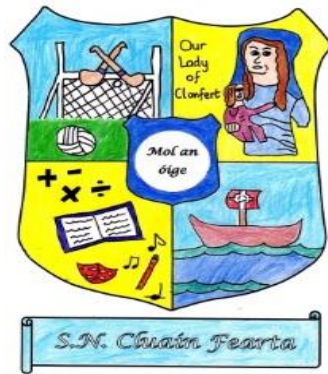


## Relationships and Sexuality Education Policy



### Introductory Statement

This policy statement is the approved approach to the teaching of RSE in St. Brendan's National School. It was drawn up by staff/parents/guardians in June 2019. It was reviewed in February 2023.

This policy further informs teachers and parents of (i) the RSE content that will be taught at each class level and (ii) outlines the organisation and management of the RSE programme across all class levels in St. Brendan's National School. SPHE and RSE will be taught in accordance with the curriculum guidelines of the Department of Education and in the context of the Catholic ethos and philosophy of the school.

### School Philosophy

We recognise that SPHE is intrinsic to the teaching and learning that occurs both formally and informally 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.

Our ethos means that we value respect, tolerance and openness through lived experiences of the children and school community.

SPHE and RSE are key components in supporting our school and children develop into healthy young adults.

### Definition of RSE

Relationships and Sexuality Education is an integral part of the SPHE curriculum 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.

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.

In an ever changing world, RSE encourages children through consistent messages that are taught in line with SPHE. 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.

### 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.
- Is a **shared responsibility** between family, school, health professionals and the community RSE education should include an input from all, and collaboration can be fostered through the teaching and delivery of materials
- Is a generic approach. It is not so much about the specific content of RSE but rather the relationship with a **child's skills, attitudes, values and understanding** relevant to a range of social, personal and health issues.
- Is **child-centered** and based on the needs of the child, therefore RSE education should prioritise the needs of the child and his/her environment, with

appropriate adaptations made within the curriculum to suit individual requirements and individual school situations.

- **Is spiral in nature.** RSE is revisited at different stages throughout the child's time in school, this will provide opportunities to consolidate and build on previous learning. This allows for issues and topics to be explored and treated in a manner appropriate to the children's needs, abilities and levels of maturity
- Engages children to be involved in **activity based learning** e.g discussion, circle time, role play. RSE should provide a range of learning opportunities that include working together, learning about one's own feelings and those of others, developing a sense of empathy and experiencing and supporting healthy relationships.
- **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.

#### **Current Provision in the School Curriculum is:**

- SPHE lessons (provided through discrete curricular time and integration)
- Use of the RSE Manuals
- Guest speaker
- Stay Safe Programme
- Walk Tall Programme
- Webwise resources
- Religious Education

#### **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 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**

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.

## **Policies which support SPHE/RSE**

- Child Safeguarding Statement
- Anti-Bullying Policy
- Code of Behaviour
- Health and Safety Policy
- Internet Acceptable Use Policy
- Admissions Policy
- Substance Use Policy
- GDRP Policy

## **Curriculum Planning for SPHE/RSE**

Curriculum Content – The curriculum will be followed and taught from infants to 6<sup>th</sup> class.

All resources will be in keeping with the ethos of the school, the whole school plan for SPHE and the RSE policy.

Each class teacher will teach the content for their class, utilising the RSE manuals to complement their teaching.

- We have a 2 year plan for SPHE. In September 2021 we revised our SPHE timetable due to COVID-19 school closures during the 2019/2020 and 2020/2021 school years. (See Appendix 1)
- 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. ( See appendix 2)
- Special arrangements exist for the delivery of the sensitive elements from 5th class up – a guest speaker will be used. 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> class will be taught together by the teacher in the middle room. 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> class will be taught by SET. Infants will be taught by the teacher in the junior room.

### **Guidelines for the Implementation of RSE**

The SPHE curriculum will underpin all teaching and learning of RSE in St.Brendan's N.S. 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.

RSE will be covered under the following strands and strand units of the SPHE curriculum:

**Strand:** Myself

**Strand Units:** Growing and changing

Taking care of my body

- The strand units 'Growing and changing' and 'Taking care of my body' are covered in year 1 of a 2 year plan. (see appendix 1)
- Lessons containing sensitive material are covered as part of these strand units. (see appendix 2)
- Delivery of sensitive lessons:  
Junior and Senior Infants - Junior room teacher  
1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> class – Middle room teacher  
3<sup>rd</sup>/4<sup>th</sup> class - SET  
5<sup>th</sup>/6<sup>th</sup> class - Guest speaker

- Parents will be informed that the school fully implements the RSE strands of the SPHE programme including sensitive aspects of the programme at enrolment.
- Parents will be informed in advance of lessons on the sensitive areas of the RSE programme, with a letter relevant to what will be taught at their child's class level, example of letter see Appendix 3.
- The letter will be issued in advance, giving parents an opportunity to meet with relevant class teachers if they so wish, to discuss or clarify what is covered and to prepare their children, it also gives parents an opportunity 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 are invited/welcome to view the curriculum and may speak to the class teacher if they have any concerns at any time during the year. The school acknowledges that parents have the primary responsibility for educating their children about growing and changing.
- Following discussion with Principal and Class Teacher, if a parent wishes to withdraw their child from the sensitive lessons it should be given in writing stating their reasons for doing so and this will be filed.
- If a child has been withdrawn from the sensitive RSE lessons, the school takes no responsibility for what the child may hear following on from the teaching of the lessons e.g. what they may hear on yard.

### **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.

### **Approaches and Methodologies**

We will endeavour to display respect for and sensitivity towards the different cultural and family backgrounds experienced by the children. The curriculum will be taught in an age-appropriate manner at all times. The curriculum will be taught from Junior Infants to 6th class. It will be taught through a spiral curriculum (key topics will be revisited in a developmental manner at regular intervals). The materials taught will reflect the needs of the children.

### The RSE curriculum will be taught through:

- stories and poems
- classroom discussion
- role play
- projects
- group work
- games
- art activities
- circle time
- guest speaker

### Resources

- PDST Health and Wellbeing RSE
- Making the Links
- Stay Safe programme
- Walk Tall programme
- RSE Manuals
- Anatomical dolls and story books
- Busy Bodies DVD and booklet. This DVD and booklet were developed to support the teaching of the 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> class component of RSE within the context of SPHE.

### Parental Involvement

- Parents will be informed that the school fully implements the RSE strands of the SPHE programme including sensitive aspects of the programme at enrolment.
- Parents will be informed in advance of lessons on the sensitive areas of the RSE programme, with a letter relevant to what will be taught at their child's class level, example of letter see Appendix 3.
- The letter will be issued in advance, giving parents an opportunity to meet with relevant class teachers if they so wish, to discuss or clarify what is covered and to prepare their children, it also gives parents an opportunity 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 are invited/welcome to view the curriculum and may speak to the class teacher if they have any concerns at any time during the year. The school acknowledges that parents have the primary responsibility for educating their children about growing and changing.

- Following discussion with Principal and Class Teacher, if a parent wishes to withdraw their child from the sensitive lessons it should be given in writing stating their reasons for doing so and this will be filed. Alternative arrangements will be considered and agreed upon by the relevant parties.
- If a child has been withdrawn from the sensitive RSE lessons, the school takes no responsibility for what the child may hear following on from the teaching of the lessons e.g. what they may hear on yard.

## Differentiation

The age and stage of development in a class can vary widely and strategies for differentiation can support gradual and appropriate learning. In St Brendan's NS. teachers use assessment and professional judgment to differentiate the programme and content to suit the needs of the class. 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.

Some techniques used:

- ensuring that objectives are realistic for the students
- ensuring that the learning task is compatible with prior learning
- providing opportunities for interacting and working with other students in small groups or 1:1
- organising the learning task into small stages: outlining the steps to be learned/completed in any given task, posing key questions to guide pupils through the different stages/processes, and assisting in self-direction and correction
- ensuring that the language used is pitched at the pupil's level of understanding. Some children may be pre-taught language or concepts in preparation of whole class work
- creating a learning environment through the use of concrete, and where possible everyday materials, and by displaying word lists and laminated charts with pictures
- employing active learning methodologies



## Language

SPHE curriculum provides a context in which children are given opportunities to develop and enhance their language skills and to increase their vocabulary related to SPHE. 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 can hurt, diminish and demean. Children need to recognise and become sensitive to the ways in which they themselves use language in their relationship and their everyday interactions. Language is a powerful tool and should be used with respect and integrity for the dignity of each person. There are two areas where the use of language is applied in RSE lessons;

- The formal use and teaching of language generally throughout the school
- The use of language in discussion through your formal RSE lessons
- Appropriate vocabulary in formal teaching
- Relating to sexuality, growing up, physical changes, parts of the body and feelings will be used, the use of slang will be discouraged
- Anatomical terms and language introduced is consistent with RSE Materials Books.

## Questions

In St Brendan's N.S. teachers may use a variety of methodologies to create a safe, open space where pupils feel comfortable to ask RSE related questions.

**We use some simple principles when fostering discussion and questioning**

- No personal questions of the teacher
- The Question Box will be available to by the children
- The teacher will be mindful of their reaction to any questions
- Questions do not have to be answered straight away

## Open Forum Questions

Sample 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 in our contract that we wouldn't ask anyone personal questions
- Somebody asked a question and the language they used was slang language, what they meant to ask was....
- A question was asked, and we cannot talk about that particular topic but I think that question was about....

For older children a 'question box' may be used as part of a structured RSE lesson. Teachers can follow up on the written questions at a later date, thus allowing time to prepare suitable answers, consult with colleagues, etc.

### Question Box

During the delivery of each section of the sensitive lessons– children will be encouraged to place their questions into a box in the classroom. These questions will then be monitored and screened with the teacher answering the questions the following week taking into account the following;

- Questions arising from lesson content will be answered in an age-appropriate manner
- The class 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 programme and they will be advised to talk with their parents
- Teachers may exercise discretion to contact parents themselves if they feel that a question is very inappropriate or needs to be communicated with home because of other reasons
- No personal questions will be answered and children will be reminded not to share personal information about their families or others – but can share with teacher after the lessons.
- *If issues arise which might be seen to contravene Children First Guidelines, the teacher will notify the Designated Liaison Person in the school.*

## **Assessment**

Assessment in RSE is important to enable the teacher to pitch the lessons correctly to their respective class group

The teacher uses;

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

## **Confidentiality**

- St Brendan's N.S. follows the Child Protection Procedures for Primary schools 2017.
- If a child is withdrawn from the teaching of sensitive issues, we 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.

## **Provision of Ongoing Support**

St Brendan's N.S 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
- budgeting for the updating and development of RSE materials
- reviewing RSE policy on a regular basis
- ensure special education teachers have adequate training opportunities
- signposting staff to resources available from PDST and other sources

## **Resources**

- Stay Safe programme
- Walk Tall programme
- RSE manuals
- Anatomical dolls and story books

- Busy Bodies DVD and booklet. This DVD and booklet were developed to support the teaching of the 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> class component of RSE within the context of SPHE.

### **Review**

- The policy will be reviewed 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.

### **Ratification and Review:**

This policy was ratified by the BOM on 01/03/2023

Signed: Fr Declan McInerney  
(Chairperson of Board of Management)

Signed: Nicola Kilmartin  
(Principal)

## Appendix 1 - 2 Year SPHE Plan

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>  <i>**RSE Talk</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>

## Appendix 2 - RSE Topics and Language

Sensitive content is highlighted in bold

Topics covered from Junior Infants to 2<sup>nd</sup> include:

- Keeping Safe
- **Bodily changes from birth (birth-9)**
- Making age appropriate choices
- Appreciating the variety of family types and a variety of family life that exists in our school and community
- 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)**

*The language taught at this level will be.....*

womb, breastfeeding, penis, vulva

- **Naming the parts of the male/ female body using appropriate anatomical terms and identify some of their functions (1st/2nd)**

*The language taught at this level will be...*

penis, vulva, vagina, womb,  
breastfeeding, urethra

Topics from 3<sup>rd</sup> to 6<sup>th</sup> include:

- **Bodily changes**
- Healthy eating, personal hygiene, exercise
- Keeping Safe
- Expressing Feelings
- Appreciating the variety of family types within our school and community and how we these family relationships shape us
- Making healthy and responsible decisions
- Forming Friendships
- **Discuss the stages and sequence of development of the human baby in the womb (3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup> class)**

- **Introduction to puberty and changes (3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> class)**

*The language taught at this level will be...*

umbilical cord, changes in puberty,  
menstruation

- **Changes that occur in boys and girls with the onset of puberty (5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> Class)**
- **Reproductive system of male/female adults (5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> class)**
- **Understanding sexual intercourse, conception and birth within the context of a committed loving relationship (5<sup>th</sup>, 6<sup>th</sup> class)**

The sensitive lessons will be delivered to 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> class by a guest speaker. Parents will be provided with more details closer to the time.

## Appendix 3 – Sample RSE Letter to Parents (Topics and Language to be attached)

### St. Brendan's National School

Clonfert,  
Ballinasloe,  
Co. Galway.



Tel: 090 96 75008  
Email: info@clonfertns.ie

Dear Parents,

Relationships and Sexuality education is an integral part of the S.P.H.E programme. The sensitive elements of the Relationships and Sexuality education programme are covered under the Strand Units, 'Growing and Changing' and 'Taking Care of my Body'. We will be completing these Strand Units with all class levels in the forthcoming weeks.

The children will be grouped according to class level for the sensitive lessons and will be taught as follows:

Junior and Senior Infants: Ms Burke

1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> class: Mrs Brennan

3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> class: Mrs Hyland/Mrs Davoren

5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> class: Ms Kilmartin/ Guest speaker

Included with this letter is a list of the topics/language to be covered with each class level. A copy of our Relationships and Sexuality Education Policy has also been attached.

A guest speaker will deliver the sensitive lessons to 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> class later in the term. More details will be provided closer to the time.

If you have any concerns, please make an appointment to see the class teacher.

Yours sincerely,

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