculum Guidelines for Teachers of Students with Moderate General Learning Disabilities, the Primary School Curriculum and the Junior Cycle Curriculum are used to inform teaching.

RSE topics addressed as part of SPHE include:

- Recognising diversity
- Growing up and change- physical changes: labelling body parts, puberty
- Privacy- concept of public and private spaces, private parts of the body, public/private activities
- Private and Public behaviour
- Appropriate and inappropriate touches
- Personal care- guidance on routines for personal hygiene, care of clothes, self care during menstruation-
- Feelings- recognising and dealing with emotions
- Self-awareness and self esteem

Specific programmes delivered to address RSE topics include:

- Stay Safe
- Walk Tall
- Growing up for Boys and Girls
- Zippy's Friends
- Looking Good
- Socially Speaking
- A PHSE programme for Learners with Autistic Spectrum Disorders by Fiona Speirs

Events such as bereavement, separation or divorce or any other family issues impacting on the pupil are dealt with sensitively in consultation with the parent/guardians with due regard to the privacy of the pupil.

### **Aims of the RSE programme**

1. To enhance the personal development, self-esteem and well-being of the pupil.
2. To help the pupil develop healthy friendships and relationships.
3. To foster an understanding of, and a healthy attitude to, human sexuality and relationships in a moral, spiritual and social framework.
4. To teach pupils an understanding of privacy and an awareness of appropriate/inappropriate sexual behaviour.

5. To enable the pupil to acquire an understanding of, and respect for, human love, sexual intercourse and reproduction. This part of the programme will only be taught to pupils when deemed appropriate, by teachers and parents and with support if necessary from the Ability West multi-disciplinary team.
6. To develop in the pupil a knowledge of and respect for reproduction.
7. To promote a positive attitude to one's own sexuality and one's relationship with others

### **Management and Organisation**

- RSE is taught in all classes.
- Materials and content are differentiated to meet the needs of individual pupils.
- The Stay Safe programme is mandatory and is taught every year.
- Parental permission must be obtained for the delivery of the Growing Up for Boys/Girls Programme.
- Some modules of Growing Up for Boys/Girls are taught in single sex groups at the discretion of the teacher.
- A proactive approach in consultation with the parents/guardians is taken to ensure that pupils are prepared practically and emotionally for puberty. Resources to support parents/guardians can be provided to enable them to teach independent self-care routines. Routines established in the home are re-enforced in school.
- A reactive approach is taken in consultation with parents/guardians for individual pupils to ensure that their sexual behaviour corresponds to social norms.
- An emphasis is placed on developing an understanding of public and private and on learning rules pertaining to privacy in relation to self-care and sexual behaviour.
- Support from the Psychology Department of Ability West may be sought to assist parents/guardians and school staff deal with sensitive issues.
- Teachers are encouraged to and, where possible, facilitated to avail of RSE training.

### **Ratification and Review**

This policy was ratified by the Board of Management on \_\_\_\_\_.

The policy will be emailed to all parents and a copy will be uploaded to the school website.

The policy will be reviewed in June 2020.

Signed \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Chairperson, Board of Management

Signed \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Principal

