

MARKETHILL PRIMARY SCHOOL



Tomorrow's Success Begins Today... 

Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) Policy

School Details:

Markethill Primary School
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Principal: Dr H McLernon

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INTRODUCTION

Relationships and Sexuality Education has been defined by the Department of Education as:

'...a lifelong process which encompasses the acquisition of knowledge, understanding and skills; and the development of attitudes, beliefs and values about personal and social relationships and gender issues.' (DENI Guidelines)

This policy is intended to provide a framework through which young people can develop the skills, attitudes and values necessary to deal with the challenges which they will meet in this very sensitive area. It will endeavour to:

- equip our children with the knowledge and skills necessary to manage their physical and emotional development.
- equip our children with the knowledge and skills that will protect them in vulnerable situations especially in a safeguarding context.

Effective RSE is essential if children are to value themselves as individuals and are to make responsible and well-informed decisions about their lives. RSE in primary schools should provide children with opportunities to:

- Value themselves as unique individuals.
- Respect themselves and others.
- Begin to develop their own moral thinking and value systems.
- Learn about friendships, healthy relationships and behaviours with others.
- Recognise and communicate their feelings and emotions and those of others.
- Learn about the changes that occur as they progress towards adolescence, particularly the emotional and physical changes at puberty.
- Learn about keeping themselves safe and know what to do or who to go to if they feel unsafe.

RATIONALE

The Northern Ireland Curriculum sets out a single broad aim for education:

'To empower young people to develop their potential and to make informed and responsible decisions throughout their lives.' (DENI 2008).

Within the Northern Ireland Curriculum, Personal Development and Mutual Understanding (PDMU) focuses on encouraging each child to become personally, emotionally, socially and physically effective; to lead healthy, safe and fulfilling lives; and to become confident, independent and responsible citizens, making informed and responsible choices and decisions throughout their lives.

Markethill Primary School is committed to including everyone and to the education of children regardless of race, religion, gender or status. All pupils have a right to an education which adequately prepares them for adult life and RSE plays an integral part. A vital part of the PDMU curriculum is the provision of RSE. Markethill Primary School advocates the promotion of a 'Personal Development' approach to RSE whereby children in our care are given the skills to help them resist peer and media pressure, and make informed decisions based on their own internal self-respect and self-esteem. Pupils are encouraged to recognise their individual needs and to respect the needs and wants of others. RSE is a lifelong process that involves the acquisition of knowledge, understanding and skills and the development of attitudes, beliefs, morals and values. Relationships and Sexuality Education is very important in our school and has close links with many of the core strands which are taught in PDMU, namely: children developing their self-

esteem and self-confidence, managing their feelings and emotions, keeping healthy and safe, building relationships with family and friends, as well as learning to live as a member of a community, understanding similarities and differences as well as responsibilities and conflict situations. In Markethill Primary School, Relationships and Sexuality Education is embedded in the teaching of PDMU but is also developed through many other aspects of school life and is:

“... taught in harmony with the ethos of the school and reflects the moral and religious principles held by parents and school management authorities.” (DE Circular 2013/16).

The teaching of RSE should provide opportunities which enable pupils to:

- ✓ Form values and establish behaviour within a moral, spiritual and social framework.
- ✓ Examine and explore the various relationships in their personal lives.
- ✓ Learn how to develop and enjoy personal relationships and friendships which are based on responsibility and mutual respect.
- ✓ Build the foundations for developing more personal relationships in later life.
- ✓ Make positive, responsible choices about themselves and others and the way they live their lives.

SCHOOL ETHOS

In Markethill Primary School, we strive to promote excellence in child centred education in a safe, inclusive, nurturing and stimulating environment where the dignity of all is valued and where everyone can aspire, aim, achieve and experience success.

- In Markethill Primary School children are our priority and we will aim to promote excellence in child-centred education by providing a thriving learning and teaching community with a culture of success for all children.
- All children will be encouraged to set and achieve the highest personal, academic, emotional and social goals.
- Children will be stimulated, motivated, enthused, have opportunities to work independently and collaboratively and feel that they make a positive contribution to the life of our school.
- Teaching staff will create an environment where pupils can grow, learn and achieve regardless of ability levels.
- Our aim is to foster in our children a desire to learn and achieve success.
- Teachers will employ a variety of teaching strategies and experiences to ensure the provision of an excellent education by implementing a broad, balanced, coherent and relevant curriculum.
- MPS will encourage the development of each pupil physically, emotionally, intellectually, spiritually, morally and culturally.
- MPS is committed to ensuring that pupils experience a happy and deep learning journey, one that will promote the idea of lifelong learners.
- In MPS we will embrace challenges and changes and initiate change, if necessary, in the pursuit of excellence in education.
- We will promote a rich, inclusive and welcoming learning community. This school community will be committed to offering a safe, secure, caring, positive and challenging working environment in which every individual feels valued, respected, supported and happy.
- The safety, welfare and development of everyone in our school will be of paramount importance to all staff.
- All staff will strive to provide an ethos in which fairness, tolerance, compassion and forgiveness permeate all relationships within the school.

- MPS will foster and encourage caring attitudes and values: self-respect, self-discipline, commitment, confidence, courtesy, good manners, a spirit of tolerance and respect for others. We believe that these are attributes that will serve the children in MPS well as they progress through school and beyond.
- We aim to prepare children for the opportunities, responsibilities and experiences of adult life. We want to cultivate our good citizens of the future, with a responsibility and a desire to contribute to the local and wider community.

Within Markethill Primary School, the pastoral care structures are based on a shared understanding of what it means to be a safe, caring and respectful school. The teaching of Relationships and Sexuality Education should be inclusive of all differences regardless of race, age, disability, ethnicity, religion, culture, gender and sexual orientation. We also recognise that children may come from a diverse home life. The effectiveness of this policy and its implementation is dependent on a collaborative process involving teachers, parents/carers, governors and other educational and health professionals. Each of the partners have distinctive contributions to make.

The delivery of RSE must prepare pupils to view relationships in a responsible and healthy manner and should be taught in conjunction with other relevant policies:

- PDMU Policy
- Pastoral Care Policy
- Acceptable Internet Use and Agreement Policy
- Anti-Bullying Policy
- E-Safety Policy
- Photographic and Video Images Policy
- Positive Behaviour Policy
- Child Protection Policy
- Code of Conduct Policy
- Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Policy
- First Aid Policy
- Religious Education Policy

HOW MORAL AND RELIGIOUS PRINCIPLES ARE ADDRESSED

- Engagement with each stakeholder in order to ensure that everyone is clear about the purpose of RSE in school and that there is no misunderstanding about any of the topics therein.
- Engagement with each stakeholder to ensure that sensitivities and genuinely held convictions are acknowledged and respected.
- By teaching RSE the children will be given possession of knowledge and life skills pertinent to their personal physical, emotional and social development.
- By teaching RSE the school's safeguarding guidance for children will be reinforced providing them with the knowledge to make responsible and informed choices and decisions that will help protect them physically and emotionally.
- By teaching RSE the children will be better placed to appreciate how the guidance contained therein will enable them to aspire to higher goals in the affective realm which is inseparable to the wider sphere of aspiration e.g. in terms of future vocation and profession.
- By teaching RSE the school's focus on the family and family values will be reinforced in turn supporting the role of the family in the child's broader education.

- By teaching RSE the key social and citizenship values which the school espouses will be reinforced. The child will therefore be better placed to make a more positive contribution to the immediate and wider community.
- No pupil will be compelled to do anything which compromises his or her personal beliefs or those of his/her family.

AIMS

Markethill Primary School aims to promote excellence in child centred education in a safe, nurturing, inclusive and stimulating environment where the dignity of all is valued and where everyone can aspire, aim, achieve and experience success.

Relationships and Sexuality Education aims to provide equal opportunity for:

- Emotional development by enhancing the personal development, self-esteem and well-being of the child.
- The understanding of how to be healthy and safe through fostering an understanding of, and a respectful attitude to, human sexuality and relationships in a moral, social and spiritual framework.
- Building, developing and sustaining healthy and respectful friendships and relationships, through developing respect for self, for others and for their future.
- The development of moral thinking and values, and how this impacts on behaviour through promoting responsible behaviour and the ability to make informed decisions.
- The development of Thinking Skills and Personal Capabilities along with a variety of life skills such as helping the child come to value family life and marriage, appreciate the responsibilities of parenthood and promote an appreciation of the value of human life and the wonder of birth.

Through the Relationships and Sexuality Education, Markethill Primary School seeks to promote and safeguard the welfare of children in an age-appropriate way.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Markethill Primary School seeks to build, in a developmentally appropriate way, on children's existing knowledge and experience of their bodies, relationships and the world around them. Through the RSE curriculum, we seek to provide structured opportunities for pupils to develop opportunities to:

- Acquire and develop knowledge and understanding of self.
- Develop a positive sense of self-awareness, self-esteem and self-worth leading them to value themselves as individuals.
- Develop an appreciation of the dignity, uniqueness and well-being of others to enable them to respect others.
- Understand the nature, growth and development of relationships within families, in friendships and in wider contexts.
- Develop an awareness of differing family patterns.
- 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 will help to establish and sustain healthy personal relationships and behaviours with others.

- Begin to develop their own moral thinking and value systems, in respect of their spiritual, social, emotional and physical growth.
- Develop some coping strategies to protect self and others from various forms of harm and abuse.
- Acquire and improve skills to recognise and communicate their feelings and emotions, and those of others during social interaction.
- Acquire and use an appropriate vocabulary to discuss feelings, sexuality, growth and development.
- Learn about keeping themselves safe and know what to do or who to go to if they feel unsafe.

MEETING THE NEEDS OF PUPILS

To ensure that the learning experiences are effective, positive and relevant to all pupils, the RSE programme should be developmental, accessible and be appropriate to the age and maturity of the pupils. It should meet the needs of both genders and be a positive experience for all participants.

RSE helps children and young people acquire age-appropriate knowledge, understanding and skills, and develop attitudes, beliefs and values about sexual identity, relationships and intimacy. Effective RSE, which is taught in a sensitive and inclusive manner, encourages children and young people to value themselves as individuals and to make responsible and well-informed decisions about their lives.

Markethill Primary School is a Rights Respecting School and upholds the articles contained in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. Our school welcomes all children and values them as individuals, treating them equally and with respect. We believe that all children have the right to have their own needs recognised and addressed to achieve success.

The relevant supporting UNCR articles in relation to RSE include:

- Article 12: ‘provides all children with the right to express their views in matters affecting them and for those views to be given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child’.
- Article 13: freedom of expression
- Article 17: access to information
- Article 29: Children’s education should develop each child’s personality, talents and abilities to the fullest. It should encourage children to respect others, human rights and their own and other cultures. (Rights Respecting Schools – UNICEF; The Convention on the Rights of the Child)

These are prerequisite if a child’s right to be heard is to be respected. Pupils will:

- become involved in the development and review of the school’s RSE policy.
- be involved in the school’s on-going evaluation and review of the RSE provision to ensure that it meets the needs of all pupils.
- have their views responded to using pupil focus groups, RRS Steering Committee and the School Council.

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

- The Board of Governors examines and ratifies the school's RSE Policy, following school and parent consultations.
- The Principal, Pastoral Care Co-ordinator, Senior Leadership Team and Safe-guarding Team co-ordinate and evaluate the school's approach to RSE and consult with the Board of Governors, staff, pupils, parents/carers, and outside agencies as appropriate. RSE will appear regularly on the School Development Plan as part of the evaluation process.
- The Pastoral Care Co-ordinator writes the policy relevant to this school and in conjunction with the Principal monitors delivery of the teaching and keeps staff up to date.
- The staff provide a link and have a complementary role with parents/carers to deliver the school's RSE programme within the context of the Northern Ireland Curriculum.
- The policy is made available to all parents who can view the policy on the school website and are welcome to provide feedback to the principal.
- Pupil and class councils may offer feedback to inform future practice.

MONITORING AND EVALUATION

The principal, SLT, Pastoral Care Co-ordinator, along with the safe-guarding team, will lead the evaluation of RSE provision along with other relevant co-ordinators where appropriate. Robust procedures for the monitoring and evaluation of the provision within school include regular checks to ensure all aspects of the curriculum are being covered.

The aim of the evaluation process is to ensure that:

- The RSE policy continues to comply with legislation and guidelines,
- Classroom practice continues to reflect the Policy and needs of the pupils,
- Teaching resources are regularly reviewed and updated,
- External agency input is evaluated regularly,
- The views of the pupils are garnered and respected,
- External agencies are informed of School procedures regarding pupil disclosures.

The principal and co-ordinator will arrange for staff development and training when the need and opportunity arises.

CONTENT AND DETAIL

The Department of Education policies; 'Every School A Good School' and 'Community Relations, Equality and Diversity in Education', outline how each school should provide a safe, welcoming and inclusive environment with an inherent respect for difference and diversity of family life in today's society.

RSE is an integral part of the revised curriculum and plays an important role in the development of young people and should help to prepare them to view relationships in a responsible and healthy manner and should be taught within the ethos of the school.

Pupils have the right to learn in a safe environment, to be treated with respect and dignity and not to be treated any less favourably on grounds of their actual or perceived sexual orientation.

RSE will be delivered in a holistic, cross curricular way, ensuring that teaching is at all times appropriate to the maturity and understanding of the pupils. Teachers will be ever alert to the personal and emotional circumstances of the pupils. RSE will include the physical and emotional changes that occur at puberty but will not include sex education.

CURRICULUM ORGANISATION AND DELIVERY

The following outline of the teaching programme illustrates the topics covered through the delivery of the Northern Ireland Curriculum in Primary School. Many of the aspects included below are also part of other curriculum areas such as: PDMU, RE, the World Around Us, PE, Drama or in reaction to specific situations. All teachers will deliver the RSE programme.

Topics and themes are often repeated at regular intervals. The sequence in which ideas are presented below is not intended to imply a teaching order.

Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1

Myself

- ✓ Myself: how I grow, feed, move and use my senses; caring for myself, for example, hygiene, sleep, exercise,
- ✓ Naming parts of the body (basic) - developing an agreed language for our bodies,
- ✓ Being myself - I am unique, my self-esteem, self-confidence, independence, respect and caring for myself,
- ✓ Similarities and differences between myself and others, for example, uniqueness, fingerprints, gender issues, different rates of growth,
- ✓ An introduction to the stages of human development - changes as we grow, for example, baby, child, teenager, adult, mother/father, grandparents,
- ✓ Recognising moods, feelings and concerns and developing a language and an appropriate manner of expressing them, for example, What do I do if I feel sad or angry?
- ✓ Personal likes and dislikes.

My Relationships

- ✓ My family, special people in my life - what they do for me and what I do for them,
- ✓ Friendships, getting on with each other, for example, communicating, playing together, listening, co-operating and sharing,
- ✓ Ageing - how do we know that things are alive, dead, young and old?
- ✓ Loss and mourning - death of a person or a pet (Note: the situations of the pupils should be taken into account prior to introducing this topic),
- ✓ Respect and caring for family members and friends, for example, caring for a new baby,
- ✓ Bullies and what to do about them,
- ✓ Personal safety - simple skills and practices to maintain personal safety,
- ✓ The difference between good and bad touches,
- ✓ Realise that adults and older children are not always friends; the potential danger of relationships with strangers or acquaintances,
- ✓ Strategies which pupils might use to protect themselves from potentially dangerous situations.

My Community/Environment

Awareness of different types of families and the roles of individuals within families,

- ✓ Keeping safe, for example, dangerous places, dangerous situations, the adults who will help, how to get help from others,
- ✓ Rules at home, at school and in the community,
- ✓ Respect and caring for people in the community, e.g. elderly people.

Key Stage 2

Myself

- ✓ My body, how it works and how to keep it healthy,

- ✓ The physical, social and emotional changes that occur during puberty (girls and boys),
- ✓ Myself and my peers - different rates of growth and physical development, maturity,
- ✓ Valuing and respecting myself, identifying personal strengths and weaknesses,
- ✓ Feelings, for example, things that make me happy, sad, excited, embarrassed, angry, scared; expressing our feelings, showing love and affection,
- ✓ Gender roles,
- ✓ Making choices - the influences on me and the consequences of actions for oneself and others,
- ✓ Distinguishing between right and wrong,
- ✓ Secrets - knowing the difference between good and bad secrets, what to do about bad secrets.

My Relationships

- ✓ Identifying the positive traits of friendship and their corresponding values,
- ✓ Differences and similarities in people; the need to respect other people's views, emotions and feeling,
- ✓ Families and how they behave - what family members expect of each other,
- ✓ The meaning of friendship and loyalty; making and maintaining friendships and social relationships, for example, identifying and understanding pressures and influences, taking account of other people's point of view
- ✓ Handling difficult situations, for example, teasing, bullying, death of a family member,
- ✓ The meaning of relationships within families, between friends and in the community,
- ✓ Behaviour - what constitutes appropriate and non-appropriate physical contact,
- ✓ Identifying dangers and risks within relationships,
- ✓ Being assertive in defending individual rights and beliefs,
- ✓ People who can help pupils when they have anxieties, concerns or questions.

My Community/Environment

- ✓ Appreciation of the family in relation to the school and the wider community,
- ✓ Cultural differences in families and family relationships,
- ✓ Helping agencies which can support families and individuals in different circumstance
- ✓ Messages and images about health, gender roles and sexuality from the media, family and peers.

ASSESSMENT

The nature of RSE is strongly orientated towards Personal Development which does not necessarily lend itself to summative assessment. RSE is not easily measurable as it is qualitative rather than quantitative.

SELECTION OF TEACHING RESOURCES

Particular attention should be paid to how best to facilitate the teaching of Relationships and Sexuality Education. In particular, attention must be given to ensure that resources used:

- Reflect the ethos and policies of the school,
- Are age-appropriate, inclusive, and sensitive to the pupils' needs and experiences,
- Work in harmony with the existing programmes that the school offers,
- Encouraging consideration of a range of issues, attitudes and beliefs pertinent to the topics covered,
- Are factually accurate and up-to-date; and,
- Make clear distinctions between fact and opinion.

In Markethill Primary School, we believe it is essential that teachers create a classroom environment which is supportive, where self-esteem is fostered and where the pupils feel valued and affirmed. The climate of the classroom needs to promote mutual respect and the dignity of each individual. It is important to create an atmosphere in the classroom which allows all pupils to feel comfortable to express opinions and feelings in a secure and safe manner and to explore issues which may be sensitive and personal. Every effort should be made to ensure that the whole group is at ease, with pupils showing respect for each other and realising their responsibilities to each other.

Ground rules should be agreed to help to minimise embarrassment and encourage the respect of each other's opinion. Realistic scenarios, case studies, role-play, drama, videos and stories can be used to enable pupils to discuss issues without personal disclosure.

Important considerations are the:

- Degree of trust, respect and positive regard for pupils.
- Relationships between the teacher and pupils, and between the pupils themselves.
- Need for clear expectations, goals and learning objectives.
- Use of teaching and learning methods which involve pupils actively in their own.
- Learning and to encourage the consideration of attitudes and values and the ability to make informed and healthy decisions; and,
- Need to be aware and take account of the current youth culture.

Information about who children can talk to if they feel unsafe at any time as well as picture of the Safeguarding team are displayed around the school and in every classroom. The use of Worry Boxes in each class as well as a 'feelings monitor' provide the children with various communication tools.

CONFIDENTIALITY AND CHILD PROTECTION/SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN

Confidentiality cannot be guaranteed. Where there is disclosure by a child of abuse, Child Protection/Safeguarding Children procedures will be implemented. The classroom is an open environment and confidentiality cannot be maintained. Therefore, staff and pupils are not encouraged to talk about their personal relationships or experiences during class discussions. The child's right to privacy must be respected at all times by both the teacher and all other pupils in the class. A key rule to agree in advance of any discussion is that no one will be expected to ask or answer any personal questions. It is equally important that the teacher shares this right and never feels obliged to impart information about his/her own personal life.

However:

- Teachers cannot promise confidentiality. A child does not have the right to expect that incidents in the classroom or in the wider context of the school will not be reported, as appropriate, to his or her parents/carers and/or the principal. (Refer to our Safeguarding Children Policy).
- The Principal or Designated Teacher for Child Protection/Safeguarding Children must be informed of any disclosures which might suggest that a pupil is at risk or that physical or sexual abuse is suspected. If a child confides in a member of staff and requests that the information is kept secret, the child must be told, sensitively, that the matter must be reported to the appropriate agencies. Decisions can then be taken in accordance with the procedures detailed in the school's Child Protection/Safeguarding Children Policy.

- Teachers can provide general educational advice to all pupils as part of the curriculum. This general advice can be given to pupils individually or within group situations. It is important that the type of advice and the manner in which it is given is supportive of the role of the parents/carers.
- There will be occasions when teachers will have to exercise their discretion and judgement about how to deal with particular issues raised by an individual or by a group of pupils. An initial judgement will need to be made about whether or not it is appropriate to deal with the issues with the whole class. The teacher may wish to discuss the issues with the parents/carers to see how they would like the matter to be handled. Teacher colleagues or a member of the school's Leadership Team/Safeguarding Team might also provide useful guidance. It may be appropriate to respond to the issues with individual pupils or to arrange time for group discussion outside class time. In all cases, teachers should encourage pupils to discuss any issues and concerns they might have with their parents/carers.
- Teachers are not medical professionals and will not give detailed personal medical advice to any pupil. Only doctors and health professionals should give medical advice to pupils.
- Teachers encourage young people, where possible, to discuss their concerns with parents/carers.

The foundation for the effective delivery of Relationships and Sexuality Education is the building of secure, trusting, respectful relationships between the teacher and their pupils. Should any children make a disclosure, members of staff should follow the child protection guidelines:

- Record, without investigating, exactly what the child says whilst not promising confidentiality,
- Inform the Designated Teacher for Child Protection who will follow the school's policy.

Information will be on display in school at a number of locations and in a number of languages informing parents of safeguarding information and the procedures to follow if they have any concerns.

ENGAGING WITH PARENTS

Engaging with parents/carers is important so that they are informed and up to date with what is being covered. This will also allow them to best support their child with their learning.

WITHDRAWAL FROM RSE

Since RSE is a statutory requirement, it should be inclusive. As a school we actively promote the implementation of RSE and strongly discourage withdrawal. The school will, however, take account of parent/carer concerns. If parents wish their child to be excluded from the RSE curriculum, this will be facilitated.

EQUALITY

The value of human life and the uniqueness of each individual will be at the heart of RSE teaching. Any form of marginalisation, harassment, bullying and/or discrimination of children on grounds of race, religion, disability, gender or sexual orientation is not consistent with the Christian vision of the human person as a child of God. The school will not tolerate homophobic language or bullying. Negative stereotypes and prejudicial attitudes will be challenged.

SPECIFIC ISSUES

There will be no direct teaching of issues such as homosexuality, AIDS, contraception etc. However, if these issues are raised by pupils, the teachers will address them sensitively. Should a

child refer to sexual activity, the teacher will inform the parent and this will be dealt with by the parent and not the school.

Should issues of gender identity arise, these will be dealt with sensitively and in collaboration with parents/guardians, the principal and the Safeguarding Team in school, as well as appropriate professionals, if required.

USE OF OUTSIDE AGENCIES

The school will endeavour to use the expertise and skills of education and health professionals from outside agencies or from individuals in the wider community. The benefits of this approach include:

- Outside agencies/individuals in the wider community bring specialist knowledge, expertise and experience into the classroom. Examples of outside agencies include, Thrive Academy (P5), RISE NI, Love for Life, Jeannie Graham (P6 and P7).
- The novelty of a new visitor coming into the classroom/school may be welcomed by pupils.
- It can increase the pupils' knowledge of services which can be accessed in the local community and teach them how to go about accessing these services if and when they need them.
- It can enhance teachers' capacity by updating their knowledge and/or showing new pedagogy/teaching practices used by the outside agency/individual.

Any outside agency/individual delivering a support session in a school will:

- receive a copy of the school's Relationships and Sexuality Education Policy;
- be made aware of and adheres to the school's Child Protection Policy;
- receive a copy of the school's policy on the use of outside agencies/visitors;
- be expected to agree to respect the ethos of the school;
- be made aware of the issues around confidentiality; and,
- be vetted as appropriate

The school will agree on learning objectives with the external service provider which outlines details of proposed session(s), aims, methodology and evaluation. This will help to clarify the expectations and requirements of both the school and the outside agency. To maximise learning from the session, the school will thoroughly prepare pupils for the visit. The class teacher will also check that pupils are not uncomfortable or unhappy with either the topics that they are addressing or the teaching methodologies that will be used. During the session, the teacher will be present at all times. Afterwards the teacher will provide pupils with the opportunity to discuss their experiences and honestly evaluate the sessions. The school will attempt to use the pupils' feedback to inform future planning and provision along with any evaluation carried out by the outside agency/individual.

Teachers will not use outside agencies/individuals as substitutes for aspects of RSE which they do not feel comfortable addressing. Teachers will also ensure that any resources or activities the outside agencies/individuals use are respectful of the school's ethos and are complementary to and support the on-going provision of RSE. If an outside agency/individual is coming into the school to support the RSE programme, parents or carers will be made aware in advance. The school will explain the type of activities which will take place to parents or carers to ensure that they have the opportunity to raise any concerns they might have before the visit. In relation to the Love for Life visit to P7 pupils, a consent form will be sent home, which gives parents the opportunity to withdraw their child from the Love for Life session.

SEN

The school will ensure children with SEN have appropriate, accessible and relevant RSE. Resources and teaching activities will be adapted to ensure that there are no barriers to participation or learning for pupils with SEN compared to their peers (see SEN/Inclusion Policy) The school will communicate with parents or carers of young people with SEN about the content of lessons and the date when classes will cover certain teaching activities/themes. This communication will allow for parents or carers to reinforce learning at home.

Pupils with SEN may be more vulnerable to all forms of abuse and exploitation. Our teachers will try to ensure that they develop the knowledge, understanding and skills of pupils to enable them to:

- identify inappropriate and exploitative behaviour;
- help develop their own prevention strategies to stay safe;
- recognise and build healthy relationships; and,
- know who they can talk to.

STAFF TRAINING

Training needs will be considered and will be accessed using the appropriate agencies. Where outside agencies are used for training purposes, their remit will be clear and will reflect the needs of the curriculum and the ethos of the school.

PERSONAL BACKGROUNDS AND CULTURAL PRACTICES

Our teachers will be particularly sensitive to the personal circumstances and cultural background of their pupils. They will recognise how pupils' views and values are influenced by their informal learning experiences and by the views of family, peers, community and the media. For example, for some pupils it would be inappropriate to address some RSE issues in a mixed gender lesson because of cultural or religious beliefs. Other pupils may have same-sex parents or carers, so teachers need to be mindful of this. RSE also provides a forum in which to explore issues such as how young girls may be victims of cultural practices, including child/forced marriages and female genital mutilation. The school will handle such issues very sensitively to ensure that some cultures are not viewed negatively due to their practices.

RSE AND THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD

The United Kingdom Government, including Northern Ireland, is a signatory to the 1989 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and has agreed to uphold the rights of children and young people as set out in the Convention. This means that all children and young people in Northern Ireland have a right to a good quality education in accordance with the Convention. Markethill Primary School is a Rights Respecting School.

To promote a better understanding of diversity and inclusion

Schools are increasingly diverse spaces, reflecting wider societal change. This is acknowledged in the *Department of Education's Community Relations, Equality and Diversity in Education Policy (2011)*. A school must provide a safe, welcoming and inclusive environment: it should foster respect for difference, challenge prejudicial attitudes, and promote equality of opportunity for all pupils. If schools are to encourage children to be confident and respectful of themselves and others, and prepare them for life after school, the teaching of RSE should be inclusive of all differences regardless of race, age, disability, ethnicity, religion, culture, gender and sexual orientation. Schools should also recognise the diversity of family life in today's society. All staff will

be sensitive and respectful of difference, ensuring that no pupil ever feels or is excluded or experiences bullying due to their family or home circumstances.

To help children keep themselves safe in the digital world

Technology plays an integral role in the lives of many children in Northern Ireland today. They use the internet to watch programmes, play games, listen and download music, carry out research for school, chat with their friends, and make new friends. The 2013 *Kids' Life and Times (KLT)* survey, which records the attitudes and views of Primary 7 children across Northern Ireland on a range of issues, reported that 90% of children have mobile phones; over 80% of these are smartphones with internet access. About half of all children surveyed said that they had a page or profile on a social media website, with 21% of boys and 11% of girls reporting they had completely public profiles (Ark, 2013). In addition, 16% of KLT respondents said that they have seen something on the internet that upset them, reinforcing the need for schools to continue to educate children (and parents or carers) about using technology and the online world safely and appropriately (However, while technological advancements provide many opportunities, along with opportunity comes risk, particularly if the children's activity is unsupervised).

Cyber-bullying, the use of chat rooms, online grooming and child exploitation, sexting, access to inappropriate content, the acting out of inappropriate sexualised behaviours, and the sending and receiving of explicit images are just some of the ways in which online and digital technology can negatively affect the lives of children. Through RSE, children should be taught 'keeping safe' messages about how to behave safely and responsibly in the digital world which plays such an integral role in their lives. Children should be able to identify potential risks to their safety, and be aware of the strategies they can use to protect themselves.

As the technological age continues at pace, we seek to raise awareness of developing strategies to keep children safe in the online world, the real world and where they overlap. Strategies used include the displaying of the internet safety SMART posters in each classroom and the ICT suite. These will be referred to at the start of each year and regularly throughout the year. E-safety events with parents will also be held periodically. Internet Safety Day will be used each year by the ICT Team to further emphasise this message. For further details, see the E-safety policy.

To provide reliable, accurate and timely age-appropriate information

Every child is unique and develops physically and emotionally at his or her own pace. However, as the average age for puberty is 8–12 years for girls and 9–14 years for boys, schools must schedule learning about puberty before its onset, during Key Stage 2. If a school does not do this, it runs the risk of leaving some children unprepared to deal with the physical and emotional changes that take place during puberty, which some may already be experiencing.

Before puberty is covered in class, the school will endeavour to consult with parents or carers about how the subject will be delivered. They should discuss the class content, and the methodologies and resources which the teacher will use. It is also good practice for schools to provide parents or carers with the materials for them to read and discuss with their children, as this will help and support their learning in the classroom environment.

On average, most girls begin menstruating when they are 12 years old; however, approximately 10% begin menstruating in primary school, some as young as eight years old. Research shows that one third of girls are not told about menstruation by their parents or carers, and 10% of girls have no preparation at all before their first period. For any girl, menstruating in school can be

distressing, particularly if it happens unexpectedly. However, this distress is magnified for girls of primary school age, particularly if they are not prepared for the physical, emotional and practical consequences. To help ease this distress, schools should put arrangements in place to support girls, for example access to sanitary supplies, sanitary disposal facilities in toilets, and have spare underwear. Teachers also need to be aware of and sensitive to the physical, emotional and practical needs of girls during menstruation – these may include asking permission to leave class, not feeling comfortable doing PE lessons, mood changes, irritable behaviour, and lack of concentration. All girls should know which staff members they can go to if menstruating in school.

To promote the appropriate use of language

Learning and using the correct terminology in Relationships and Sexuality Education is vitally important for children, as it helps them to talk about feelings, sexuality, relationships, growth and development with confidence. In the interests of child safeguarding, it is very important that schools use the proper biological terms for parts of the body with the children from an early age, particularly private body parts and functions. To ensure consistency, all school staff will agree the key terms which they will use at the different key stages with pupils.

To help children recognise inappropriate behaviour and touch

Article 34 of the UNCRC enshrines all children's rights to be protected from sexual abuse and exploitation.). However, child sexual exploitation is becoming increasingly evident in Northern Ireland. The SBNI (Safeguarding Board for Northern Ireland) has published a leaflet (see appendices) issued to all schools in Northern Ireland on 5 November 2014 (see Department of Education letter at [www.deni.gov.uk/circular letter to schools - child sexual exploitation](http://www.deni.gov.uk/circular%20letter%20to%20schools%20-%20child%20sexual%20exploitation) which defines child sexual exploitation as:

'a form of sexual abuse in which a person(s) exploits, coerces and/or manipulates a child or young person into engaging in some form of sexual activity in return for something the child needs or desires and/or for the gain of the person(s) perpetrating or facilitating the abuse' (SBNI, 2014, page 7).

Given the nature of the contact time between pupils and their teachers in the primary school setting, teachers are in a good position to observe possible behavioural changes and may be able to identify 'at risk' children at an early stage. Staff should be aware of the various factors which can increase the vulnerability of a young person to this form of abuse. These include:

- low self-esteem
- looked-after children
- young people living in difficult home circumstances
- being bullied at school
- disengagement with school (SBNI, 2014, page 4)

Through RSE, children should develop an understanding of their own uniqueness. It is also vitally important that they know and understand that, even though they are young, their body belongs to them and them alone. The school will raise the children's awareness of abuse and exploitation.

This will help them to recognise what constitutes:

- appropriate and inappropriate behaviour
- appropriate and inappropriate touch
- unwanted attention, or attention that makes them feel uncomfortable in any way

Children must know what to do or who to go to if they feel unsafe at any time. The school will display photos of the key staff children can approach in prominent areas throughout the school and having a 'Worry Box' in the classroom.

MONITORING AND EVALUATING THE RSE POLICY

The RSE Policy will be reviewed regularly. It will be amended as appropriate, in light of changes in legislation or practice, following targeted consultation with all staff members, parents, governors and external agencies.

This policy has been approved by the Board of Governors of Markethill PS on 27 January 2025.

Policy Date: January 2025

Signature of Chairperson of Board of Governors: Mr R Dougan

Signature of Principal: Dr H McLernon

Review Date: January 2028

Appendices: Relevant Legislation, Policy and Guidance

The following appendices should be noted:

- DENI Circular 2001/15 – 'Relationships and Sexuality Education'
- United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child
- CCEA (2001) Guidance for Primary Schools: Relationships and Sexuality Education
- The Education Order (NI) 2006
- The Equality Act Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2006
- DENI (2009) Every School A Good School
- DENI Circular 2010/01 – 'Guidance on Relationships and Sexuality Education'
- DENI (2011) Community Relations, Equality and Diversity in Education Policy
- DENI Circular 2013/16 – 'Relationships and Sexuality Education Policy in Schools'
- DENI Circular 2013/19 – 'Guidelines on Relationships and Sexuality Education'
- DENI Circular 2014/01 – 'Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE)'
- DENI Circular 2015/21 – 'Relationships and Sexuality Education Guidance'
- CCEA (2015) Relationships and Sexuality Education Guidance (An update for Primary Schools)
- ETI (2016) An evaluation of RSE in Primary and special schools
- DENI Circular 2016/05 – 'Children who Display Harmful Sexualised Behaviour'
- DENI Circular 2017/04 – 'Safeguarding and Child Protection in schools – A Guide For Schools'