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Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) Policy

Guiding Principles

The guiding principles underpinning the teaching and learning of RSE in St. Nicholas' Special School are:

1. **RSE is a core component of the SPHE curriculum** and is integrated into whole-school learning.
2. **RSE is for all teachers and all children** in St. Nicholas' Special School.
3. **We recognise the need to tailor content and teaching to meet pupils' diverse needs** and developmental stages, ensuring it is **age-appropriate, developmentally appropriate, and sensitive to individual differences**, in line with the **Department of Education guidelines**.
4. **We aim to support pupils** through puberty and adolescence with:
 - Clear information on physical and emotional changes.
 - Assurance of their normality.
 - Encouragement to regard their developing bodies positively.
 - Support for forming appropriate relationships.
 - Guidance on socially acceptable and unacceptable behaviour.
 - Keeping safe.

Introductory Statement and Rationale

St. Nicholas' Special School recognises its duty to provide RSE to pupils with a wide range of physical and associated disabilities, including varying degrees of learning difficulties, speech and language, and sensory impairments.

We adopt an **open, positive attitude** to physical and emotional development, valuing every child as an individual and actively encouraging a positive self-image. Puberty and sexual development are recognised and addressed by staff **sensitively and in partnership with parents**, reflecting the **Department of Education's RSE Interim Guidelines (1997)**.

This policy provides an **overview and framework for short- and long-term planning**. It also informs the Board of Management, parents and SNAs of our approaches and methodologies.

RSE is a **shared responsibility** between school, home, and the wider community. Parents' contributions and involvement are essential for effective implementation.

Vision

Our vision is to enable pupils to **grow up as happy, healthy, well-balanced individuals**, becoming responsible citizens and valued members of their communities.

Aims

In line with the **SPHE Curriculum (1999)** and **RSE Interim Guidelines (1997)**, we aim to:

- Support pupils through physical, sexual, emotional, and moral development.
 - Foster positive self-image and self-esteem, particularly for pupils with disabilities.
 - Promote healthy friendships and appropriate relationships.
 - Develop social and communication skills.
 - Establish socially acceptable behaviour patterns.
 - Enable pupils to understand and respect human love, relationships, and reproduction.
 - Promote mental health, well-being, and a sense of wonder at new life.
 - Support pupils' right to form friendships and intimate relationships in adult life.
 - Support healthy living and personal safety.
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Stay Safe Programme

The **Stay Safe Programme (2017)** or **Stay Safe for Children with SEN** will be taught on a **two-year cycle alternating with the RSE Programme**. It includes:

- Feeling safe/unsafe
- Bullying
- Touches

- Secrets and Telling
- Strangers

Content of the Plan

Walk Tall Programme:

The programme is **differentiated by teachers** to meet the varying needs and abilities of the children in each class.

Social, Personal and Health Education-Two year Grid		
STRAND	Strand Units (Year 1)	Strand units (Year 2)
Myself	Self -Identity Taking Care of my Body Growing and Changing	Making Decisions Safety and Protection: *This Strand Unit is for third to Sixth class only. Infants to complete the safety issues section of
Myself and Others	Myself and My Family	My Friends and other People
Myself and the Wider World	Developing Citizenship	Media Education

There is a close link between the language used in the Stay Safe Programme and the RSE Programme.

1. Content Objectives

The RSE curriculum should enable the child to:

- ✓ Develop self-awareness, self-esteem, and self-worth.
 - ✓ Appreciate the dignity and uniqueness of themselves and others.
 - ✓ Understand relationships within families, friendships, and wider society.
 - ✓ Develop decision-making and problem-solving skills.
 - ✓ Recognise the variety of family patterns and roles.
 - ✓ Understand personal growth and sexuality as part of self-identity.
 - ✓ Acquire appropriate vocabulary and social interaction skills.
 - ✓ Develop coping strategies for personal safety and to prevent abuse.
 - ✓ Critically understand external influences on decision-making.
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2. Approaches and Methodologies

Aligned with the **SPHE Guidelines for Teachers of Students with MGLD (2002)**:

- **Active, child-centred methodologies:** Circle time, role-play, social stories, video modelling, visual supports.
 - Use of **SPHE for Pupils with ASD by Fiona Speirs** and other differentiated resources.
 - **Anatomically correct dolls** and visual supports for explicit teaching.
 - Inclusion of **Webwise** for internet safety.
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3. Linkage and Integration

RSE is linked to:

- **SPHE strands:** Myself, Myself and Others, Myself and the Wider World.

- **Literacy, language and communication** (e.g., vocabulary development, social scripts).
- **Wellbeing frameworks** (e.g., Wellbeing in Education – Framework for Practice).
- Cross-curricular activities and events (e.g., Wellness Week).

4. Assessment and Record Keeping

Assessment aligns with the **Assessment in the Primary School Curriculum (NCCA)** and includes:

- ✓ Teacher observation and pupil engagement
- ✓ Parent observations
- ✓ IEPs and PPPs
- ✓ Checklists and pupil work samples
- ✓ End-of-year reports
- ✓ Consultation with multidisciplinary teams (e.g., SLT, OT)

5. Equality of Participation and Access

- RSE is **inclusive of all pupils**, respecting diversity of gender, ability, ethnicity, and family structures.
- Differentiation ensures all pupils can participate meaningfully.
- Collaboration with parents and outside professionals where needed (e.g., NEPS, Barnardos, HSE).

6. Timetable

- Allocated **30 minutes per week or one hour per fortnight** to ensure meaningful exploration.

7. Resources and ICT

A comprehensive inventory of resources ensures high-quality RSE delivery. All materials are **age-appropriate, inclusive, and accessible**.

8. Health and Safety

RSE is taught in line with the **school's Health and Safety Policy** to ensure safe, supportive learning environments.

9. Individual Teachers' Planning and Reporting

Teachers use this policy to guide **long- and short-term planning**, ensuring consistency and progression.

- **Fortnightly plans** reflect RSE implementation.
- Feedback is shared through **parent-teacher meetings, daily emails, and staff meetings**.

10. Staff Development

Staff are supported to attend **RSE and SPHE CPD** opportunities and share knowledge during staff meetings. Training includes:

- ✓ Child Abuse Prevention Programme / Stay Safe
- ✓ RSE Programme / Wellbeing in Education
- ✓ The Sex Factor / Attention Autism Sex Education
- ✓ Aistear and Nurture Room training

11. Parental and Community Links

- RSE policy and curriculum available on the **school website**.
- Daily emails and parent communications support home-school links.
- Parents are encouraged to use **"Making the Big Talk Many Small Talks" (HSE)**.
- Parents are notified in advance of sensitive topics.

Success Criteria

The plan's success will be evaluated based on:

- ✓ Teachers' planning and pupil engagement
- ✓ Parent and pupil feedback
- ✓ Alignment with Department of Education guidance
- ✓ Ongoing collaboration between school, parents, and SNAs

Implementation

Roles and Responsibilities

- St. Nicholas' believe that the school community must be involved to successfully implement RSE. Therefore, the teaching staff will implement this plan with the support of the Board of Management, Parents, SNS's and the local community.

Timeframe

- Full implementation in the **2025/2026 school year**.

Review

- **Formal review every two years; next review in May 2027.**
- Ongoing updates to resources and approaches.

Policy Ratification and Review

Ratified by the Board of Management on: 05/11/2025
Signed (Chairperson): [Signature]
Signed (Principal): [Signature]
Review Date: May 2027