



Relationships and Sexuality Education Policy for St. Christopher's Primary School, Haddington Road, Ballsbridge, Dublin 4

School Details

St. Christopher's Primary School is a mixed primary school located in Dublin City. It is the result of the amalgamation of St. Brigid's Primary School and St. Mary's Primary School in 2019. There are twenty-four classes with three classes at each level from Junior Infants to Sixth.

Introductory Statement

This policy was first developed in St. Brigid's Primary School in 2001 with a committee and revised in 2005-2006 following a staff development session with an RSE facilitator. It was reviewed again in 2010-2011 and it has since been reviewed informally at staff meetings. Feedback at these meetings, the amalgamation of St. Brigid's and St. Mary's, and development of a number of resources on the PDST.ie website have prompted a more thorough review. The current review has been carried out by the staff of St. Christopher's in the school year 2019/2020.

School Philosophy

Education in St. Christopher's is characterised by care for the individual. The child's many needs are met in a well structured environment where he/she can live fully the life of a child. While nourishing the child's young life, we hope to provide him/her with a solid foundation for future growth and development in a Christian tradition. The environment is such that the child is encouraged and stimulated to be confident, appreciative, independent and creative. The RSE programme will be implemented within this framework.

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.

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 about relationships and sexuality in ways which will enable them to form values and help them think and act in a moral, caring and responsible way. This work will be based on developing a good image, promoting respect for themselves and others, and providing them with appropriate information. 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.

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 supports children's development 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

Current Provision

- SPHE lessons (provided through discrete curricular time and integration)
- Use of the RSE Manuals and Busy Bodies resources
- Stay Safe Programme
- Walk Tall Programme
- Webwise resources
- Weaving Wellbeing
- RESPECT Guidelines (suggested approaches to teaching about different families)
- Adapted resources for SEN from www.pdst.ie
- Religious Education taught through Alive O/Grow in Love

Aims of RSE

- 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
- Anti-Bullying Policy
- Acceptable Use Policy (access to internet)
- Relationships and Sexuality Education Policy
- Substance Use Policy
- Communication Policy
- Code of Behaviour
- Attendance Policy
- Equality of Access and Participation
- Healthy Eating Policy
- Extra-Curricular Activities Policy
- Intimate Care Policy
- Separation and Custody Issues
- Data Protection Policy
- Health and Safety
- Healthy Eating
- Special Education Policy

Guidelines for the Management and Organisation of RSE in our School

- We recognise that parents are the primary educators of their children, and that the home is the natural environment in which RSE should take place. The role of the school, therefore, is seen as one of support for the work of the home in this area.
- The approach in school is child-centred and will always take the age and stage of development of the children into account. Appropriate vocabulary relating to sexuality, growing up, physical changes, parts of the body and feelings will be used at each class level (See Appendix 1). The use of slang words will be discouraged. Language will, at all times, reflect respect for those involved and for educational content.
- Questions arising from lesson content will be answered in an age-appropriate manner. The class teacher cannot answer questions which do not relate to the particular curriculum objectives for a class. Pupils will be informed if a question/issue is not on the programme and they will be advised to talk with their parents. Teachers may exercise discretion to contact parents themselves if they

feel that a question is very inappropriate. Teachers can also be mindful that a question need not be answered immediately. For older children, a question box can be used as part of a structured RSE lesson. This allow teachers to follow up on a written question at a later date, thus allowing time to prepare suitable answers, consult with colleagues etc.

- It is our policy not to answer personal questions and to discourage disclosure of personal or family information. Teachers will be mindful of their reactions to any questions.
- In the class situation children will be encouraged to recognise that certain information is for them only and it would be inappropriate to discuss this with younger siblings/children for example. The teacher should clarify expectations beforehand.
- Our RSE programme is inclusive and so we actively discourage withdrawal. Should a parent seek to have their child withdrawn from the RSE lessons, the school will take account of parental concerns, and parents' right to withdraw their child from themes pertaining to sensitive issues will be honoured on the understanding that the parent(s) is taking full responsibility for this aspect of education themselves.
- Each class teacher will teach the content for their class level each year as laid out in the curriculum, utilising the RSE manuals to complement their teaching. The strand Taking Care of my Body is covered in February each year and the strand Growing and Changing is covered in March each year. The sensitive lessons are taught as part of these broad topics (See Below).
- Special consideration will be taken to ensure the needs of children with SEN are met. Taking into account the pupils social and emotional development, instruction will be based on individual needs where possible. Parents will be consulted around sensitive issues.
- If a teacher has concerns about teaching the sensitive topics in RSE they should consult with the Principal.
- We invite a facilitator from Accord to work with our 5th and 6th classes for one day annually. The content of this programme is designed specifically for these age groups. Parents are made aware of the content in advance and are asked for their consent in writing in order for their children to take part.
- Substitute teachers (short-term) or student teachers on placement are not expected to teach the sensitive content.

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 enrollment.
- Parents will be informed in advance of lessons on the sensitive areas of the RSE programme, with a letter / email communication via Aladdin informing them what will be taught at their child's class level.
- 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.
- The letter / email communication 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. The school acknowledges that parents have the primary responsibility for educating their children about growing and changing.
- Parents have a responsibility to become involved, to inform themselves of the programme content and to prepare their children for the information they will acquire around the sensitive areas in RSE/SPHE.
- 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 and this will be centrally filed.
- If a child has been withdrawn from the sensitive RSE lessons, the school cannot take responsibility for what the child may hear following on from the teaching of the lessons e.g.: what they may hear in the playground.

Organisation and Curriculum Planning

RSE forms part of the national curriculum for SPHE and will be taught from Junior Infants to 6th class. RSE will be covered under the following strands and strand units of the SPHE curriculum:

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|------------------------|
| 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 the sensitive / specific content covered through RSE strands and strand units. The sensitive topics are in italics.

| <u>Topics covered up to 2nd Class include:</u> | <u>Topics from 3rd to 6th classes include:</u> |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Keeping Safe • <i>Bodily changes from birth (birth-9)</i> • Making age appropriate choices • Appreciating the variety of family types and a variety of family life that exists in our school and community • Recognising and expressing feelings • Self-care, hygiene, diet, exercise and sleep | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Bodily changes</i> • 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. |

| | |
|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expressing opinions and listening to others • <i>Naming the parts of the male/ female body using appropriate anatomical terms (Junior/ Senior Infants)</i> • <i>Naming the parts of the male/ female body using appropriate anatomical terms and identify some of their functions (1st/2nd)</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Making healthy and responsible decisions • Forming Friendships • <i>Discuss the stages and sequence of development of the human baby in the womb (3rd, 4th class)</i> • <i>Introduction to puberty and changes (3rd, 4th, 5th and 6th class)</i> • <i>Changes that occur in boys and girls with the onset of puberty (5th and 6th Class)</i> • <i>Reproductive system of male/female adults (5th and 6th class)</i> • <i>Understanding sexual intercourse, conception and birth within the context of a committed loving relationship (5th, 6th class)</i> |
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Sensitive Content

Sensitive content for 3rd - 6th is taught as per the 2 year St. Christopher's SPHE plan. The principal will make arrangements regarding the teaching of the programme and the deployment of staff. Where appropriate, boys and girls will be addressed separately with regards to specific issues concerning their own gender and stage of development.

The strand Taking Care of my Body is covered in February each year and the strand Growing and Changing is covered in March each year. Parents of children in 5th and 6th class can order a copy of the Busy Bodies Booklet in advance to support the implementation of the sensitive objectives in class.

Approaches and Methodologies

When implementing the programme, staff at St. Christopher's will endeavour to display respect for and sensitivity towards the different cultural and family backgrounds of the children in our school. 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 22/2010).

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
- 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 students' 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 everyday 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.

Taking into account children's cognitive, social and emotional development and their class level (4th, 5th, 6th), instruction on the sensitive aspects of RSE will be based on individual needs and decided together by the Principal, mainstream teacher, support teacher and parents before the programme commences. Support teachers will aid the mainstream teacher with the facilitation of agreed RSE provision for any child with special educational needs. Children may work in smaller groups or 1:1 with adapted

material. Children may be pre-taught language or content in anticipation of whole class work.

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.

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 in class will be consistent with RSE Materials Books. For class appropriate explanations of certain terms (e.g. gay, lesbian) please refer to the INTO publication Different Families, Same Love available at <https://www.into.ie/lgbt/EducationalResources/>

Confidentiality

The school follows Children First: National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children 2017 and the Children First Act 2015. Where there is disclosure by a child of abuse, or a teacher has any concerns about a child, the school authorities will follow our Child Protection Policy. The Principal is our Designated Liaison Person.

Teachers will deliver lessons with respect for the rights of the children and their families concerning privacy and confidentiality.

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 the lesson content.

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.

Resources

Relationships and Sexuality Education Resource Materials (DES) - Each class teacher has a copy of the appropriate manual and/or access to it in online / pdf format. Other resources that support the broader aims of RSE include:

- Stay Safe Programme
- Walk Tall Programme
- Making the Links and Beyond
- Anatomical Dolls and Story books at Infant Level
- Busy Bodies DVD and Booklet. This DVD and booklet were developed to support the teaching of the 3rd, 4th, 5th and 6th class component of RSE within the context of SPHE.
- Picture books
- INTO Different Families, Same Love Poster
- RESPECT guidelines.
- Resources available at <https://pdst.ie/node/811>
- Each teacher has a copy of the *Updated* Anatomical Terminology Guide, which also details the sensitive content objectives, to inform their teaching at each class level. This is also available at <https://pdst.ie/sites/default/files/NEW%20Sensitive%20Language%20Grid%2011.18.pdf> on the PDST website

Provision of Ongoing Support

The Board of Management supports the implementation of the RSE programmes. We recognise that our school has a supportive role to that of the home. Ongoing training and review can alleviate any worries teachers may have in relation to teaching RSE. The following opportunities will be facilitated in St. Christopher's:

- Opportunities provided by our local Education Centre will be brought to the attention of staff members.
- Relevant teaching materials will be provided for teachers
- Teachers will be encouraged to attend CPD in RSE
- Staff meetings will be 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.
- Our HSCL officer will work with parents to support them in whatever way is necessary

Review

This current policy for St. Christopher's was reviewed in 2019/2020. It will be reviewed every two years. It may be reviewed at an earlier time should a need arise. As with all our plans and policies, parents have access to this policy on request.

This plan was ratified by the Board of Management at a meeting on 3rd December 2019.

Appendix 1

RSE Sensitive Language

| Class Level | Sensitive Language |
|-----------------------|---|
| Junior Infants | Womb, breastfeeding, penis, vagina |
| Senior Infants | As Above |
| First Class | + vulva, urethra |
| Second Class | As Above |
| Third Class | As Above |
| Fourth Class | + Changes in shape, breasts, menstruation, periods, pubic hair, body hair, underarm hair, hormones, umbilical cord |
| Fifth Class | + breasts develop, ovaries, fallopian tubes, womb (uterus), cervix, perspiration, oily skin, pimples + growth spurts, testicles, scrotum, facial hair, nocturnal emissions (wet dreams), sperm production, skin changes, voice changes, perspiration, oily skin, pimples |
| Sixth Class | + Conception, semen, sexual intercourse (in the context of a committed and loving relationship), Busy Bodies Language |