

**Scoil Mhuire na nGael
19598V**



**RSE POLICY
Relationship & Sexuality Education**

SCHOOL DETAILS

Scoil Mhuire na nGael is a mixed school, located in Bay Estate, Dundalk, Co. Louth. We have a staff of 26 mainstream class teachers, 4 special class teachers, 8 special education teachers, 17 SNAs, 2 full-time secretaries, 1 full time caretaker and 3-part time cleaners. There are 4 classes at each class level of Infants and 3 classes at each levels from 1st to 6th class. We have a current whole school enrolment of 624 pupils.

INTRODUCTORY STATEMENT

This policy was drawn up by a committee involving staff and parents/guardians in 2012. It was subsequently reviewed in 2015 and 2024. 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.

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 Catholic 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
- a *shared responsibility* between family, school, health professionals and the community
- a subject which develops a child's *skills, attitudes, values and understanding* relevant to a range of social, personal and health issues
- *child-centred* - RSE education should prioritise the needs of the child and his/her environment, with appropriate adaptations made to suit individual requirements and individual school situations
- *spiral in nature* - SPHE/RSE formally begins in Junior Infants and is developed throughout the child's time in school. This will provide opportunities to consolidate and build on previous learning in developmentally appropriate manner
- taught through *active learning methodologies* - RSE provides a range of learning opportunities that requires children to actively participate in their learning in a wide variety of ways e.g. discussion, circle time, role play.
- *free of bias* - Lessons, language and resources selected by the school should reflect this. SPHE/RSE encourages children to be inclusive with each other, challenge prejudice and learn how to live together in an intercultural society

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

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.

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 OF RSE

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

SCHOOL POLICIES WHICH SUPPORT SPHE/RSE

Policies that support SPHE/RSE

- Child Safeguarding Statement and Risk Assessment
- Substance Use Policy
- Code of Behaviour
- Anti-Bullying Policy
- Admissions Policy
- Acceptable Use Policy
- Healthy Eating Policy
- GDPR Policy

CURRICULUM PLANNING FOR SPHE/RSE

Our school follows a two year plan for SPHE.

Scoil Mhuire na nGael		SPHE - Two Year Grid
Strand	Strand Units (Year 1)	Strand Units (Year 2)
Myself	<i>Self-identity (Sept.–Oct.)</i>	<i>Safety and Protection (Jan-Feb)-Stay Safe</i>
	<i>Taking care of my body(Jan-Feb)</i>	<i>Making Decisions (March-April)</i> <i>*This strand unit is for third to sixth only. Infants to second complete the Safety Issues section of Safety and Protection</i>
	<i>Growing and Changing (Mar-April)</i>	
Myself and others	<i>Myself and My Family (Nov.-Dec.)</i>	<i>My friends and other people (May-June)</i>
		<i>Relating to others (Sept-Oct.)</i>
Myself and the wider world	<i>Developing Citizenship (May-June)</i>	<i>Media Education (Nov-Dec.)</i>

Sensitive Lessons Stay Safe/RSE

RSE, which largely looks at the development of relationships, is interwoven through all strands and strand units of the SPHE curriculum. The more sensitive aspects of RSE will be covered under the strand 'Myself' and strand units 'Growing and changing' and 'Taking care of my body'. Teachers will refer to the resource Making the Links to support their planning for the delivery of these strand units. Suggested resources are listed under the Resources Section of this policy.

THE IMPLEMENTATION OF RSE

The SPHE curriculum will underpin all teaching and learning of RSE in Scoil Mhuire na nGael. The SPHE curriculum 1999 is allocated 30 minutes of discrete teaching time by the Department of Education. Teachers can use their professional discernment if extra time is required, this can be taken discretionary time. Teachers are encouraged to use an integrated approach for the delivery of SPHE. All resources used will be in keeping with this RSE policy and will take into consideration the sample criteria for choosing resources, as outlined in the SPHE Teacher Guidelines p.103.

- 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
- 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.

PUPIL VOICE

In our school the voice of our pupils is acknowledged, valued and respected. Children are given opportunities to reflect and feedback on SPHE/RSE provision through various modes. This information will be used to inform school improvement in relation to future RSE provision.

APPROACHES & METHODOLOGIES

In Scoil Mhuire na nGael, we will use the following approaches and methodologies to teach RSE;

- stories and poems
- classroom discussion
- ICT Activities
- group work
- games
- art activities
- reflection
- circle time
- external facilitator (Circular 0042/2018)

RESOURCES

In Scoil Mhuire na nGael our staff may consult any of the following teaching resources when teaching RSE in addition to the DES Relationships and Sexuality Education Programme:

- PDST Health and Wellbeing RSE
- NCCA SPHE/RSE Toolkit
- DE Walk Tall Manuals
- Making the Links and Beyond
- Stay Safe programme
- Walk Tall Programme
- Anatomical Dolls
- HSE publications (www.healthpromotion.ie)
- Busy Bodies Booklet/ Videos/ Workbook (PDST/OIDE)

PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT

In Scoil Mhuire na nGael parents/guardians will be informed at enrolment that the school fully implements the RSE strands of the SPHE curriculum. Parents/guardians will be informed in advance of the teaching of the formal RSE lessons. (A sample letter is provided in Appendix 1). This will offer parents/guardians/carers an opportunity to meet with relevant teachers to discuss/view the material that will be covered and share any personal details they feel the teacher should be aware of prior to their child engaging in RSE lessons. If they wish to withdraw their child from specific formal RSE lessons, this should be provided in writing to the school and kept

on file. Alternative arrangements will be considered and agreed upon by the relevant parties. The school cannot accept responsibility for indirect RSE related information delivered to the child outside of formal RSE lessons i.e. on yard etc.

Parents may be signposted to developmentally –appropriate resources to support them in speaking with their child about relationships, sexuality and growing up.

DIFFERENTIATION

The age and stage of development in a class can vary widely and strategies for differentiation can support gradual and appropriate learning. In Scoil Mhuire na nGael, teachers use assessment and professional judgment to differentiate the curricular objectives and content to best suit the needs of all pupils. Adaptations to the way in which the content is delivered will be made for children with special and additional educational needs. Both consultation with parents/guardians/carers in advance of lessons and the anticipation of the pupil's needs will be central to ensuring learning is meaningful. This may be reflected in the student's support file.

Useful Resources:

- Middletown Centre for Autism
- PDST RSE
- Stay Safe for Children with SEN

LANGUAGE

Language is a powerful tool and should be used with respect and integrity for the dignity of each person. 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 it can hurt, diminish and demean.

QUESTIONS

In Scoil Mhuire na nGael teachers may use a variety of methodologies to create a safe, open space where pupils feel comfortable to ask RSE related questions. These questions may be asked through such modes as:

Question Boxes

During the delivery of each RSE lesson, pupils can be encouraged to place their questions into a box.

For older pupils a 'question box' is one methodology that may be used as part of the formal RSE lessons. Teachers can follow up on the written questions at a later date, thus allowing time to prepare suitable answers, consult with colleagues/RSE policy to formulate an appropriate response. These questions can be reviewed and the following may be taken into account:

- All pupils are encouraged to write on the question sheet. If they don't have a question ask them to write something interesting they learned in the lesson
- Questions arising from lesson content will be answered in an age-appropriate manner.

- The 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 curriculum and they will be advised to talk with their parents
- Teachers may exercise discretion to contact parents if a need arises
- No personal questions will be answered and children will be reminded not to share inappropriate personal information about their families or others

Open Forum Questions

Teachers give pupils an opportunity to ask questions at various times throughout the RSE lesson. Questions will be answered in an age and developmentally appropriate way. Children will be made aware that the class teacher may not be able to answer their question and they will be signposted to ask an adult they trust at home.

Possible 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 that we wouldn't ask anyone personal questions...*
- *Somebody asked a question and the language that was used was slang language. I think what they meant to ask was....*

ASSESSMENT

Scoil Mhuire na nGael may employ the following methods for assessment in SPHE/RSE:

- Observation and questions to assess the pupils' engagement and interest
- Use of teacher-designed tasks such as worksheets, quizzes or games
- Use of reflection or learning log
- Pupil Portfolio

CONFIDENTIALITY

Scoil Mhuire na nGael follows the Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post Primary Schools 2023. If a child is withdrawn from specific RSE lessons, the school cannot guarantee that the withdrawn child will not hear the information from another source. Parents are invited to share any changes in circumstances with the school as necessary e.g. changes in family structures etc. For the welfare of some children, this information may be important for a teacher to know prior to engaging in specific topics on family/relationships etc.

PROVISIONS FOR ONGOING SUPPORT

Scoil Mhuire ensures the provision of ongoing support by the following:

- encouraging teachers to attend RSE CPD

- utilising staff meetings as a platform for discussion and development of RSE
- seeking the support from a PDST Advisor
- create a mentor system amongst to support the teaching RSE
- budgeting for the updating and development of RSE materials
- reviewing RSE policy on a regular basis
- ensure special education teachers have adequate training opportunities
- staff will reflect on information gathered from pupil questionnaires and focus groups. This will be used to inform future developments regarding RSE.
- signposting staff to resources available from PDST/OIDE and other sources

REVIEW

Scoil Mhuire na nGael will review this policy every three years. The policy may also be reviewed at an earlier time should a need arise. Parents and staff will be informed of any amendments made. This plan was ratified by the Board of Management at a meeting on 15th October 2024.

Signed: Proinsias Ó Cuanaigh Date: 15.10.2024

Chairperson of the Board of Management

APPENDIX 1

SAMPLE LETTER TO PARENTS

Dear Parents/Guardians,

Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) is an integral part of the Social, Personal and Health Education curriculum. We will be commencing formal RSE lessons in Term 2, January 20XX. RSE predominantly lies within the strand units 'Taking care of my body' and 'Growing and changing' which can be viewed at https://www.curriculumonline.ie/getmedia/462570f8-27cc-4f5b-a13ed1e2de8c18d2/PSEC06_SPHE_curriculum.pdf. It is also summarised in the table below.

Social, Personal and Health Education Curriculum (NCCA 1999)

INFANTS - 2nd CLASS

Strand Unit - Growing and Changing

- As I grow I change
- New life
- Feelings and emotions

Strand Unit - Taking care of my body

- Knowing about my body
- Food and nutrition
- Making decisions

3rd CLASS - 6th CLASS

Strand Unit - Growing and Changing

- As I grow I change
- Birth and new life
- Feelings and emotions

Strand Unit - Taking care of my body

- Knowing about my body
- Food and nutrition
- Health and wellbeing

Our school's RSE policy is available to view on our school website (www.bayestatens.com). It outlines our agreed approach to achieve the objectives of the aforementioned strand units.

If you wish to discuss this further, please do not hesitate to arrange an appointment to meet with your child's class teacher.

Yours sincerely,
