

## Some frequently asked questions (see [www.ecdrumcondra.ie/](http://www.ecdrumcondra.ie/) programmes for the 'Going Forward Together' booklet:)

### **Why do we need RSE?**

Many children get information and misinformation about relationships and sexuality from television "soaps", in the playground, from older friends— in many settings and in many ways that parents cannot control and may not be too happy about. Furthermore, children may be picking up messages from television, videos and films such as "aggression works", "it's okay to be dishonest if you're not caught", "I can do exactly what I want, now!".

There is a need to help children and young people to listen, to distinguish between differing points of view and to express themselves in an appropriate way. An Advisory Group established by the Minister for Education in 1994 to advise on the introduction of RSE into schools quoted the following examples from research and common observation:

- ◆ children receive informal and unsupervised information about relationships and sexuality
- ◆ such information may be inadequate and inappropriate
- ◆ young people are already exposed to a variety of sexual practices and attitudes through the media, particularly television, film and magazines
- ◆ children are maturing physically at even earlier ages
- ◆ the roles of women and men in society are changing
- ◆ the nature of family life is changing in a way that places many pressures on children and young people.

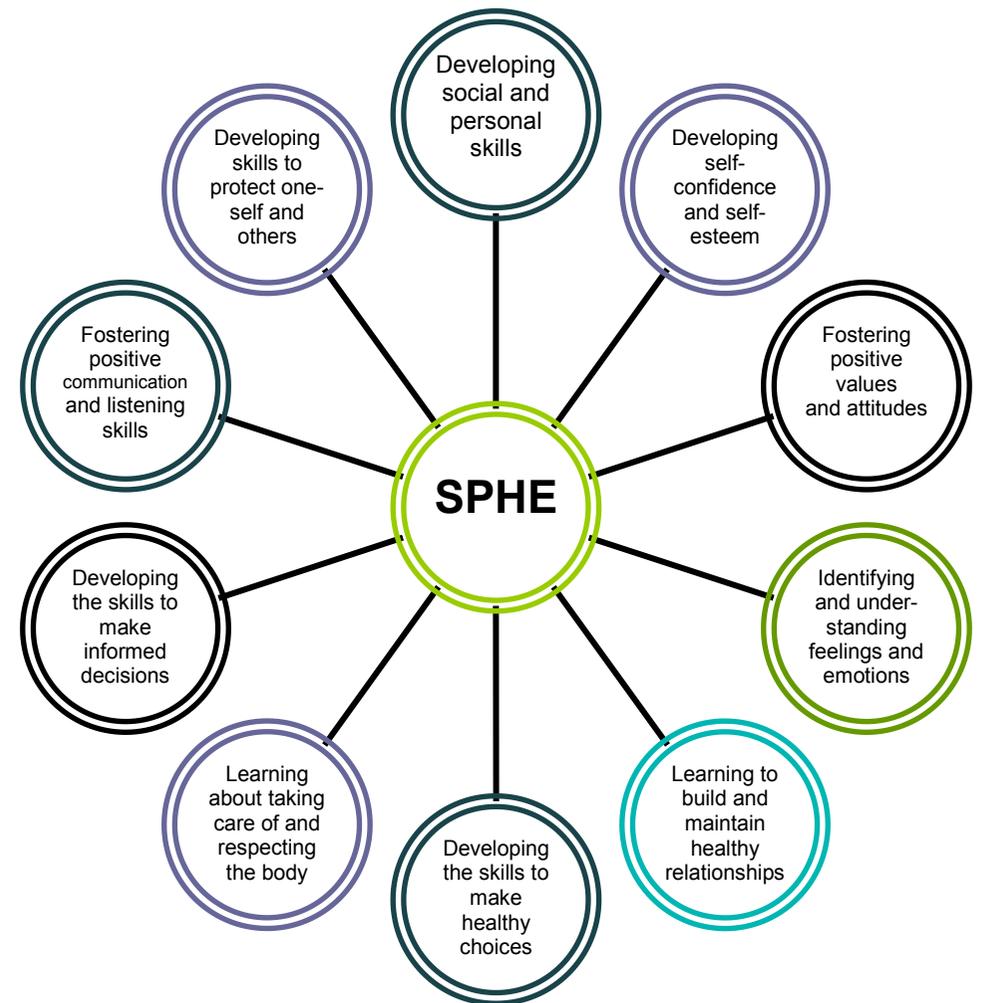
For these reasons, and because education is about developing skills for life as well as skills for learning, the Advisory Group concluded that there was a need for a soundly based programme of RSE in schools.

### **Will RSE help children to make responsible choices?**

Yes. The choices and decisions we make in our lives are influenced by the values we hold. We receive these values from our religious and cultural traditions but also from our family, school and community. The methods used to teach RSE create opportunities for children and young people to discuss attitudes, beliefs and values about many issues and to develop the skills to make informed and responsible choices and decisions.

### **Will RSE lead to a loss of innocence in children?**

No. However, we should distinguish between innocence and ignorance. Lack of correct and appropriate information can leave your child vulnerable, confused and anxious. On the other hand, providing information, combined with opportunities for discussion and decision-making within a moral framework, can be very helpful and valuable.



## Relationships & Sexuality Education Policy

This policy is set out in accordance with the Department of Education and Science requirement for National Schools to provide a broad Social, Personal & Health Education (SPHE) programme, of which Relationships & Sexuality Education (RSE) is an integral part.

The policy document was drafted by an RSE Policy Committee (2 parents, 2 teachers, 2 Board of Management members) during the spring term, 2008. Comments and suggestions on the draft from the wider parent and staff community were encouraged during the summer and autumn terms 2008. The Board of Management of Gorey Educate Together National School considered all of the above, before revising and ratifying this document as school policy at their February 2009 meeting. Implementation will commence during the autumn term 2009.

## The Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) curriculum

This school delivers the SPHE curriculum in accordance with Department of Education and Science guidelines.

The SPHE curriculum is structured in such a way as to treat the social, personal and health dimensions of a child's life in an integrated manner. It provides for the development of a broad range of values, attitudes, skills and understanding relevant to the child's health and well-being, to other people and to the society in which s/he lives. This foundation will inform the child's actions, behaviour and decisions in the many situations that s/he may encounter and have to deal with as part of everyday life and living.

The 3 strands of the SPHE curriculum are: Myself, Myself and Others, and Myself and the Wider World.

The content outlined in the SPHE curriculum is implemented in this school through a combination of formal and informal approaches: formally through discrete SPHE time designated on school timetables (including Stay Safe, RSE, and (from 2009) Walk Tall lessons) and informally through the everyday happenings in the school.

## Relationship to the Ethos of this School

SPHE permeates all aspects of school life, and its development and implementation are significantly influenced by our multid denominational, child-centred, democratically run and coeducational ethos.

## Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE)

RSE is the part of the SPHE curriculum that provides children with structured opportunities to develop the knowledge, attitudes, values, beliefs and practical skills necessary to establish and sustain healthy personal relationships as children and, subsequently, as adults.

RSE is a spiral programme from junior infants to sixth class, building-on and returning to similar topics each year to suit the age of the children.



It is school policy to teach to nine RSE themes each year, as detailed in *Resource Materials for RSE* (inspection copy available from the school office and the school's Parent-Teacher Association secretary.)

The teaching approaches used will include: classroom discussion, group-work, games, art activities, using stories and poems, class round/circle time, quiet time, a visitor to the classroom, video, educational drama and debate.

## The 2009-'10 school year

The RSE programme will be taught in our school from September 2009. Parents and teachers of children in the older classes will need to cooperate in ensuring that any 'catch-up' on information regarding unfamiliar topics or language goes well. The teachers will give additional time to introducing particular lessons (checking prior knowledge, introducing vocabulary, etc.)

## Outside speakers/facilitators

Where trained outside speakers or facilitators are used, they will deliver their content in the context of this policy document and in the context of the ethos of our school. A teacher will remain present in the classroom with any outside speaker.

(Class teachers may opt out of the teaching of possible sensitive issues. In such cases, the principal will make arrangements with another teacher or an outside speaker to teach the topics.)

## Further information on RSE

*Resource Materials for RSE* (Four books: Infants, 1st/2nd classes, 3rd/4th and 5th/6th) Inspection copies are available from the school office or the PTA secretary.

Website: [www.ecdrumcondra.ie/programmes](http://www.ecdrumcondra.ie/programmes) (A range of resources available, including the booklet 'Going Forward Together: An introduction to RSE for parents.')

Education Centre, Milehouse Road, Enniscorthy: The centre runs courses and information sessions for parents and teachers on an annual basis.

## Resources for parents

Parents may find the following books useful. They are available on short-term loan from the school office. (Please review the material carefully and ensure it would be useful in your home situation.)

*What's happening to me?* (boys) Usborne Books.

*What's happening to me?* (girls) Usborne Books.

*Let's Talk About Sex*, Walker Books.

*Where Willy Went: The Big Story of a Little Sperm*, Red Fox Publishing.

*Mummy Laid an Egg*, Red Fox Publishing.

*Hair in Funny Places*, Red Fox Publishing.

*What's Inside Your Tummy Mummy?* Red Fox Publishing.

*Busy Bodies: A book about puberty for you and your parents*, Health Service Executive.



## Answering questions

This policy document guides the school staff on how to respond to children's questions regarding RSE lessons:

- ◆ for some topics, an age appropriate 'contract' between teacher and class should be devised, where it is agreed that personal questions would not be asked or answered.
- ◆ where a child seeks information that is beyond the content of this school's RSE programme and/or not considered to be age appropriate for the general body of pupils, the teacher should not answer the question, but refer the child to his/her parents.
- ◆ staff should not invalidate questions, but use limits. Examples: 'I will do my best to answer your questions, but I may not be able to answer all of them.' 'Would you be able to ask your mum or dad about that?' 'That's something you'll learn about as you get older/you'll learn about in fifth class.' 'We agreed in our contract for this lesson that we wouldn't ask anyone personal questions.'
- ◆ teachers can inform parents what questions are arising in class and how they were answered/not answered, as necessary.
- ◆ for older children a 'question box' can 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.



## Co-education

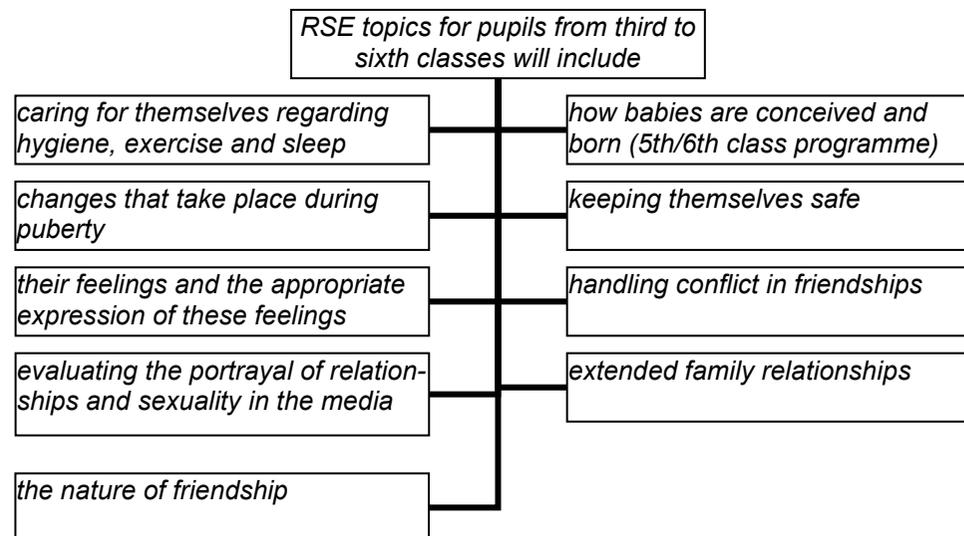
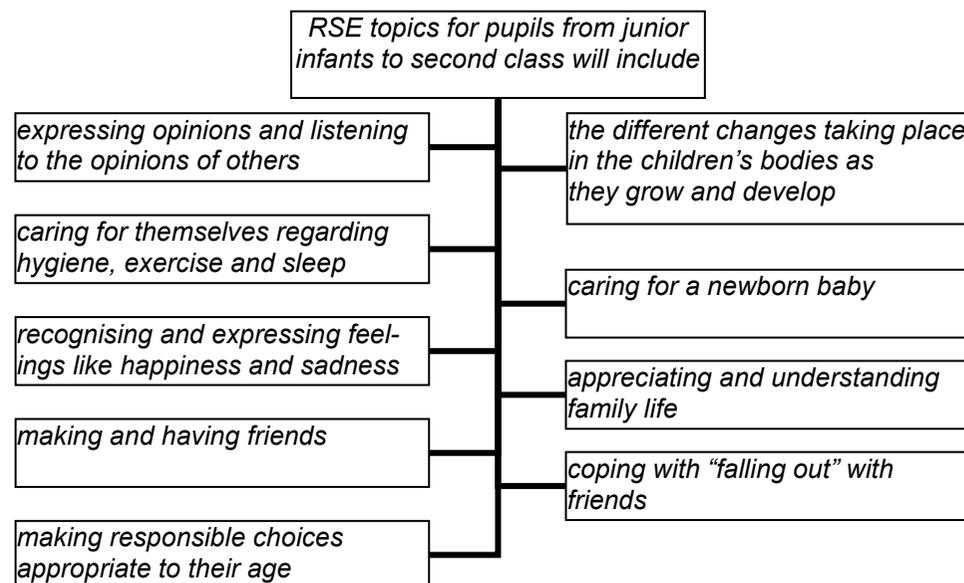
This is a coeducational school. We will teach boys and girls together, except for the following lessons:

Fourth class girls and boys will be taught the lesson on physical changes during puberty separately, giving each group the same information and lesson. [Exception: only the girls will receive information on menstruation.]

Fifth and sixth class boys and girls will be taught the lessons on puberty and reproduction separately, giving each group exactly the same information and lesson (including menstruation.) The boys and girls will then be brought back together for discussion and follow-up lesson.

## Multi-class situations (E.g. 3rd and 4th classes in the same classroom)

Many RSE topics can be taught to two or more classes together, (as is the case with some other subjects.) The staff will, however, make organisational arrangements for the teaching of certain material to a specific class, where this is necessary.



For more detail see 'Resource Materials for RSE' (inspection copy available from the school office and the PTA secretary) or visit [www.ecdrumcondra.ie/](http://www.ecdrumcondra.ie/) programmes to view the 'Going Forward Together' information booklet.

## Possible sensitive issues

Many aspects of RSE are common to other school programmes. For example, 'the family' might be central to oral language work in English or Gaeilge, or a life-story project in history.

The RSE programme also includes a number of possible sensitive issues, listed below. It is school policy to deal with these issues through structured lessons, as naturally as possible and without undue emphasis. Listing the issues here, along with the classes in which they are first taught, enables parents to prepare their children in advance for a particular topic, if they so wish (see section on parents/guardians as primary educators.)

Lesson Title	Class	Topic or Language
Caring for New Life	Senior Infants	Language: baby in womb for 9 months, breast-feeding.
My Body	Senior Infants	Language used: penis, vagina.
How My Body Works	First Class	Language: urine passes through the penis in boys and the urethra in girls.
The Wonder of New Life	Second Class	Language: baby leaves its mother's womb through the vagina.
Preparing for New Life	Third Class	Language: umbilical cord, navel.
My Family	Third Class	Language: gay, lesbian, heterosexual, homosexual.
The Wonder of New Life	Fourth Class	Topic: the developing foetus.
Growing and Changing	Fourth Class	Topics: physical/emotional changes in puberty. Menstruation (taught to fourth class girls only.)
My Body Grows and Changes	Fifth Class	Topics: puberty (revised,) menstruation (taught to boys and girls,) reproduction.
The Wonder of New Life	Fifth Class	Topic: reproduction.
Relationships and New Life	Sixth Class	Topics: sexual intercourse in the context of a committed, loving relationship; reproduction.

Topics such as sexually transmitted diseases, contraception, masturbation and abortion and are not covered in the primary school RSE programme.

## This school's RSE policy acknowledges different relationship types, as follows:

When preparing for and delivering the RSE Themes *This is My Family* (Junior and Senior Infants,) *My Family* (First-Fifth Classes) and *Families* (Sixth Class) the teachers will take the different family patterns represented within the classroom into account. The family situations that particular children *may* choose to share with their class (such as: father, mother and child; foster parents and child; father, grandparents and child; mother and child; father, father and child; mother, boyfriend and child; etc.) will be included in the lesson activities as naturally as possible and without undue emphasis.

Some children use the word 'gay' from a young age. The use of the word 'gay' in school will be addressed by staff, as follows. Infants – Second class: Redirect the child in a natural way, without undue emphasis. Refer the child with questions regarding the term to his/her parents. Third – Sixth class: The staff member may offer a brief interpretation of the term, as follows: 'Sometimes two men or two women make a life together. They love and care for one another.' This interpretation would be presented as naturally as possible and without undue emphasis. The vocabulary 'gay,' 'lesbian,' 'heterosexual,' and 'homosexual,' may also be used. Refer the child with further questions regarding homosexuality to his/her parents. Use of the term 'gay' as a slur (or in any inappropriate context) will be challenged by staff. We promote a school environment that is safe, effective, positive and respectful – Ref: *Code of Behaviour*.

## Parents/guardians as the primary educators of their children

Informal education for RSE begins from the moment the child is born. Everything a parent does as they interact with the child gives messages about human relationships in the broadest sense. For example, how the parent smiles at, talks to, cuddles and bathes the baby; how they dress and toilet-train the toddler; how they talk to the child about his or her body and how it works; how they encourage and answer questions; how family members get on with one another — all these colour children's attitudes towards themselves, towards others and towards the wider world.

Gorey Educate Together NS supports and complements the rights and responsibilities of parents in its approach to the teaching of RSE:

- ◆ this policy document is provided to parents/guardians when their child joins the school. It lets them know what RSE is about and where they can find further information.
- ◆ this document provides an outline of the RSE lessons and when they are taught, enabling parents to prepare their children in advance for a particular topic, if they so wish.
- ◆ the classteachers provide copies of specific 'Home-School Links' letters to parents in advance of the teaching of the lessons listed on the previous page of this document.
- ◆ the school makes inspection copies of RSE lesson materials available to parents through the main office and the PTA secretary. Parents are encouraged to engage with their children on the content of all of the RSE lessons.
- ◆ the school informs parents about RSE Information Evenings, (hosted annually by the Co Wexford Education Centre, Milehouse Road, Enniscorthy.)
- ◆ the school honours the right of parents/guardians to withdraw their child from specific RSE lessons. It is the responsibility of the parent to inform the principal in writing of this decision. Such a decision must be confirmed in writing on an annual basis.