

Relationships and Sexuality Education Policy

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RELATIONSHIPS AND SEXUALITY EDUCATION POLICY

Introduction

Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE)

Sexuality is an inherent part of being human. At some time during our lives everyone will make decisions around their sexuality and sexual expression. RSE is education that addresses all aspects of human sexuality in a holistic emotional, physical and spiritual sense.

At Balnamore Primary School we believe that the development of healthy sexuality is a right for all young people. We believe that all young people who attend our school have a right to education that will help them develop the knowledge and skills to enable them to make informed decisions about their sexual expression in a way that:

- Respects their individual belief system
- Shows respect for others
- Helps them to develop and manage personal and sexual relationships
- Keeps them safe

This RSE policy reflects the ethos and principles of Balnamore Primary School. It is informed by the views and opinions of pupils, school staff, parents, Board of Governors and the wider community.

Related School Policies

- Child Protection Policy
- Positive Behaviour Policy
- Anti-Bullying Policy
- Pastoral Care Policy
- Pastoral Care Guidance DENI

Aim of the policy

- To ensure that RSE enables our pupils to develop and maintain safe, healthy and satisfying personal relationships.
- To value, support and guide school personnel involved in the planning and delivery of RSE, both formal and informal.
- To ensure that the planning and delivery of RSE reflects the ethos and values framework of our school.
- To ensure that the RSE programme as recommended by CCEA is enriched to meet the specific and special needs of all our pupils.

Legislative context for RSE

In 2006, the Education Order NI resulted in RSE becoming a statutory component of the Revised Curriculum.

CCEA released guidance documentation in 2015 for Primary Schools in the area of RSE:

- Relationship and Sexuality Education Guidance: An update for Primary Schools
- Relationship and Sexuality Education Guidance: An update for Post Primary Schools

“The Department considers that every school should have a policy setting out how the school will address relationships and sexuality education within each pupil’s curriculum . . . The policy should be the subject of consultation with parents and should be endorsed by the school’s Board of Governors. All teachers, whether or not they are centrally involved in teaching the programme should be aware of its details and their implications.”

The moral framework of the Policy

We recognise that young people live in a diverse range of cultures, religions and family types. We recognise them as individuals with the right to be treated with respect and dignity regardless of their class, sexuality, culture, religion, ability and gender. We are committed to an RSE programme which at all times will reflect the diversity and complexity of the lives and experiences of young people in our school and community.

We also recognise that at times there may be conflict between the different values systems and at all times, whilst respecting difference, we will uphold the ethos of the school and include it in all aspects of RSE teaching. After broad consultation and deliberation by school staff, the following value system was agreed.

Values framework of RSE policy which reflect the school ethos

- respect and honesty for self and others
- understanding of rights and responsibilities in the context of relationships

- understanding and acceptance of diversity regarding physicality, religion, culture and sexual orientation
- non-exploitation in sexual relationships
- integrity with self and others
- comprehensive understanding of consent in a wide range of contexts
- self-discipline
- development of realistic awareness for self and others
- building safe secure relationships to promote resilience

At Balnamore Primary School, we need to make explicit the morals and values framework we wish to endorse, in line with the ethos of the school. With this provision, the following key messages will be promoted:

- The deferment of sexual activity until young people are physically and emotionally mature enough to understand the inherent responsibilities.
- The deferment of sexual activity until young people have the capacity to give legal consent.
- An appreciation of the value of stable family life, marriage, loving relationships and the responsibilities of parenthood.
- Recognition of the positive benefits of seeking sexual fulfilment within a committed relationship with one person.
- Abstinence as a positive option, which is an achievable reality to which young people can aspire.
- Abortion is a very sensitive issue which is ultimately best reconciled through informed personal choice.
- Sexuality in all its diversity is defined by the individual and should be respected as long as it is expressed within the legal framework.

Equal Opportunities Statement

The structure content and delivery of the RSE programme will be developed and implemented to reflect the diversity of the physical, mental, emotional and spiritual needs of the pupils in the school.

Confidentiality

There is no statutory legislation relating specifically to confidentiality. Balnamore Primary School recognises that pupils need and expect a certain level of confidentiality, but as we have responsibility for the welfare and safety of young people within the school environment, it is not always possible to offer confidentiality. It is essential that at all times confidentiality operates within the boundaries of the school's Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy and the Children's (Northern Ireland) Order 1995. All teaching staff must adhere to the following procedures:

- Confidentiality must be discussed with pupils before beginning an RSE programme or one-off session. 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.
- While teachers are unsure when confidentiality should not be maintained they should in the first instance consult with the Principal.

RSE Programme Content and Cross Curricular Delivery.

Cross Curricular Delivery

RSE is a universal subject. Opportunities to explore the elements of RSE present themselves throughout the school curriculum. Capturing the teachable moment and encouraging discussion in the different subject areas helps place RSE in the context of life and social skills learning. This encourages young people to see it as an inherent part of human relationships and their own development.

The following topics may be addressed in the RSE programme across the curriculum:

Growth and development from birth through the life stages

- the male and female body
- puberty – physical and emotional changes

Personal

- self-esteem
- confidence
- comfort

Relationships

- developing, maintaining and ending personal and sexual relationships
- relationship dynamics
- communication skills
- decision-making skills – marriage and living together
- understanding what is/isn't an appropriate relationship /who it is appropriate to have a relationship with

Sexuality

- identity
- orientation
- expression
- sexual response

The law

- age of sexual consent
- age of medical consent (in line with Gillick Competency and Fraser Guidelines) – see appendix

Language

The acquisition of appropriate language in RSE is crucially important to enable young people to communicate confidently about themselves, their sexuality and their relationships.

In acquiring an appropriate vocabulary related to sexuality, growing up, physical changes, feelings etc, the young person obtains a means by which these issues can be discussed. The use of proper terms for parts of the body and body functions should be encouraged from the earliest age so that these terms are given a status and acceptability. Embarrassment is reduced and pupils become comfortable with these words and their meaning. Having a language which is socially acceptable and unambiguous in RSE is especially important because it has long been an area fraught with misunderstanding, unease and anxiety. One of the main objectives of any RSE programme is to provide young people with language through which they may seek clarification, ask questions and discuss all aspects of their growth and development.

In our society, many of the swear words are sexual in origin and refer to sex in a debasing way. The message given by the use of this language is very powerful and creates associations with sexuality which are primarily negative. It is therefore extremely important that proper terminology is used in RSE activities and that the tone of discussions is respectful and genuine. We will try to source suitable images as visual cues for those pupils with literacy or communication difficulties. Parents will be encouraged to use these proper terms and to support the messages the school is trying to promote.

We have taken onboard the advice of the Family Planning Association (FPA) that “RSE will be more effective in meeting the pupils’ needs if the teacher wants to be involved in the delivery” and that “The most important criteria is that the teacher is confident and comfortable working in the area of sexuality and sexual expression.” To this end, no-one will be forced to teach RSE and those who volunteer to do so will be offered all the training and support they require.

Teaching methods

Balnamore Primary School is committed to providing a learning environment which best suits the needs of pupils and provides opportunity for participation and engagement. The preferred teaching method for RSE is interactive group work. This approach facilitates open discussion, involvement and processes, providing opportunities for the development of social and life skills, and a values framework. The current Principal within Balnamore Primary School has availed of two days RSE training and remains available for any staff interested in developing their understanding of RSE. As a school we also provide whole school RSE training to Teaching and Non-Teaching Staff. RSE workshops for Parents remain on Schools agenda at least every other year.

The teaching method chosen will depend on the learning objectives, such as:

- **Information and knowledge-based objectives** need exercises which present information in several different ways i.e. telling, seeing and finding out. Methods for learning include brainstorms, quizzes, games, demonstration packs and art work.
- **Skills based objectives** need participation and use of verbal and non-verbal communication. Useful methods include scenarios, role-play, investigation tasks, video and audio recordings, any method that helps bring real life situations into the room.
- **Values and attitudes objectives** are best achieved through open discussion, developing communication skills, building self-esteem and encouraging self-awareness and exploration and the development of the individual's values system. Methods include situation cards and statements based on a diversity of cultural, social and personal norms and personal preferences.

Coordination of RSE Programme

The role of the Safeguarding Team includes:

- Ensuring that the programme is taught effectively and is appropriate to age and maturity of the pupils
- Liaising with SLT, Board of Governors, parents and health/educational visitors on RSE Matters
- Attending appropriate in-service training and disseminating appropriate information to other members of staff
- Organising training for staff when and where appropriate.
- Liaising with outside agencies for curriculum purposes for example PSNI – presentation on internet safety.

Responding to Specific and Sensitive Issues

We recognise that, on occasion, certain sensitive issues may require consideration. Issues such as sex outside marriage, contraception, sexual identity and orientation, 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 that may be a contradiction to the lifestyle or experiences of some pupils and their parents, and teachers and other staff within the school. However, the school will ensure that pupils receive information that is balanced, non-judgmental and respectful of the diversity of values that are reflected in society.

When attempting to deal with these issues the following procedures will be adopted:

- **Child Protection:** if, for any reason, a young person is deemed to be at risk he/she will be reassured that he/she will be supported through the process. The school will adhere to its guidelines on Child Protection.
- **Sexual Identity/Sexual Orientation:** We are aware that as young people are growing up, they can experience sexual identity and

orientation confusion. This may be temporary for some, while for others, it may become clear with time that their orientations are permanent. Bullying on the grounds of sexual orientation is as unacceptable as in any other situation where someone is mistreated because of their differences from those who are perceived to be the majority. All issues relating to bullying on the grounds of sexual orientation will be dealt with appropriately in line with the schools anti bullying policy.

- **Child Sexual Exploitation**

(This section links to our Child Protection Policy)

The Marshall Report in 2014 highlighted incidence of Child Sexual Exploitation in Northern Ireland. Further advice and guidance can be found on the Safeguarding Board for Northern Ireland Professional Guidance Document.

At Balnamore Primary School, we strive to build a healthy secure relationship with each child, this not only promotes resilience but also optimises external conditions for learning. It is vitally important that our pupils understand healthy secure relationship and the difference between these that are not healthy and secure. This is the cornerstone for RSE within Balnamore Primary School.

“The RSE guidance references the recent inquiries into child sexual exploitation and the fact that RSE provides the opportunity for schools to play a preventative role by improving awareness amongst staff of the vulnerability factors and current indicators of Child Sexual Exploitation. It also identifies how effective RSE provision can help pupils recognise potentially exploitative and dangerous situations and how to take preventative action.”

(Department of Education Circular *Relationships and Sexuality Education*: No. 2015/22) – See appendix

Specific Issues Statement

We in Balnamore Primary School need to make explicit the morals and values framework we wish to endorse, in line with the ethos of the school. With this provision, the following key messages will be promoted:

- The deferment of sexual activity until young people are physically and emotionally mature enough to understand the inherent responsibilities.
- An appreciation of the value of stable family life, marriage, loving relationships and the responsibilities of parenthood.
- Recognition of the positive benefits of seeking sexual fulfilment within a committed relationship with one person.
- Abstinence as a positive option, which is an achievable reality to which young people can aspire.
- Abortion is a very sensitive issue which is ultimately best reconciled through informed personal choice.

- Sexuality in all its diversity is defined by the individual and should be respected as long as it is expressed within the legal framework.

These statements have been agreed after the broadest possible consultation with the school staff and are the result of serious consideration and deliberation.

****For the protection of staff and clarity for the pupils, the school MUST make specific value-based statements on sensitive issues consistent with the ethos of the school. This directive comes from the DENI. ****

External agencies and individuals

Balnamore Primary School recognises that the expertise of education and health professionals from statutory or voluntary organisations or individuals from the community can provide a value-added dimension to the RSE programme. Before agreeing to use an external agency or individual, teachers will:

- ensure that the agency or individual receives a copy of the school's RSE policy. The issues of confidentiality and ethos of the school will be particularly discussed
- review resources which are to be used
- decide if parents should be consulted
- agree on whether or not the teacher will be present
- check if the agency has a child protection policy and if so, review its contents
- ensure that the input complements the school's RSE programme and will incorporate preparation and follow up activities
- inform pupils of the purpose of the visit
- agree with the agency practical arrangements such as room allocation and no interruptions
- ensure that the pupils evaluate the work

Parental Partnership

Parents and Carers are keen that their children are well prepared to handle situations around relationships and sexuality. Whilst the classroom teacher has a significant role to play in the implementation of RSE in school, this role cannot be considered in isolation to the role of parents and carers. Both should be complementary. The home exerts a major influence on all aspects of a young person's life and especially so in the domain of relationships and sexuality.

Our school will never attempt to assume the role of parental responsibilities. Rather, we view parents and carers as having the prime responsibility for bringing up their children. It is paramount that we work in partnership with parents and carers, particularly in relation to sensitive issues.

We will therefore seek to ensure that our RSE programme complements and is supportive of the role of parents/carers and that they are made aware of the topics covered in lessons and workshops that contribute to the teaching of RSE.

Evaluation

The SMT will be responsible for co-ordinating the evaluation of the provision of RSE within the school. They will inform governors, staff, parents and pupils that monitoring is taking place, advising them that all comments are welcome. Pupils and teachers, classroom assistants and therapy staff will evaluate the provision of RSE in the school and this will provide valuable evidence to feed back into a regular review of policy and practice.

The policy will be reviewed on a yearly basis as in line with ETI requirements. Departmental audits in relation to the delivery of the RSE programme will also be carried out as well as monitoring of planning to ensure the programme is age appropriate and effective. Information gained will then be correlated by the coordinator(s) and used to adapt the programme for the future.

The aim of the evaluation process will be to ensure that:

- the RSE policy continues to comply with guidance/legislation
- classroom practice continues to reflect the policy and the needs of pupils
- teaching resources are regularly reviewed and updated
- the views, thoughts and feelings of pupils are respected and will be used to influence the *real* needs of pupils rather than *perceived* needs

“On the 26th August 2015 the Department requires all grant aided schools to develop their own RSE Policy. The revised guidance therefore focuses on providing advice and a template for the development of a schools RSE Policy which is relevant to the lives of pupils today; providing an overall framework for a schools RSE policy; and for instance, looking at how schools interact with pupils, focussing on the need to make pupils feel safe and confidence that they should not be bullied for example due to their sexual orientation.”

(Department of Education Circular *Relationships and Sexuality Education*: No. 2015/22)

Everyone reviewing or developing a policy on RSE or involved in the delivery of a programme has his or her own personal morals and values. It is, therefore, important that schools make explicit the morals and values framework underpinning their RSE policy and programme. This framework should reflect the following:

- the Children’s (Northern Ireland) Order 1995
- the Equality agenda enshrined in the Belfast Agreement and detailed in the Northern Ireland Act 1998
- The Human Rights Act 2000.
- The Sexual Offences Order 2008
- Every Child Matters

- Education Order 2006
- Sexual Health Promotion Strategy 2008

Guidelines for Teachers

It is intended that any teachers delivering the RSE programme should be familiar with and follow guidelines for teachers as laid out in the documents:

Guidance for Primary Schools Relationships and Sexuality Education
Guidance for Post-Primary Schools Relationships and Sexuality Education

In addition, if a pupil asks a knowledge or information-based question related to RSE, it is the policy of *Balnamore Primary School* that (with due regard to the Safeguarding and Child Protection policy) a staff member should, as far as possible, give a sensitive and honest answer or should direct the pupil to a source of information where they could find such an answer.

Teaching specific issues

“Teachers should not avoid discussion of sensitive issues such as contraception, abortion, HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases, homosexuality and pornography. Discussion of such issues in the media and elsewhere is so common that many pupils will already be aware of them.”

(Department of Education Circular *Relationships and Sexuality Education*: No. 2001/15).