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# Strathearn School

## RELATIONSHIPS AND SEXUALITY EDUCATION POLICY

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## **1 Introduction**

2 Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) is a lifelong process, which encompasses the acquisition of knowledge, understanding and skills as well as the development of attitudes, beliefs and values about personal and social relationships and gender issues. It is a statutory part of the curriculum and will encourage young people to value themselves as individuals and make responsible and well-informed decisions about their lives. The following priority areas of RSE are covered in the RSE curriculum at Strathearn School:

- Consent;
- Developments in contraception;
- Domestic and sexual violence and abuse;
- Healthy, positive sexual expression and relationships;
- LGBTQ+ matters;
- Safe use of the internet;
- Social media and its effects on relationships and self-esteem;
- Teen parenting; and
- Menstrual wellbeing

Sexuality<sup>1</sup> includes all aspects of the human personality and has biological, cultural, psychological, social and spiritual dimensions.

RSE is delivered in keeping with the ethos of the School and in furthering the School aim of respecting self and others. The RSE Policy should be read in association with the School's Pastoral, Anti-Bullying, Positive Behaviour, Safeguarding & Child Protection, Drugs and eSafety policies.

## **2 Legislative Context for RSE**

In June 2013, the Department of Education issued Circular 2013/16 'Relationships and Sexuality Education Policy in School'. The circular states that "the delivery of RSE must prepare pupils to view relationships in a responsible and healthy manner and should be taught in harmony with the ethos of the School and reflect the moral and religious principles held by parents and school management authorities". The Department requires each school to have in place a written policy on how it will address the delivery of RSE. The policy should be subject to parental consultation and endorsed by the School's Board of Governors. All staff should be familiar with the contents of the policy.

Furthermore, the School's RSE Policy should take account of the Equality Act (Sexual Orientation) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2006 and the guidance subsequently issued by the Equality Commission in 2009 on eliminating sexual orientation discrimination in schools in Northern Ireland. This legislation demands that all pupils have the right to learn in a safe environment, to be treated with respect and dignity and not to be treated any less favourably on grounds of their actual or perceived sexual orientation<sup>2</sup>.

In 2015, CCEA disseminated teacher guidance on RSE (DE Circular 2015/22). Whilst in 2017, the Department of Education issued updated guidance on 'Safeguarding and Child Protection in Schools' (updated August 2020) in which Section 8 highlighted the importance of the preventative curriculum through the delivery of RSE in schools. Most recently, in 2019 CCEA issued the document - 'Relationships and Sexuality Education Guidance, An Update for Post-Primary Schools'. This updated the previous guidance issued in 2015 and outlines a contemporary approach to the delivery of RSE. The document highlights the importance of RSE as it:

- Respects the rights of children and young people;
- Promotes a better understanding of diversity and inclusion;
- Helps young people keep themselves safer in the digital world;
- Helps young people to recognise and challenge inappropriate behaviour and touch;
- Provides reliable, accurate and age-appropriate information; and
- Increases young people's awareness of sexual health.

This policy supports the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) which guarantees, in Articles 2, 6, 12, 13, 16, 19 and 23:

- Non discrimination;
- Right to life survival and development;
- Right to express views freely in all matters affecting the child;
- Right to access information;
- Right to privacy; and
- Protection from harm.

### **3 The Moral Framework of the Policy**

Strathearn School recognises that young people live in a diverse range of cultures, religions and family types. The School aims to establish an inclusive community where all pupils and staff are treated with dignity and respect, regardless of individual differences including culture, race, religion, beliefs, sexual or gender orientation, appearance and personal capability. In such an environment, we believe each pupil will be free to reach their full potential.

The School is committed to an RSE programme which, at all times, will reflect the diversity and complexity of the lives and experiences of pupils in the School and the community.

RSE is taught in a sensitive manner in conformity with traditional moral and religious principles.

Emphasis is placed on:

- A respect for self and others;
- The development of a healthy critical self-awareness;
- The importance of a permanent, committed and loving relationship with one person;
- The responsibility of parenthood and the value of a stable family life;

- The deferment of sexual activity until young people are physically and emotionally mature enough to understand the inherent responsibilities;
- Abstinence as an achievable option.

Strathearn School also recognises that, at times, there may be conflict between the different value systems. At all times, whilst respecting difference, the staff will uphold the aims and policies of the School.

#### **4 Aims and Objectives**

At Strathearn School, we strive to provide a secure and supportive learning environment in which the programme of education meets the needs of each pupil and which prepares them for life beyond School. In doing so, the School will endeavour to:

- Provide a pastoral care system which gives support and guidance at all times;
- Promote self-confidence, self-respect, self-discipline, self-motivation, initiative and positive attitudes;
- Promote strategies which enable pupils to develop a language for life and learning.

The aims and objectives of the RSE curriculum are to:

- Enhance the personal development, self-esteem and well-being of the pupils;
- Acquire and develop a knowledge and understanding of self;
- Help the pupils develop healthy, appropriate and respectful friendships and relationships with adults and their peers;
- Promote responsible behaviour and the ability to make informed decisions within a moral framework;
- Develop coping strategies to protect themselves and others from various forms of abuse;
- Develop personal skills which will help to establish and sustain healthy personal relationships;
- Acquire a knowledge of the causes and prevention of sexually transmitted infections;
- Acquire and improve skills of communication and social interactions;
- Develop a critical understanding of external influences on lifestyle and decision making;
- Develop skills for coping with peer pressure, conflict and threats to personal safety;
- Acquire a knowledge and understanding of the law as it relates to sexual behaviour.

The provision of RSE is an equal opportunity issue. All pupils of Strathearn School will receive appropriate preparation for the emotional and physical changes at puberty and beyond. The programme will be tailored to meet the particular requirements of pupils with special educational needs in terms of content, methodology and the resources used, if required.

It is widely recognised that pupils with Special Educational Needs are more vulnerable to all forms of abuse and exploitation. Staff will try to ensure that they develop the knowledge, understanding and skills of pupils to enable them to:

- Identify inappropriate and exploitative behaviour;
- Help develop their own preventative strategies to stay safe;
- Recognise and build healthy relationships; and
- Know who they can talk to.

## **5 Confidentiality**

There is no statutory legislation relating specifically to confidentiality. Strathearn School recognises that pupils need and expect a certain level of confidentiality, and every effort is made to ensure that this is provided as and when appropriate. However, it is essential that at all times confidentiality operates within the boundaries of the School's Safeguarding & Child Protection Policy and the Children's (Northern Ireland) Order 1995. The School have a responsibility for the welfare and safety of all pupils within the School environment and thus it is not always possible to offer confidentiality.

All teaching staff must follow these procedures:

- Confidentiality must be discussed with pupils before the RSE programme commences;
- Ground rules should be agreed with pupils;
- Pupils should be informed that there are instances when confidentiality cannot be held (for example, in cases of suspected abuse). Pupils should be fully informed of action that will be taken;
- Pupils must be fully aware that they have the right to report inappropriate attitudes and/or behaviour by any member of the School personnel;
- Where teachers are unsure of their obligations in relation to confidentiality, they should in the first instance consult with the Designated Teacher, Mrs N Sinnerton (Pastoral Vice Principal).

## **6 Development of Skills**

The RSE curriculum is designed to enable pupils to learn and to practise the skills necessary to form and maintain relationships and to make informed choices regarding health and well being. These skills will enable them to critically evaluate the wide range of information, opinions, attitudes and values. These skills will evolve as the pupils are given the opportunity and encouragement to reflect and practise them in a non-judgemental environment. Such opportunities will assist in the development of the pupils' self-esteem and emotional maturity.

Teaching RSE will provide opportunities for the pupils to:

- Form values and establish behaviour within a moral, spiritual and social framework;
- Examine and explore the variety of human relationships;

- Learn how to develop and enjoy personal relationships and friendships which are based on responsibility and mutual respect;
- Build the foundations for developing more personal relationships later in life;
- Make positive, responsible choices about themselves and others and the way they live their lives;
- Practise communication skills by listening to others, giving and receiving feedback, being assertive, handling and resolving conflict;
- Develop decision-making and problem-solving skills by making sensible decisions, making moral judgements about what to do, developing independence of thought and considering the consequences of actions;
- Exercise interpersonal and leadership skills by taking the initiative, managing others and managing relationships confidently.

## **7 Management and coordination of RSE**

### **Role of the Vice Principal (Pastoral)**

The Vice Principal (Pastoral) has overall responsibility for the pastoral care of pupils with the School. Their role includes:

- Updating the RSE policy;
- Updating staff on the policy; and
- Liaising with the LLW coordinator who oversees the RSE programme.

### **Role of Learning for Life and Work (LLW) coordinator**

The LLW coordinator has oversight of RSE programme. Their role includes:

- Coordinating the programme of study and ensuring that the programme is taught effectively and is appropriate to the age and maturity of the pupils;
- Liaising with the Principal, Board of Governors, teaching and non-teaching staff, parents and health professionals on RSE matters;
- Attending in-service training and disseminating appropriate information to other members of staff;
- Organising staff training as and when appropriate;
- Liaising with external agencies for curriculum purposes.

### **Role of Heads of Year**

Each Head of Year has oversight as to what is taught. Their role includes:

- Devising the programme of study;
- Review of the programme of study to ensure it is relevant, meaningful and current;
- Development of resources; and
- Support staff delivering programme of study.

## 8 Implementation of the RSE programme

The RSE programme is delivered as part of the LLW Programme (the Personal Development strand of the *Learning for Life and Work* Programme) at Key Stages 3 and 4 by Form Tutors. In Sixth Form, Form Tutors deliver aspects of the course through tutorial lessons.

Strathearn School aims to provide a learning environment that suits the needs of the pupils and provides opportunity for participation and engagement. Teaching methods include:

- Information and knowledge-based learning activities including, for example, mind maps, questioning, discussion, reflection and problem solving;
- Skill-based activities through participation and communication including, for example, scenarios, role-play, video and auditory recordings and any other method that brings real life situations into the classroom;
- Development of values and attitudes through talking and listening skills including, for example, discussions;
- Whole group sessions including assemblies with relevant organisations.

Such methodologies will ensure pupils gain deeper knowledge, understanding, attitudes and dispositions. Teachers will employ an enquiry-based approach when exploring sensitive issues.

## 9 RSE Across the Curriculum

Many aspects of RSE are explored across the School curriculum. As noted, topics are delivered predominantly through the School's Personal Development (PD) programme; but also through Science, Religious Studies, Physical Education, Home Economics, Art, Languages, Geography, ICT, History and English curricula. This cross-curricular approach is conducive to the development of those life skills amongst pupils that a good RSE programme will promote. The components of the RSE programme currently addressed within each subject discipline in Strathearn School are summarised in Appendix 1.

### **RSE at Key Stage 3**

It is intended that during Key Stage 3 pupils will achieve a basic knowledge and understanding of the content and begin to appreciate the issues pertaining to RSE. The issues discussed at Key Stage 3 include:

- Growth and Development during puberty
- Marriage and Family life
- Forming and maintaining relationships
- Respect and Tolerance

The programme is supported by external agencies, including 'Love for Life' who deliver talks on personal health issues and safety.

### **RSE at Key Stage 4**

Progression and continuity is achieved at Key Stage 4 by revisiting certain topics so that pupils can reach a deeper understanding of more complex concepts and issues given their increased maturity and wider range of experiences. The issues developed at Key Stage 4 include:

- The nature of relationships
- The concept of love and sex in relationships
- Safer sex and health risks
- The transmission of Sexually Transmitted Infections

The programme may be supported at Key stage 4 by presentations from external agencies including 'Love for Life'.

### **RSE at Key Stage 5**

At Key Stage 5, external agencies including, but not limited to, Love for Life, Nexus NI and the PSNI deliver additional RSE components tailored to the needs of post-16 pupils, in preparation for leaving School and moving into a more adult environment.

## **10 Resources**

The resources used are consistent with the aims and objectives of the RSE policy, and the School's traditional moral framework. CCEA and other sources provide support materials to assist in the development of resources (see Appendix 2). Teachers, including Heads of Year, must be cautious about the resources they use to deliver RSE. They must satisfy themselves that the resources they plan to use:

- Reflect the ethos of the School;
- Are age-appropriate, inclusive, and sensitive to the pupils' needs and experiences; and
- Are factually accurate, up-to-date and make clear distinctions between fact and opinion.

As part of the curriculum, teachers provide general information about sexual health issues, but will also encourage pupils to develop strong communication channels with parents, the School health nurse and medical practitioners. Pupils will also receive information about where, and from whom, they can receive confidential advice, treatment and support. Personal advice (including medical) is not to be given to individual pupils.

## **11 External agencies and support**

At Strathearn School, we recognise that the expertise of education and health professionals, from statutory or voluntary bodies or individuals from the community, can bring a valuable contribution to the RSE programme.



Prior to using an external agency or individual, the member of staff organising such contributions must:

- Ensure that the agency or individual receives a copy of the School's RSE policy;
- Ensure that issues around confidentiality and the School's ethos are highlighted;
- Ensure parental consent through agreement in writing for participation in any programme;
- Ensure an appropriate member of staff is present;
- Ensure that the content to be delivered complements the School's RSE programme;
- Inform pupils of the purpose of the visit;
- Ensure that the pupils, and attending staff, evaluate the work.

## **12 Sensitive issues**

Issues such as sexual identity, female genital mutilation and abortion can attract a wide range of beliefs or values. The teaching of all issues including those that may be perceived as sensitive will be consistent with the ethos of the School even though they may be a contradiction to the lifestyle experiences of some pupils, parents or staff. The School must ensure that pupils receive information that is balanced, non-judgmental and respectful of the diversity of values that are reflected in society.

There is no statutory parental right to withdraw a pupil from RSE lessons. However, the School, will take account of any parental concerns expressed and will try, as far as possible, to make alternative provision for any pupil whose parent wishes them to be excused from specific, or all, RSE classes.

If a parent or pupil wishes to be excluded from the study of a particular sensitive issue or topic, they can discuss this with the LLW co-ordinator or Vice Principal (Pastoral).

## **13 Evaluation**

The LLW coordinator, Heads of Year, School Health Nurse, Vice Principals (Pastoral and Teaching & Learning) and other relevant staff will evaluate the provision for RSE within the School. Views of pupils and staff will be sought and used to give informed feedback on a biennial review of the policy and practice. The aim of the evaluation process will ensure that:

- The RSE policy continues to comply with guidelines and legislation;
- Classroom practice continues to reflect the policy and the needs of the pupils;
- Teaching resources are reviewed and updated;
- The views, thoughts and feelings are respected and will be used to influence the real needs of pupils rather than their perceived needs.


The RSE policy is available on the School's website. Paper copies can be requested from Reception.

<sup>1</sup>the capacity for sexual feelings

<sup>2</sup>a person’s sexual [identity in relation to](#) the [gender](#) to which they are [attracted](#); the fact of being [heterosexual](#), [homosexual](#) or [bisexual](#).

## Appendix 1

SUBJECT	Physical Development	Emotional Education	Social Development	Relationships Family/Peers	Personal Safety	Issues of Abuse	Self-esteem	Conflict Resolution	Child Birth	Child Development	Contraception	Physiology of Sex	HIV/Aids	Sexually Transmitted Infections	Gender Issues
BIOLOGY															
HOME ECONOMICS															
ENGLISH															
HISTORY															
GEOGRAPHY															
RELIGIOUS STUDIES															
PHYSICAL EDUCATION															
LANGUAGES															
ART															
INFORMATION & COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY															
PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT															

 Topics addressed

## Appendix 2

### Support Resources

#### CCEA Resources

Available at [www.ccea.org.uk](http://www.ccea.org.uk)

#### RSE Hub

The RSE Hub provides a range of up-to-date, relevant resources and sources of support for priority areas in RSE. These resources and guidance documents can be used to help address sensitive issues with pupils. However, the resources should be reviewed prior to use to ensure they are appropriate for pupils and in line with the ethos and RSE policy of the School.

#### Wellbeing Hub

The Wellbeing Hub identifies how the Northern Ireland curriculum promotes the learning and development of skills that support pupils' wellbeing and mental health.

#### UNCRC Resource Hub

CCEA and the Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People have partnered to create resources for teachers and pupils with a focus on the rights of children and young people, as outlined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC).

#### Teaching Controversial Issues

A training programme which supports a whole-school approach to teaching controversial issues. Training materials can be adapted for use within the School.

#### Controversial Issues Guidance

Guidance to support Principals, senior leaders and teachers plan and develop approaches to teaching controversial issues at whole-school and classroom levels.

#### **CCEA guidance documents**

The following guidance documents, produced by CCEA, may be of use to teachers in planning RSE provision:

- **InSync** - teaching resource for Key Stage 3 Personal Development issues
- Learning for Life and Work at Key Stage 4
- Active Learning and Teaching Methods at Key Stage 3
- Thinking Skills and Personal Capabilities at Key Stage 3
- Teaching, Learning and Assessment at Key Stage 4

## **Department of Education Resources**

Available at [www.education-ni.gov.uk](http://www.education-ni.gov.uk)

### **iMatter**

A series of support leaflets relating to pupil health and wellbeing.