**RELATIONSHIPS AND SEXUALITY**

**EDUCATION (RSE) POLICY**



# *This policy was ratified in 1999*

# *Reviewed: 2008, 2019, 2022*

*Next Review Date: 2026*

**Introductory Statement and Rationale**

All schools are required to have an RSE policy to detail how RSE is taught in the school. This policy is an approved approach to the teaching of Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) by the Department of Education. 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 1999 with a committee, revised in 2008, and again in 2019.

Relationships and Sexuality Education seeks to provide children with opportunities to acquire knowledge and understanding of relationships and human sexuality, through processes which will enable them to form values and establish behaviours within a moral, spiritual and social framework.

R.S.E. will be taught in the context of Social, Personal and Health Education (S.P.H.E.). The S.P.H.E. programme provides learning opportunities in the context of a positive school climate, through discreet time and through an integrated approach across a range of subject areas.

R.S.E. is currently taught informally in the context of a number of programmes in school including Religious Education, Health education and Stay Safe.

# Our School Philosophy

St. Francis Xavier Senior School is a Roman Catholic School which respects and accommodates pupils from other denominations. It recognises the uniqueness of each child. It seeks to develop children spiritually and morally and to foster in each child an ethical and Christian sense that will enable him/her to acquire values on which to base choices and form attitudes.

It endeavours to equip children with the knowledge and skills that will serve them, not only in their lives as children, but later as 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.

## Aims of the 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 to, human sexuality and relationships in a moral, spiritual and social framework.
4. To enable the child to acquire an understanding of, and respect for, human love, and reproduction.
5. To enable the child to be comfortable with the sexuality of oneself and others while growing and developing.

## Objectives of the R.S.E. Programme

* Acquire and develop knowledge and understanding of self.
* Develop a positive sense of self-awareness, self-esteem and self-worth.
* Develop an appreciation of the dignity, uniqueness and well-being of others.
* Understand the nature, growth and development of relationships within families, in friendships and in 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 will help to establish and sustain healthy personal relationships.
* Develop some coping strategies to protect self and others from various forms of abuse.
* Acquire and improve skills of communication and social interaction.
* Acquire and use an appropriate vocabulary to discuss feelings, sexuality, growth and development.
* Develop a critical understanding of external influences on lifestyles and decision making.

# Guidelines for the Management and Organisation of R.S.E. in Our School

R.S.E. will be taught in all classes from 3rd to 6th. Teachers will endeavour to create a classroom environment which is supportive and non-threatening so that the children’s self esteem is fostered, where they feel valued and affirmed. At all times, the role of the teacher is considered to be complimentary to that of the parent, taking cognisance of individual needs, stage of development and family background of the child.

**Parents’ Rights and Responsibilities Including the Withdrawal of Pupils**

Parents’ rights and responsibilities are respected. Parents have a right to withdraw their children from the lesson on sensitive issues if they wish. Parents who wish to withdraw their children from classes on sensitive issues will be treated with the utmost confidentiality.

It is recognised that parents are the primary providers of relationships and sexuality education for their child as the home is the natural environment in which this education takes place.

The school plays a supportive role in this regard. Parents will be informed about RSE through the enrolment form and consent forms.

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.

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. The 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”*.

**Policies which support SPHE/RSE (ref. SPHE Policy)**

* Child Protection Policy
* Code of Behaviour
* Anti-Bullying Policy
* Enrolment Policy
* Acceptable Use Policy
* Health Eating Policy

**Organisation and Curriculum Planning of R.S.E.**

RSE forms part of the national curriculum for SPHE and will be taught from 3rd to 6th classes. RSE will be taught under the following strands and strand units of the SPHE curriculum:

|  |
| --- |
| Myself |
| Growing and ChangingTaking 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 which compliment the aims and objectives of RSE:
* Friendship
* Self-Identity
* Family
* Self-esteem
* Growing Up
1. The second section will deal with any sensitive/specific content covered through RSE strands and strand units. The sensitive aspects are marked in **bold** below. Sensitive content is taught as per the 2 year SPHE plan.

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| --- |
| Topics from 3rd-6th Classes include: |
| * **Bodily Changes**
* Healthy Eating, personal hygiene, exercise
* Keeping Safe
* Expressing feelings
* Appreciating the variety of family types within our school community and how these family relationships shape us
* Making healthy and responsible decisions
* Forming friendships
* **The stages and sequence of development of the human baby in the womb (3rd/4th Class)**
* **Introduction to puberty and changes (3rd, 4th 5th 6th Class)**
* **Changes that occur in boys and girls at the onset of puberty (5th & 6th Class)**
* **Reproductive system of male/female adults (5th/6th Class)**
* **Understanding sexual intercourse, conception and birth within the context of a committed loving relationship (5th/6th Class)**
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**Additional Supports for Female Pupils**

To support and reassure our young female pupils at the onset of puberty, Ms. Marianne Brennan (teacher), meets with the girls from 4th-6th classes each year to inform them of emergency supplies of sanitary products available in the school and where they are stored. Parental consent is always sought in advance of this meeting.

**Approaches and Methodologies**

When implementing the programme, staff at St Francis Xavier SNS will endeavour to display respect for and sensitivity towards different cultural and family backgrounds. The curriculum will be taught in an age appropriate manner at all times and through a spiral curriculum with key topics revisited in a developmental manner at regular intervals.

The RSE curriculum will be taught through:

* Stories and poems
* Classroom discussion
* Group work
* Art activities
* Circle time
* Guest Speaker

**Differentiation**

Teachers use assessment and professional judgement to differentiate the programme and content to suit the needs of the class. Sometimes the stage of development in a class can vary and strategies to differentiate in class can support gradual and appropriate teaching. Some techniques include:

* Ensuring objectives are realistic for pupils
* Ensuring that the learning task is compatible with prior learning
* Organising the learning task into small stages and ensuring the language used is appropriate to the pupil’s level of understanding
* Group work and Discussion
* Higher and lower order questioning
* Moderated whole class discussion through a Question Box in 5th & 6th Classes

**Pupils with Special Educational Needs**

Adaptations to the way the content is delivered will be made for pupils with Special Educational Needs. Consultations with parents/guardians in advance and anticipation of the pupils’ needs will be central to ensuring a lesson is meaningful.

* Pupils may be pre-taught language or concepts
* Pupils may work in smaller groups or 1:1 on adapted material
* Specific or different objectives related to the pupils’ own learing needs should be detailed in their IEP in consultation with parents/guardians.

**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.

**Questions**

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.

Simple principles when fostering discussion and questioning include:

* No personal questions of the teacher
* The Question Box will be availed of by the children in 5th and 6th classes
* The teacher will be mindful of their reaction to any questions
* Questions do not have to be answered straight away

**Question Box**

For pupils in 5th and 6th classes, a ‘Question Box’ will be used as part of a structured RSE lesson from academic year 2022/23.

During the delivery of each section of the sensitive lesson, the children will be 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 taking into account the following;

* 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 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 teacher after the lessons.

*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 is essential to RSE as it is to any other subject. It enables 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 reflection worksheets.
* Use of scrapbook, portfolio, Stay Safe Booklet

**Confidentiality**

* The school follows Children First Guidelines 2011 and The Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post Primary Schools 2011.
* If a child is withdrawn from the teaching of sensitive issues, the school cannot guarantee that the other children will not tell or inform him/her about what happened

**RSE Resources**

RSE resources used in our school include:

* Stay Safe Programme
* Walk Tall Programme
* Webwise resources
* Busy Bodies DVD and Booklet. These resources were developed to support the teaching of 3rd, 4th, 5th and 6th class component of RSE within the context of SPHE.
* Adapted resources for SEN from [www.pdst.ie](http://www.pdst.ie)
* Flourish RE Resource (since 2022)
* INTO Different Families, Same Love Poster

For sixth class, the present procedure is that qualified facilitators deliver a workshop on Personal Development. Prior to this workshop, an information evening is held for parents.

**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
* Support from a PDST Advisor
* Promotion and communication of resources available from www.pdst.ie

**Review Process**

This policy will be reviewed every 4 years to evaluate its effectiveness and to ascertain what changes, if any, are necessary. Parents will be informed of any amendments made.

**Ratification and Communication**

The Board of Management of St Francis Xavier SNS ratified this plan in 1999.

It was reviewed in 2008 and 2019 and most recently on 9th November 2022. This plan is available to parents on request.

Signed : John Mitchell Date: 9th November 2022

 Chairperson