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Relationships and Sexuality Education Policy Statement

1 Introductory statement

The RSE policy previously in place in Our Lady of Mercy N.S. continues to apply in Scoil Mhuire agus Bharra until it is reviewed and updated.

This RSE policy was drafted by a subcommittee comprising teachers, parents and Board of Management members. The policy was updated following input by staff at a staff meeting in 2024.

2 Our school philosophy

A Roman Catholic school, which is established in connection with the Minister for Education, aims at promoting the full and harmonious development of all aspects of the person of the pupil: intellectual, physical, cultural, moral and spiritual, including a living relationship with God and with other people. The school models and promotes a philosophy of life inspired by belief in God and in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The Catholic school provides religious education for pupils in accordance with the doctrines, practices and tradition of the Roman Catholic Church and promotes the formation of pupils in the Catholic faith.

3 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.

4 Relationship of RSE to SPHE

RSE is an integral part of SPHE and 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.

5 Aims of the RSE programme

- To enhance the personal development, self-esteem and wellbeing of the child.
- To help the child to develop healthy friendships.
- 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.

6 Current provision for RSE

We have used lessons and activities from the Religious Education programme (Grow in Love), Child Abuse Prevention programme (Stay Safe) and Substance Misuse programme (Walk Tall).

7 Management and organisation of RSE

Provision for RSE

Teaching about relationships and sexuality will be delivered in the context of SPHE. All content objectives will be taught developmentally by the time the children leave Sixth Class. All issues will be discussed with sensitivity, professionalism and awareness of the varying levels of development within a class.

Within a two-year cycle:

Year	Programme
Year 1 Odd year, e.g. 2023	Stay Safe to be taught to all classes except Junior Infants. Junior Infants will cover RSE.
Year 2 Even year, e.g. 2024	RSE to be taught to all classes.

Possible sensitive issues, such as naming body parts and sexual intercourse, will be covered within the strand units Taking care of my body, Growing and changing, and Safety and protection.

Terminology

We will give children the correct and appropriate terminology as laid down in the RSE materials. See Appendix 1 for a summary of the Oide RSE Language Grid and a link to the full resource.

Class groupings

Pupils will be taught RSE in their usual classes. Boys and girls will be taught together from Junior Infants to Third Class. In Fourth Class, boys and girls will be taught separately for menstruation lessons only. In Fifth and Sixth Class, boys and girls will be taught separately for RSE lessons.

Answering questions

Should a pupil require information that is not in line with the curriculum content and is not considered age-appropriate for the general body of pupils, the school will refer the pupil to their parents.

RSE and other curricular areas

Our policy on RSE will also inform the teaching of the strand Living Things in Science.

8 Rights and responsibilities of parents and guardians

- In SPHE and RSE, parents are acknowledged as the primary educators of their children and the school will work in a supportive role.
- Before RSE lessons commence, parents will be provided with an overview of the SPHE/RSE programme and the list of possible sensitive issues. Parents' booklets are available from RSE, Dublin.
- An outline of the lessons and sensitive issues will be available to parents before they are taught, so that they can prepare the child before it is dealt with in school, if they so wish.
- A parent's right to withdraw a pupil from the process will be honoured on the understanding that the parent is taking full responsibility for this aspect of education. It is the responsibility of the parent to inform the school in writing of this decision. A record will be maintained in the pupil's file where parents decide to withdraw their child from RSE lessons.

Confidentiality: If a child is withdrawn from the teaching of sensitive issues, we cannot guarantee that other children will not tell them about what happened.

9 Rights and responsibilities of teachers

- Each class teacher will teach the SPHE programme, including sensitive issues.
- A teacher's right to opt out of teaching the sensitive issues will be honoured. Provision will then be made for these issues to be taught by a colleague, or by a female staff member to the girls and a male staff member to the boys.
- If a member of staff is unavailable to teach the sensitive issues, arrangements regarding the teaching of the programme will be made by the Board of Management.

10 Teaching and visiting speakers

RSE will be taught from Junior Infants to Sixth Class by the class teacher. A suitable guest speaker (In My Shoes) will be invited to deliver the following:

Class	Content
Fourth Class	Menstruation.
Fifth Class	Menstruation.
Sixth Class	Sexual intercourse, conception and birth within the context of a loving relationship; the physical changes that occur in boys and girls with the onset of puberty and an understanding that these take place at different rates for everyone; the reproductive systems of both male and female adults.

Teachers will be present when this takes place during school hours. All information delivered will be informed by the content objectives of the SPHE Curriculum (see SPHE Curriculum Statement, p. 32). We will require the guest speaker to keep within the school guidelines and to furnish the school with a transcript of the talk beforehand.

11 Sources and resources

We will use the RSE and Stay Safe programmes and other resources, such as a suitable video, that are deemed suitable by the Principal or curriculum lead in consultation with a representative of the parents.

12 Ongoing support and development

Where necessary, or if opportunities arise, we will seek funding from the Board of Management for in-career development for teachers and training for parents.

13 Policy review and amendments

When this policy is updated, the draft will be circulated online to parents, teachers and the school authorities and amended where feasible. The final agreed policy will be presented to the Board of Management for ratification, circulated to all parties involved and implemented.

The review arrangements in the existing policy provide for a review after one year and every two years thereafter. All partners will be informed of amendments following a review. RSE resources will also be reviewed to ensure that they are kept up to date.

14 Ratification history and current status

The RSE policy was ratified by the Board of Management of Our Lady of Mercy N.S. on 22 March 2005 and updated in 2008 and 2024.

Date recorded on the previous policy: 30 April 2024.
Next review date recorded on the previous policy: April 2026.

This existing policy remains in force in Scoil Mhuire agus Bharra pending review and update.

Appendix 1 RSE language grid

Summary adapted from the Oide Primary RSE Language Grid. Use the full grid for curriculum objectives, lesson references and supplementary resources.

Class level	Learning focus	Vocabulary
Junior and Senior Infants	Birth and new life; naming body parts using anatomical language.	Womb, breastfeeding, penis, vulva.
First and Second Class	Life cycles and reproduction; naming body parts and exploring their functions.	Infant vocabulary, plus vagina and urethra.
Third and Fourth Class	Puberty and related feelings; development before birth; natural differences in the timing of changes.	Earlier vocabulary, plus umbilical cord, menstruation and changes in puberty.
Fifth and Sixth Class	Intercourse, conception and birth in a loving, committed relationship; puberty and adult reproductive systems.	Earlier vocabulary, plus wet dreams, semen and sexual intercourse. Consult Busy Bodies for language guidance.

Vocabulary builds on earlier class levels. This table is a summary, not the full RSE programme.

Full resource: Oide Primary RSE Language Grid