

St. Anthony's Special School
RSE Policy

Version	Revision Date	Reason	Approved by	Approved on
1	Feb 2011	R/V	BOM	2nd Feb 2011
2	Feb 2013	R/V	BOM	Feb 2013
3	Feb 2015	R/V	BOM	Feb 2015
4	Feb 2017	R/V	BOM	1st Feb 2017
5	31st Jan 2019	With PDST Nuala Dalton	BOM	11th Feb 2019
6	For 2025/26	R/V 2019 Policy	BOM	10th March '25

St. Anthony's School, Humbert Way, Castlebar, Co. Mayo
Policy Statement for RSE: reviewed Feb 2025

School Name: St. Anthony's Special School **Vimhir Rolla:** 19248R

Enrolment: Special School for children with Mild General Learning Disabilities who may also have co morbid difficulties such as ADHD, ASD, Sensory Impairments or Physical Disabilities. **School Ethos/**

Philosophy: The characteristic spirit of our school as stated in our Mission and Vision Statement is inspired by the vision of a holistic view of the child and the school strives to enable pupils to develop a sense of dignity and self-worth in an environment where the intellectual, spiritual, moral, cultural and physical needs of the pupils are identified and addressed in accordance with each pupil's level of development and ability. It is our goal to assist in the growth of self-esteem among each of our pupils in a child centred and child safe environment. We work towards this goal through cross curricular strategies where emphasis is also placed on self-help and community participation, empowering every student to reach their full potential and lead fulfilling, independent lives.

Definition of RSE:

RSE encompasses the acquisition of knowledge and understanding, and the development of attitudes, beliefs and values about relationships, sexual identity and intimacy. It also 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.¹

This policy has been drawn up with reference to Department of Education Circulars 42/2018, 43/2018 on Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) & Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) - Best Practice Guidelines for Primary and Post Primary Schools. In this policy document all references to gender are taken to be inclusive and the term "parent" is taken to include "guardian".

Rationale:

The school has a responsibility to put in place an R.S.E. policy as part of the wider, Social, Personal + Health Education curriculum. The need for this policy arises from our schools obligation to provide for all the needs of the student body and respond appropriately to sensitive and emotive issues relating to emerging sexuality issues, and the need for extra care and education in matters of personal safety for children with special needs who may be more at risk of abuse or who may be more vulnerable to sexual exploitation due to the following reasons:

¹ RSE, Guidelines Booklet, Page 7

1. possible communication difficulties
2. sensory difficulties
3. vulnerability due to isolation
4. dependence on goodwill of carers
5. power differences
6. limited assertiveness
7. limited ability to recognise inappropriate sexual behaviour
8. need for intimate care such as washing and toileting
9. contact with multiple care services and carers
10. frequent staff turnover
11. compliant behaviour towards adults
12. limited understanding of sexuality or sexual behaviour
13. need for attention, friendship or affection
14. limited sense of danger and inability to see warning signs
15. fear of not being believed
16. perceived limited reliability as witnesses.

Some pupils in our school may require more help than others in coping with the physical and emotional aspects of growing up. They may also need more help in learning what are acceptable and unacceptable behaviours. Through the provision of RSE and Stay Safe within the SPHE curriculum pupils should become more aware of and better able to recognise and report signs of abuse to them and others. They should also become more aware of how their behaviour, regardless of their intentions, may appear to others.

Context:

RSE is a mandatory part of the SPHE primary School Curriculum, which has been timetabled on our curriculum from September 2004. Sensitive (sexual) issues will be covered within the Strand Units 'Taking Care of my Body,' 'Growing and Changing,' and 'Safety and Protection.' Current provision included in the school curriculum is

- discrete SPHE lessons
- use of RSE manuals and Busy Body resources
- Stay Safe Programme
- Walk Tall Programme
- Religious Education
- Level 1 & 2 JCL Learning Programme (Senior Cycle from Sept '25)

Aims: (see also SPHE Curriculum Guidelines Pg. 9 and 10 - detailed in the school SPHE plan)

- a) To enhance the personal development, well being and self-esteem of each child.
- b) To enable the child, understand and develop healthy friendships and relationships.
- c) To promote a healthy positive attitude and understanding of sexuality and relationships
- d) To understand the physical changes taking place with the onset of puberty
- e) To enable each child to gain an understanding of, a healthy attitude to, and respect for human love, reproduction and sexual activity in a sensitive and measured way.

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 members of the school community. The school ethos affirms and supports close links between school and home. To this end parents/guardian's are encouraged to play a meaningful role in the R.S.E. programme.

Child Protection

This policy is cognisant of all aspects of our current Child Safeguarding Policy. The school follows the DES Child Protection Procedures and has both DLP and DDLP in place. Where a child protection concern is raised the procedures outlined in the schools Child Safeguarding Policy will be followed.

Guideline for the Management and Organisation of RSE in our school:

- Parents have the primary responsibility for educating their children in sexual matters. In this context parents are acknowledged as primary educators of their children and the school will work in a supportive role.
- All content objectives will be covered by the time the children leave school at age eighteen.
- The programme is taught within the ethos of the school and contemporary issues/topics are dealt with by the teacher at a level appropriate to the age and stage of development of pupils within a moral and spiritual framework.
- All information delivered will be informed by the content objectives of the SPHE, Junior L1 L2 & Senior Cycle Curriculum as detailed above.
- Should a pupil require information that is not in line with the curriculum content and considered not to be age appropriate for the general body of pupils the school will refer the question home to parents and parents can decide if the question should be answered and who would be the best person to answer the question. This is done on an individual basis.
- An outline of the content objectives will be available to parents before the commencement of the programme each year.

Methodology

Active Learning & student centred approaches are used extensively in all classes to build confidence and address fear e.g : discussions, circle time, role play, visuals, nteractive resources, questionnaires, games, problem solving, story reading. Methodologies used are inquiry based and free from bias.

School Curricular Provision

Strand Units of the SPHE/RSE Primary Curriculum:

(As per all Primary Schools for children from 4 - 12 years of age)

Myself - Self identity; Taking care of my body; Growing and changing; Safety and protection.

Myself and Others - Myself and my Family, Friends and Relating to other people.

Taking Care of My Body includes Naming parts of the male and female body using appropriate terminology (Junior and Lower Middle classes). Identifying physical changes, Understanding puberty and the Reproductive System (Senior Classes)

Growing and Changing includes The stages of development of a baby from conception to birth (Middle Classes).

Understanding sexual relations within the context of a committed loving relationship (Senior Classes).

Children who ask questions in class on content outside the curriculum are talked to individually and discreetly. Parents are always informed and asked to talk to their child.

The Stay Safe and Walk Tall programmes.

The Stay Safe programme covers personal safety skills and is taught in all classes on alternate years. Aspects of the programme such as bullying are revised in all classes regularly. The Walk Tall programme covers substance misuse and aspects of this programme are covered throughout the SPHE curriculum.

Junior Cycle - Learning Programmes Level 1 & 2:

The Junior Cycle Level 1 Learning Programme- PLU 3-Personal Care and Wellbeing: Element -Personal Safety

The Junior Cycle Level 1 - PLU 4-Being Part Of a Community: Element -Relating to Others

Element- Being Safe in the Community

The Junior Cycle Level 2 Learning Programme for students aged 12-18 supports RSE through the Priority Learning Unit: Personal Care and through the Element: Becoming aware of one's sexuality. The Wellbeing programme at Junior cycle level also supports the aims and goals of RSE.

PROPOSED CONTENT FOR ST. ANTHONY'S SCHOOL RSE PROGRAMME

- Topics covered in RSE are based on the content of the RSE-Primary School Curriculum and for Lower Primary classes in our school include:

- Keeping safe.
- Naming bodily parts using correct terminology.
- Bodily changes during growth and development.
- Appreciating family life/family relationships.
- Recognizing and expressing feelings.
- Self-care, hygiene, diet, exercise and sleep (link with P.E. Healthy Eating Policy and S.P.H.E.)
- Healthy eating, personal hygiene, exercise.
- Expressing feelings.

- Topics covered in RSE are based on the content of the RSE-Primary School Curriculum and for Upper Primary classes in our school include:

- Bodily changes
- Healthy eating, personal hygiene and exercise
- Keeping safe
- Expressing feelings
- Family relationships
- Making healthy and responsible decisions
- Forming friendships
- Changes that occur in boys and girls with the onset of puberty
- Reproductive system of male/female adults

- Topics covered in Post Primary classes in our school are based on the content of RSE Post Primary Junior Cycle and TRUST resource materials for RSE at Senior Cycle that build on work previously covered at the Primary level and include:

- Developing good daily personal care
- Developing a healthy lifestyle
- Being able to manage stress
- Knowing how to stay safe
- Recognising emotions
- Making personal decisions
- RSE Specific Topics: Becoming aware of one's sexuality:
 - Identify the standard names of the sexual organs
 - Describe the functions of the sexual parts of the body
 - Recognise the physical and emotional changes which occur in boys and girls during adolescence
 - Recognise the difference between appropriate and inappropriate ways of expressing feelings
 - Recognise the difference between a friendship and a more intimate relationship
 - Understanding sexual intercourse, contraception and birth within the context of a committed loving relationship
 - Accept appropriate attention from others
 - Differentiate between familiar and unfamiliar people
 - Object to inappropriate attention and/or show awareness of another person/people who can help if uncomfortable in a situation
 - Show awareness of risks in familiar environments

- Recognise public and private places and how they are different
- Identify or name body parts using correct anatomical language
- Follow social conventions of privacy
- Demonstrate awareness of appropriate and inappropriate physical contact with others
- Understanding the stages and sequence of development of the human baby in the womb, birth and caring for a baby
- Relationships and taking time to think

Students in the post primary classes may need further opportunities to discuss topics as may be relevant and this will take place with parental approval. They may also use programmes such as "Up2Us" which deal with anti-bullying and cyberbullying as these topics are cross curricular and also have RSE aspects to be considered e.g. "sexting", sharing pornographic pictures etc

Organisational Matters:

Parents will be informed in advance of lessons on the sensitive areas of the RSE programme.

Consent to participate in the RSE programme:

Consent is sought during the enrollment meeting with parents of all new pupils. The policy is available on the school website and parents/guardian's will always be provided with a full copy following a request to do so.

The school R.S.E. Programme acts as a support only to parents/guardians, and parents/guardians retain the right to withdraw their children from classes. As parent/guardian, if you feel strongly that you do not wish your child to participate you must contact the school and confirm in writing that you will be teaching the complete sexuality element of the RSE programme to your own child and - sometimes we can resolve any misunderstandings. A parent's/guardian's right to withdraw a pupil from the process will be respected on the understanding that the parent is taking full responsibility for this aspect of education themselves. It is the responsibility of the parent/guardian to inform the school of this decision and they will have to acknowledge and confirm this decision in writing.

Important NOTE: Parents/guardians will have to withdraw their child from school for the duration of the class that RSE is being taught as the school cannot provide supervision if a child is not attending the class.

- Parents/guardian's have a responsibility 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/guardian's are welcome to view the curriculum and may speak to the class teacher if they have any concerns.
- 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 children/siblings for example.
- With regard to matters of a confidential nature, the school cannot take any responsibility for what is discussed in the yard or classroom.
- Special consideration will be taken to ensure that the needs of all our children are met, due to their special educational needs. Taking into account the pupils' social and emotional development, instruction will be based on individual needs where possible. Parents/guardian's may be consulted around sensitive issues.

Dealing with questions:

It is natural that children should wish to ask questions in the area of RSE.

All questions answered will reflect the parameters of the curriculum. Certain topics are not in the primary RSE/SPHE curriculum (Primary Classes) and will not be discussed i.e. abortion or contraception, but will be discussed in the Senior Classes as per Students rights. If any questions asked by pupils are deemed inappropriate the teacher will refer the pupil to their parents, or state that this information may be available at a later stage of the curriculum or in the post primary level when they are older. The school cannot guarantee confidentiality if a child asks a question of a personal nature or discloses personal information. It is school policy that where a pupil is considered at risk of any type of abuse or in breach of the law, the teacher/school must refer this immediately to the DLP/DDLP and /or TUSLA.

While masturbation is not taught about as part of the curriculum it is acknowledged that some children do require explicit teaching around appropriate and inappropriate behaviours which may include masturbation. Specific age-appropriate resources may be used here in consultation with parents and if relevant other multi-disciplinary team personnel.

Homosexuality is taught about in the context of a loving relationship and through fostering diversity, inclusion and tolerance throughout the school culture.

Staff Training

School staff have availed of training and are encouraged to attend in-service training in: -

- The Child Abuse Prevention Programme (Stay Safe)
- Relationships and Sexuality Programme (R.S.E.)
- Walk Tall Programme (S.M.P.P.)
- RSE and Autism Middletown Training for staff

PDST also supports teachers in the provision of SPHE/RSE/Stay Safe in our school through the use of facilitators to support the school as required.

Evaluation

- Teacher observation.
- Regular review of what needs to be changed.
- Ensuring all SPHE strands are covered over a two-year programme of SPHE.
- Teacher designed tasks and tests and self-evaluation.
- Staff feedback.
- Parental feedback.

Roles and Responsibilities

The whole school community of B.O.M., staff, pupils and parents play a key role in the formulation and implementation of the plan.

Resources:

- 1999 Primary Curriculum - SPHE
- NCCA Curriculum for Students with General Learning Difficulties.
- RSE Primary Resource Manuals 2017 - Jnr Infants to 6th Class
- RSE Post Primary: Junior Cycle
- Wellbeing for Junior Cycle
- Busy Bodies Teachers Manuals, workbooks and Online resources
- Puberty & Sexuality for Children & Young People with a Learning Disability - Leeds NHS •
- Child Protection Guidelines and Procedures 2017 - Department of Education & Science •
- Stay Safe Programme *New 2016-2017 programme
- Walk Tall Programme *New in 2017
- Videos/DVDs e.g. Busybodies Adolescent Development Programme - HSE
- Library Books - How Did I Begin? Where Did I Come From? What's Happening To Me? Let's Talk About Where Babies Come From
- Invited speakers (See P. 33 of SPHE T.G. re guidelines and Circular 22/2010)
- Appendix 1: RSE Special Needs Resource List (see https://sphe.ie/downloads/rse/rse_learning_diff.pdf)
- Up2Us Anti Bullying Kit
- Year 2025- The British programme ' Learn & Thrive' is to be used for very informative videos and resources to assist the existing programmes.
- [PDST.ie/primary/health-wellbeing/RSE](https://pdst.ie/primary/health-wellbeing/RSE) Learning for Life- Learn & Thrive
- Exploring Feelings-To manage Anger, To Manage Anxiety
- HSE : Tom's Power Flower & Talking to Young Child about Relationships, Sexuality and Growing Up
- Sex & Relationships Education: A Visual Programme for Learners with Autistic Spectrum Disorders or Learning Disabilities by Fiona Speirs
- Puberty & Sexuality for Children & Young People with a Learning Disability (NHS Document)
- Health Relationships, Sexuality and Disability Resource Guide 2014 Edition (USA)
- Sexuality, Sex Education and Autism Spectrum Disorders: The Basics (2012 HSE Carlow/Kilkenny)

Ratification

This policy was originally reviewed and ratified by the B.O.M. at a meeting on Thursday 1st May 2008 and is effective from that date. Reviews are held bi-annually as detailed in front of Policy.

Implementation

Implementation has been ongoing since 2004-2005 and the RSE programme is carried out every second year in all class levels in the school at the same time.

Ratification 2025-2027

Signed: Joe Treacy Date: 10/03/2025 (Chairperson BOM)

Signed: Ann Smyth Date: 10/3/25 (Principal)

