



**'I have come that you might have life and have it to the full'**

**(John.10:10)**

## **DIOCESE OF EAST ANGLIA**

### **GUIDANCE AND PRINCIPLES FOR RELATIONSHIP AND SEX EDUCATION**

#### **The Place of Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) in schools**

The Catholic Church, of which our schools are part, recognises that we are created in the image of God. Christ, in becoming man, affirmed the goodness of body and soul, which together make us fully human. Catholic schools are called to commit to the education of the whole child and therefore RSE "should be carried out as part of the holistic education which seeks to form as well as inform young people in preparation for adult life."<sup>1</sup>

Following the guidance of the Bishops of England and Wales and as advocated by the DfE (and the Welsh Assembly Government) RSE will be firmly embedded in the PSHE framework as it is concerned with nurturing human wholeness and integral to the physical, spiritual, emotional, moral, social and intellectual development of pupils. It is centred on Christ's vision of being human as good news and will be positive and prudent, showing the potential for development, while enabling the dangers and risks involved to be understood and appreciated.

The government also recognises that the aim of RSE "is to give young people the information they need to help them develop healthy nurturing relationships of all kinds, not just intimate relationships. It should enable them to know what a healthy relationship looks like and what a good friend, a good colleague and a successful marriage or other type of committed relationship."<sup>2</sup>

#### **RSE in our diocesan Schools**

With the Christian mission of our schools uppermost in our minds, and with consideration of the statutory guidance in this area, schools that offer RSE should do so in harmony with the diocesan guidelines outlined in this document. To avoid imparting mixed messages, our schools must:

- impart Catholic teaching in the area of sexual morality
- promote respect for the dignity of the body, respect for human life, the virtue of chastity and the sacrament of marriage
- demonstrate pastoral sensitivity for the cultural, personal and family circumstances of all pupils while maintaining the integrity of Catholic teaching

---

<sup>1</sup> Catholic Education Service, 2016

<sup>2</sup> Relationships Education, Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) and Health Education , July 2019, DfE

- inform parents if any outside agencies (eg a nurse) will be delivering any content in this area, and strive to ensure they do not deliver information which undermines Catholic teaching
- recognise parents as the primary educators of their children. “Sex education, which is a basic right and duty of parents, must always be carried out under their attentive guidance, whether at home or in educational centres chosen and controlled by them.”<sup>3</sup> (Indeed, the aforementioned 2019 RSE Guidance recognises that ‘the role of parents in the development of their children’s understanding about relationships is vital’.<sup>4</sup> )
- inform parents of RSE course content and planned dates of delivery. A meeting should be held to give parents the opportunity to ask questions about the material.
- ensure parents of Primary children are aware of their right to withdraw their children from all or part of any RSE (that which is outside national curriculum science), and support them in their decision should they choose to do so. However, Relationship Education is compulsory in all Primary schools.
- Ensure parents of Secondary pupils are aware of their right to withdraw their child from Sex Education but there is no right to withdraw from Relationships and Health Education.
- offer opportunities to meet with parents and support them in taking on this aspect of their parental role.

## Statutory requirements for RSE

Where RSE is taught it should give consideration to the following documents:

- *The Education Act 1996*. In consolidating all previous legislation in this area, this act requires that primary schools have a policy statement that describes the RSE provided or gives a statement of the decision not to provide RSE. This must be available for inspection, with responsibility falling to the governing body.
- *The Learning and Skills Act 2000*. This act states that where RSE is provided, it should ensure that young people learn about the nature of marriage and its importance for family life and bringing up children, and ensure that teaching and materials are appropriate for the pupils’ age and religious and cultural background.
- The Department for Education 2019 document, *Relationships Education, Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) and Health Education*. This is statutory guidance and it discusses the delivery of RSE through the PSHE framework to help schools plan RSE policy. It contains teaching strategies, suggestions for working with parents and advice on confidentiality.

## SEXUALITY IN GOD’S PLAN

### Made in the Image of God: Love, Communion and the Holy Trinity

At the heart of the Christian life is the Holy Trinity, where Father, Son and Spirit dwell in communion. The reciprocal total self-giving between Father and Son is fruitfully manifest in the person of the Holy Spirit, and the love of the triune God overflows and embraces all people and all creation.

Human love, likewise, calls for self-donation. In Genesis we read that every human person is made in “the image and likeness of God”<sup>5</sup> and that God has *written into* the humanity of man and woman the vocation, capacity and responsibility of love and communion. This profound dignity of man underpins the approach to all education in a Catholic school. Our approach to RSE, therefore, must

---

<sup>3</sup> John Paul II *Familiaris Consortio*, 37

<sup>4</sup> Relationships Education, Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) and Health Education , July 2019, DfE

<sup>5</sup> Genesis 1: 27

be rooted in the Catholic Church's teaching of the human person and presented as a positive message of divine truth. Our sexuality is God's gift, part of our unique identity, and the means by which we both express love and share in God's work of creation. Such a powerful gift must be treated with the respect and reverence it deserves.

## **Male and Female He Created Them**

The book of Genesis tells of man and woman as equal partners who enjoy a relationship of intimacy with God. In acknowledging our human nature, we are all called to acknowledge the difference and complementarity of each sex. The most beautiful form of love on earth is the love between a man and a woman who give themselves to each other in marriage, an indissoluble, one-flesh union affirmed and raised to a sacrament by Christ<sup>6</sup>. The marital bond of *one flesh* has a two-fold purpose – the expression of love between husband and wife and the procreation of children. As a relationship of total, exclusive, faithful, and self-giving mutual love,<sup>7</sup> marriage must be *open to life*, where children are welcomed and the community of a family established.<sup>8</sup> Made in the image of God, each person is of great value. The Catholic reverence for all human life, from conception through to natural death, is rooted in this conviction.

There may be some who are called to the celibate life. This is also an authentic expression of sexuality, since we relate to others as the man, or the woman, that we are. Sexuality infuses our whole being, and is not limited to the physical expression of sexual intercourse. Celibacy is a unique way of giving oneself, as a witness to the fullness of divine communion with God which awaits the faithful.

## **The Wound of Sin**

It is important to understand that the intimate and happy relationship between human beings and God, as established in the beginning, was wounded by sin. The account in Genesis reminds us how sin brings about isolation, division and conflict. When questioned by God about his 'eating of the fruit of the tree', the man blames his wife and we see straight away division where there should be marital harmony. Through the sacrament of Baptism we are restored to God's grace, and are enabled to overcome wayward desires. Consequently, chastity - that is, the "successful integration of sexuality within the person and thus the inner unity of man in his bodily and spiritual being"<sup>9</sup> - is attainable, even though this "apprenticeship in self-mastery"<sup>10</sup> can be a challenging pursuit. It remains true, however, that "chastity proves invaluable for the genuine growth of love between persons".<sup>11</sup>

## **Redeemed in Christ**

Through his life, death and resurrection, Jesus Christ has rescued humankind from the power of sin. The belief that "the Word was made flesh"<sup>12</sup> underlines the goodness and significance of the human body. St. John Paul II spoke of sexuality as saying something: that the body itself has a language.<sup>13</sup> When we act with our bodies, we are speaking to others and it is important that we communicate effectively and honestly. Our ability to grow in virtue is made possible by the Christian life of discipleship, lived in union with Jesus Christ in his Body, the Church. Formed by the Word of God and nourished by the sacraments - especially the Holy Eucharist and Reconciliation - we are strengthened on our Christian journey. Indeed, Christ has left us an

---

<sup>6</sup> Mk 10:2-9

<sup>7</sup> cf. *Gaudium et Spes* 47-52

<sup>8</sup> John Paul II *Letter to Families* 7-8

<sup>9</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2337

<sup>10</sup> *Natural Family Planning Program*, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 3211 Fourth St., NE, Washington, DC 20017, 202/541-3240, [nfp@usccb.org](mailto:nfp@usccb.org)

<sup>11</sup> Pope Francis, *Amoris Laetitia*, 206

<sup>12</sup> John 1:14

<sup>13</sup> John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio*, 32

example of selfless love, which both shows us the way and also empowers us by his grace to fulfil our potential as loving human beings, body and soul. We reach true happiness only by dying to self and rising to a new way of living.<sup>14</sup>

## **TODAY'S CONTEXT**

### **A varied and challenging socio-cultural climate**

Many people today have views about sexuality and human relationships which differ markedly from the teachings of the Church. In a society in which divorce, same-sex partnerships, sex before marriage and cohabitation are commonplace, the Church's teachings are decidedly counter-cultural, appearing outmoded, authoritarian and even unrealistic. Yet "as Christians, we can hardly stop advocating marriage simply to avoid countering contemporary sensibilities, or out of a desire to be fashionable or a sense of helplessness in the face of human and moral failings. We would be depriving the world of values that we can and must offer".<sup>15</sup>

It is also increasingly likely in today's climate that children will have had exposure to sexually explicit material, and may understand the physical nature of sexual relations. This makes setting sexuality in its proper context all the more important. Indeed, it is the understanding of the human person in relation to others which is the core focus of RSE.

### **The Catholic school's response and message**

The Catholic school, as part of the Church, is called to proclaim the joy of the gospel, even when it runs counter to many of the accepted norms of society. Church teaching on sexual morality is not designed to restrict freedom or pleasure, but rather to enable us to find true happiness through love and responsibility. By expounding Christian values and promoting them in a positive light, we hope to impart the wisdom and beauty of Church teaching, enabling students to grow in virtue and reject damaging cultural trends or corrosive peer pressures.

### **A Challenging Journey**

Whilst the Church professes that sexual union should always take place in the context of marriage, we all recognise that the child's journey toward sexual maturity can be difficult and confusing, not least in today's cultural milieu. Even so, children should be encouraged and actively helped to grow towards maturity and responsibility and thus to realise the Christian life. Daily prayer, frequent confession, reception of the Eucharist, along with the cultivation of self-discipline and virtuous habits, are essential. Chastity is helped by God's grace through the supernatural means he gives us in his Church, for grace perfects nature and strengthens us. Successful role models for the young, as seen in the examples of family life well lived, in the Scriptures and in the lives of the Saints, can be a great help and an inspiration.

Thus, our Catholic schools' education must remain true to Catholic teaching. All parents, as primary educators of their children, have the right and responsibility to raise their children in accordance with their beliefs and values, forming them and giving them the information they wish them to possess.

---

<sup>14</sup> Cf Eph 4:22-24, Rom 12:1-2, Rom 6:11-14

<sup>15</sup> *Amoris Laetitia*, 35

## **PRINCIPLES FOR SCHOOLS**

### **Parents as primary educator: Home School Partnership**

Parents are a child's first educator - in forming the child, in developing personal relationships and especially in matters of education relating to human sexuality<sup>16</sup>. School staff should encourage pupils to seek the advice of their parents in this area. Where RSE lessons are given in school, the parental right to withdraw their children must be accepted and respected.

### **The Importance of appropriate teaching and materials**

Much resource material published for RSE is unsuitable; that is, it does not accord with the Catholic vision. Some resources are too sexually explicit; others can be seen to portray casual sexual relationships as normal. It is important to take care when selecting resources that they do not undermine Catholic morality. RSE lessons must contribute to pupils' development of a positive self-image, as well as their respect and love for others. Sexuality must be seen as a gift from God, as part of our human dignity and beauty, with its fullest expression belonging within marriage. Chastity and purity should be promoted as a positive response to this gift. This approach influences the respectful terminology we use when talking of sex and the changes bodies go through during puberty, to enable an appreciation of the wonder of the human body and its place in God's creative plan. The RSE sessions should be delivered by a teacher who is confident and knowledgeable in this area of Church teaching.

### **The whole person**

In any school-based education relating to sexuality and personal relationships, emphasis should be placed upon the whole person and not just on biological aspects. Every child is unique and so the aim is to form each person in love - body, mind and spirit. The virtue of chastity will enable the self-possession which is necessary before a person is able to make a genuine self-gift to another. RSE should stress Christ as the model of chastity and dependence upon the Holy Spirit through the sacramental and spiritual means provided by the Church. To be unchaste is to be, in a sense, torn and not free, which is why the Church has a special duty to assist and heal those who are broken or fallen. Catholic schools have a duty to never imply that pre-marital sexual intercourse is fine as long as it is *safe sex*.

### **Distinguishing between sinner and sin**

RSE lessons should always take care to distinguish the sinner from the sin, treating those who struggle to live in accordance with the teaching of Christ with mercy and compassion, without in any way passing judgment on them as persons. This is the example Christ has given us in the Gospels, as when he condemned adultery but treated with love and mercy the woman caught in the act, exhorting her to 'go and sin no more'.<sup>17</sup>

Alternative views about sex outside of marriage, about contraception, about homosexual acts, about IVF and so on should therefore not be presented as neutral or value-free information but always in relation to the Church's teaching on marriage and sexual morality, and while always being sensitive to the often complex family and relational situations within which our children live. Given that many of our children come from homes with family models that are at variance with the Church's teaching, care needs to be taken to ensure that RSE is taught in the context of God's unconditional love, with mercy and compassion, so that children – and parents – feel

---

<sup>16</sup>Pope Francis, *Amoris Laetitia*, 84 'Schools do not replace parents, but complement them,'

<sup>17</sup>Jn 8: 3-11

supported and not judged or excluded, but at the same time offering them hope that they do not have to be bound by the circumstances which surround them.

### **A comprehensive curriculum**

Schools should consciously promote Catholic values relating to the importance of stable relationships, marriage and family life. In particular, they should promote those virtues which are essential in responding to God's call to love others with a proper respect for their dignity and the dignity of the human body, namely faithfulness, fruitfulness, chastity, integrity, prudence, mercy and compassion. In addition, the DfE identifies three strands in RSE – attitudes and values; knowledge and understanding; and personal and social skills. These strands helpfully suggest that curriculum content might be provided by three inter-related means: the whole school / ethos dimension; a cross-curricular dimension and a specific sex and relationships dimension (module).

### **Day-to-day modelling of Christ's example**

In their day-to-day dealings with pupils, all staff in a Catholic school are expected to reflect and reinforce the teachings of the Catholic Church and are accountable to parents and governors. This is especially important in matters relating to personal relationships, sexual morality and what is taught in RSE. Schools must also ensure that RSE is sensitive to the different needs of individual pupils and is taught in a way that does not subject pupils to discrimination. Lessons should, where possible, contribute to children's capacity to realise the nature and consequences of discrimination, teasing, bullying, the use of prejudice-based language and aggressive behaviours (including cyber-bullying), to respond conscientiously and to ask for help.

## **PRACTICALITIES – CONTENT AND PEDAGOGY**

### **A constant incorporation of morality**

RSE is an education in love and responsibility and so the moral dimension should always be incorporated. Consciences need to be formed so that a child is able to recognise the value of his or her peers and act appropriately. RSE must be age-appropriate, positive, prudent, clear and delicate. All RSE will be in accordance with the Church's moral teaching. It will emphasise the central importance of marriage and the family whilst acknowledging that all pupils, irrespective of value background, have a fundamental right to have their experiences and lives respected.

### **The individual child's journey**

Formation in RSE must be tailored to the needs of the individual, as far as possible. At times this might require an emphasis on dialogue and discussion, whilst recognising the normative status of the Church's teaching. Extra care must be taken to ensure pupils with additional needs are not given information they may find distressing to receive, parental consultation being crucial in these circumstances. They should also receive appropriately differentiated support in order to meet the varying needs of such pupils.

### **The Word of God**

Lessons should refer to the Word of God. This is revealed through the Bible and the Church's Tradition, and transmitted through the teaching authority of the Church. The personal love of Jesus Christ should be emphasised in teaching objective moral principles.

### **Respect for other faiths and ethnicities, and their teaching on sexuality**

We acknowledge and respect the presence in our schools of other faith-traditions and their teaching on sexuality, even though we may not be able to provide affirmation and support for

their teachings. Practice must be sensitive to the needs of different ethnic groups, however, and we should respond flexibly and positively to parental requests and concerns wherever possible.

### **Protecting innocence, modesty and privacy**

A child's personal space and intellectual and emotional maturity should be taken into account at all times. Modesty is a child's natural inclination to protect themselves in this highly personal area and should be respected and preserved. Pupils' privacy should also not be invaded in any way. The aim is to engage with children, giving them the tools needed to grow in virtue and understanding of the sacredness of human sexuality. It is a very delicate area and consideration must always be given to "the years of innocence from about five years of age until puberty. This period of tranquility and serenity must never be disturbed by unnecessary information about sex".<sup>18</sup>

In addition, more sensitive RSE content (eg lessons on physical changes during puberty) should be given in single sex groups to help preserve modesty and minimize embarrassment.

### **Children's questions**

Our children experience a wide range of lived experiences at home. Schools should strive, therefore, to promote a healthy, positive atmosphere in which RSE can help pupils learn without intimidation or fear. Schools should encourage pupils to ask questions freely in an appropriate manner or setting (which may include in written form for those children embarrassed to ask their question in front of the group) confident that their questions will be answered. Some questions may raise issues which it would not be appropriate for teachers to answer during ordinary class time, e.g. where a child's questions hints at abuse, is deliberately tendentious or is of a personal nature.

### **Controversial and sensitive issues**

There are always likely to be sensitive or controversial issues in RSE. These may be a matter of maturity, of personal experience or of disagreement with the teaching of the Church. In some cases they may hint at illegal activity or other harmful situations. The use of ground rules, negotiated between teachers and pupils, will help to create a supportive climate for discussion. However, all staff should have ready recourse to advice and guidance where children's questions or class discussions lead into sensitive or controversial areas in which they are not sufficiently expert or experienced to provide a safe and satisfactory response. Staff should never try to muddle through – or risk a response – where they are conscious that their knowledge is wanting.

### **Safeguarding arrangements**

In a context in which pupils are encouraged to discuss relationships openly and freely, it is inevitable that – from time to time – there will be issues of confidentiality. Pupils should be routinely encouraged to talk with their parents/carers about the issues which are discussed in lessons.

In RSE as in all other school activities, a teacher with any concerns about the welfare of a particular child must follow the school's child protection / safeguarding procedures. Where appropriate, teachers should explain to pupils that they cannot offer unconditional confidentiality in matters which may constitute disclosure or illegality. Teachers should explain that, in such circumstances, they would have to pass the information on to the appropriate person.

---

<sup>18</sup> Pontifical Council for the Family, *Truth and Meaning of Human Sexuality*, 78

## **Appendix A:**

### **DETAILED OBJECTIVES – THE CONTENT OF RSE**

The following are *offered as suggestions* for the aims of an RSE curriculum in our Catholic schools.

For pupils to:

- know that they are a unique creation of God and so are able to grow in self-respect, developing a positive attitude to themselves, their feelings and their sexuality
- understand that self-giving love is central to relationships
- recognise the importance of forgiveness and saying sorry in relationships
- understand the reasons for self-respect, and why they should act with respect and responsibility in their relationships
- reflect on their own relationships recognising those qualities that help relationships grow
- develop knowledge, communication skills and understanding in order to help personal decision-making
- act responsibly as an individual and as a member of a group
- identify – and have the confidence to talk about – their emotions and how to respond positively to them
- communicate a point of view clearly and appropriately and listen to the views of others
- take responsibility for oneself and for one's actions
- come to understand the influence and impact of the media, internet and peer groups and develop the ability to assess pressures and respond appropriately
- think positively about their own bodies
- understand, in ways appropriate to their age and developmental needs, the changes they will undergo including puberty
- think positively about other people, adults as well as children
- take care of themselves, their health, safety and personal hygiene
- keep themselves safe and ask for help and support when needed
- become aware of good choices and wrong choices and their consequences
- make good choices about what to do in particular situations
- manage relationships with friends confidently and effectively
- develop the ability to form positive, non-exploitative relationships and reject bullying
- explore and reflect on their own observations of married life
- have an understanding of the family, an appreciation of the values of family life and the roles and responsibilities of family members
- have an understanding of a family which - despite difficulties - is a spiritual community in which members can grow in faith, hope and love
- understand that the difference between male and female is part of God's loving and creative plan
- understand sexual behaviour and reproduction in the context of a loving and self-giving marriage avoiding its reduction to bodily functions
- understand the Church's teaching on sexual activity outside of marriage
- understand the Church's teaching on the distinction between sexual orientation and sexual activity
- recognise and appreciate the Catholic belief in the importance of marriage for family life and the bringing up of children
- exhibit charity and compassion for others



## **Appendix B:**

### **ROLES, RESPONSIBILITIES AND ACCOUNTABILITY**

This section sets out the respective expectations of governors, the headteacher, the RSE leader, staff and parents:

Governors are responsible for:

- ensuring that the policy accords with Catholic teaching
- drawing up the RSE policy, in consultation with parents and teachers
- ensuring that the policy follows and is in accordance with diocesan RSE guidance
- ensuring that the policy is always available to parents
- ensuring that the policy accords with the school's other policies
- ensuring that parents know of their right to withdraw their children from RSE lessons
- ensuring that school policy provides proper and adequate coverage of the relevant National Curriculum science orders

The headteacher is responsible for:

- exercising overall delegated responsibility for the implementation of this policy and for liaison with the governing body, parents of pupils and the Diocesan Schools' Service
- ensuring that parents are consulted annually on the school's arrangements for RSE, including content, materials and pedagogical approaches

The RSE leader is responsible for:

- ensuring personal knowledge and formation in Catholic teaching in the area of RSE
- leading, challenging and supporting staff in the implementation of this policy
- leading the monitoring and evaluating of standards in RSE and the progress of pupils
- leading and supporting staff in the dissemination of the information relating to RSE
- leading and supporting staff in identifying, organising and evaluating professional development and in-service training in RSE

All staff have a duty and responsibility to:

- implement this policy in their day-to-day practice
- exercise a duty of care relating to confidentiality and sensitive and controversial issues
- actively contribute to the guardianship and guidance of the physical, moral and spiritual wellbeing of pupils

Parents should:

- recognise that they are the primary educators of their children and that the school's role is to seek to support them in this task
- recognise their right to be consulted before this policy is ratified by the governing body.
- recognise their right to withdraw their children