

R.S.E. Policy for Merlin Woods Primary School

▪ Introduction

Merlin Woods Primary School is a co-ed mainstream Primary School with two special classes. The school is a Catholic school under the patronage of the Diocese of Galway. The ethos of our school is founded on Christian principles where tolerance and respect for others is paramount. It is our intention that everyone feels valued and our pupils are encouraged to develop their full potential in a caring and supportive environment. RSE encompasses the acquisition of knowledge and understanding and the development of attitudes, beliefs and values about relationships, sexual identity and intimacy. In Merlin Woods Primary School we seek to promote the overall development of the child which involves the integration of RSE into personal understanding, growth and development within the context of our Catholic ethos.

▪ Development of this Policy

This policy was devised by school staff following RSE Training in Galway Education Centre. It was originally ratified by the Board of Management in January 2015. It was developed to inform teachers and parents as to what material is covered in the RSE programme within SPHE. It was reviewed by the RSE Policy committee with a PDST advisor in October 2014, in 2017 and again in 2020.

▪ Rationale

Merlin Woods Primary School is committed to the education of all the children in their care. Relationships and Sexuality are integral parts of the human personality and impact their biologically, culturally, socially and spiritually. The ethos of the school is the cornerstone of our RSE Policy. RSE is a lifelong process that involves the acquisition of knowledge, understanding and skills and the development of attitudes, beliefs, morals and values. While we believe that the primary responsibility for addressing these issues rests with parents, we acknowledge the vital part the school can play in supporting and complementing this.

▪ School Philosophy

Merlin Woods Primary School is a Catholic school and therefore all policies developed are implemented in ways which are in keeping with the ethos of the school. The ethos of the school is characterised by the following:

- *Sensitive to reality of our children's lives in a changing world*
- *Mutual respect between all partners in education*
- *Child-centred*
- *Aims to ensure each child reaches full potential in the holistic sense*
- *Hopes that children are equipped with high self-esteem to enable them to go to live happy and fulfilled lives*

▪ Definition of RSE

RSE 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. RSE aims to help children learn, at home and in school about their own development and about their friendships and relationships with others. This work will be based on developing a good self-image, promoting respect for themselves and others and providing them with appropriate information.

▪ **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. (p. 5 NCCA interim curriculum and guidelines for RSE)

▪ **Current Provision** Included in the school curriculum is:

Many of the strands of SPHE/RSE recommended by the Department of Education and Science are already in place within the school. Named below are a number of subject areas which fall into this category:

SPHE & Incredible Years Behaviour Management Programme

Creates a positive school climate and atmosphere.

Religious Education

Through the Grow in Love Programme

Language Development

Language has a vital role to play in SPHE/RSE. It is important that a child be able to articulate her feelings and this is why Language Development is emphasised from day one. Topics of conversation include: Myself, My News, Friends, My Family.

Learn Together

Several of the lessons in the LT Programme are based on the child as a person. Some examples of these include: I Am Unique, My Body, Resolving Conflicts, Growing.

Social and Environmental Studies

This subject deals with a wide range of issues including: Personal Hygiene, Life Cycle, My Body.

Gaeilge

Certain themes within the RSE programme already form part of the Irish curriculum, where familiar topics are discussed informally with the children, for example, My Body, Myself, My Family.

Stay Safe Programme

This programme deals with many of the issues developed upon in the RSE syllabus, namely: the Development of Self-Esteem, My Body, and Self-Protection.

Art and Craft

Through many of the varied Art and Craft activities the children already interpret and display an understanding of some of the information contained in the RSE programme,

for example, making a Spring Frieze (introducing new life), *Myself, Sense and Touch (My Body)*, *Hand and Feet Prints* (awareness of physical growth).

Music, Movement and PE:

Through music, movement and PE the children become aware of the physical nature of their bodies and various exercises are carried out within the classroom which develop upon the idea of physical growth, for example, *Stay Safe Song*, *Lambs at Play* (song), *Physical Education*.

Science

As part of the science curriculum "the identification of the parts of the human body is included at each level of the primary programme" and "children will be helped to develop ideas about the human body, growth, movement and breathing ... the development of children's ideas about body changes and reproduction should be done in accordance with the school's policy on SPHE". (Science Curriculum Teacher Guidelines, Page 10). Our policy on RSE will also inform the teaching of the strand "Living Things" in Science.

Use of resources

eg anatomically correct dolls for infants, puppets, role play equipment, etc. Use of the RSE Manual and *Busy Bodies DVD* and *Busy Bodies Booklet*

As is apparent from the above, much of the RSE programme is already contained within today's curriculum. Many more examples exist, as the school currently provides a large number of programmes both formal and informal, which all come under the umbrella term SPHE.

▪ **Aims of our RSE programme**

- To help young people develop healthy friendships and relationships
- To promote a healthy attitude to sexuality and to relationships
- To enhance the personal development, self-esteem and well-being of the child
- To foster an understanding of, and a healthy attitude towards, 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- Fifth and Sixth Class
- To understand the physical changes taking place with the onset of puberty- Senior Classes
- 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

➤ **Guidelines for the Management and Organisation of RSE in our School**

➤ Curriculum Matters:

- Curriculum Content –The curriculum by NCCA will be followed as published, and will be taught from Infants to 6th class. All resources used will be in keeping with the ethos of the school and the policy. Each class teacher will teach the content for their class level.

- If an outside speaker is used, the class teacher is responsible for making them aware of school policy and that teacher will sit in during the lesson.

Topics covered up to 2nd class include:

- Keeping Safe
- Bodily changes during grown and birth (birth to 9)
- Making age appropriate choices
- Appreciating family life
- Recognising and expressing feelings
- Self care, hygiene, diet, exercise and sleep
- Expressing opinions and listening to others
- *Naming the parts of the male/ female body using appropriate anatomical terms (Junior/ Senior Infants)*
- *Naming the parts of the male/ female body using appropriate anatomical terms and identify some of their functions (1st/2nd)*

Topics from 3rd to Sixth include:

- Bodily changes
- Healthy eating, personal hygiene, exercise
- Keeping Safe
- Expressing Feelings
- Family relationships
- Making healthy and responsible decisions
- Forming Friendships
- *Discuss the stages and sequence of development of the human baby in the womb (Fourth class)*
- *Changes that occur in boys and girls with the onset of puberty (Fifth and Sixth Class)*
- *Reproductive system of male/female adults (Fifth and Sixth Class)*
- *Understanding sexual intercourse, conception and birth within the context of a committed loving relationship.(Fifth and Sixth Class)*
- Organisational Matters:
- If children are withdrawn by their parents, they must give a notice in writing to the school principal that they are withdrawing their child. The child will be accommodated in another teacher's classroom in the school.
- With regard to matters of a confidential nature, the school cannot take any responsibility for what is discussed in the yard or classroom.
- Any teacher has the right to opt-out from teaching the sexually sensitive issues in RSE. It is the responsibility of the Board of Management to ensure that the curriculum will be taught to the children by another teacher or an outside speaker.
- Parents are invited/welcome to view the curriculum and may speak to the class teacher if they have any concerns.
- Dealing with Questions:
All questions answered will reflect the parameters of the curriculum. Certain topics will not be discussed i.e. abortion, masturbation, homosexuality, contraception. Questions to the teacher may be written or oral within the group setting and answered within the boundaries of the curriculum and policy. Any questions asked by the children that are judged to be inappropriate, the teacher

will refer the child to their parents or will explain that this will be covered at second level.

- With regard to matters of a confidential nature, the school cannot take any responsibility for what is discussed in the yard or classroom.

➤ ***Unforeseen Closures:***

Should a forced closure take place due to unforeseen circumstances e.g Covid 19 virus, SPHE lessons (Walk Tall, Stay Safe, RSE) will be taught virtually where possible. Where lessons, due to their sensitive nature, cannot be taught virtually they must be taught on the resumption of face to face teaching. Teacher's planning will reflect lessons omitted and should be communicated to a new teacher should the class be moving on.

(The sensitive lessons for RSE are taught every year at all class levels. Therefore, upon reopening, these lessons which may have been missed due to school closure, are to be taught as a priority.)

▪ **Provision for Ongoing Support**

- Parents welcome to view curriculum if they wish
- Regular contact with parents prior to the teaching of lessons involving "sensitive issues" in the form of the home/school link page accompanying such lessons in the RSE Resource Books **OR** Contact will be made with parents prior to the address by the outside speaker. Parents have the primary responsibility for educating their children in sexual matters. The school RSE programme acts as a support only to parents, and parents retain the right to withdraw their children from classes.

- **Links to other policy areas**
- Child Safeguarding Statement
 - SPHE Policy

Child Protection

The school follows the DES child protection guidelines and has a child protection policy with the Principal as Designated Liaison Person. In cases of disclosure, the DLP will follow the procedures as set out in Children First.

▪ **Review**

This policy was reviewed in January 2021 following an in depth SPHE review in 2020. All teachers will be invited to contribute feedback at that stage having looked at the policy and how the programme was received. The policy will be reviewed every 2 years thereafter, or if a need arises in between. Parents will be informed of any amendments made by the RSE policy committee.

It was ratified by the Board of Management on 25th February 2021.