



Who is responsible for the teaching of RSE?

Parents and carers

"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. In this regard, the Church reaffirms the law of subsidiarity, which the school is bound to observe when it cooperates in sex education, by entering into the same spirit that animates the parents"¹

Parents are the first educators of their children. It is their right and responsibility to inform and educate their children in matters relating to human growth and development, particularly sexual development. Therefore, schools should always seek to work in partnership with parents and carers and the teaching offered by schools should complement and not replace their primary role. The Church has a special duty and right to educate as part of its mission, and a Catholic school is the principal means by which it assists parents in their duties.

This principle that parents are the first educators of children is sometimes used as a reason for not including sexual education in school curriculums, or for excluding the elements which deal with puberty and sexual behaviour. However, the principle is a general educational principle – not one that is specific to sexual education². Given that the education process is one of partnership between parents and educators this area too must be taught in school if the parents have sought this partnership in education by electing to send their child to a Catholic school. A Catholic school can no more avoid its responsibilities in this regard than can good Christian parents. The Church's emphasis that parents are the first teachers of their children, includes the recognition that parents will need and welcome help to teach their children about love, relationships and sexuality.³

Some parents and carers experience and express difficulty in discussing relationships and sex with their children. The school has a privileged role in collaborating with parents in their educative task and seeks to offer advice and to support them in this situation. This supportive role will be exercised with sensitivity. Many teachers say that parents often welcome the school's support and contributions to RSE, building on what parents begin and continue at home. Similarly, grandparents and the extended family often serve as positive role models for children and young people. They have enormous potential to be a positive influence.

Respecting the primary role of parents as educators in this area, schools should work with them at every stage of the development of the RSE programme as well as during the process of monitoring, review and evaluation of it and the materials used. Prior to the delivery of RSE the school should provide full information to parents.

¹ The Truth and Meaning of Human Sexuality, Pontifical Council for the Family, 1995.

² See CCC 2223 et seq

³ 'The Pastoral Constitution "Gaudium et Spes" in speaking of the dignity of marriage and the family presents the latter as the preferential place for the education of young people in chastity. But since this is an aspect of education as a whole, the co-operation of teachers with parents is needed in the accomplishment of their mission. Such education, therefore, must be offered within the family to children and adolescents in a gradual manner, always considering the total formation of the person.' Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education, 'Educational Guidance in Human Love' (November 1, 1983), 15

Parents and carers have a right to see the school's RSE policy. The school should make this available and give it free of charge upon request to parents. This should include information about the parents' right to withdraw their children from the RSE programme. These provisions will help to ensure that schools develop policies which reflect parents' wishes and the culture of the community they serve.

Best practice would ensure that parents and carers are kept informed of what the school is delivering so that they can follow up at home. Information regarding RSE should be included in newsletters and curriculum information sent home to parents and carers. Schools may also run workshops to enable parents and carers to talk constructively with their children regarding relationships and sex education. There is a mandatory duty to publish RSE curriculum information on the school website and parents and carers could be reminded to review this to inform themselves regarding what is being taught in RSE.

Governors

The 1996 Education Act places responsibility for the school's policy on RSE in the hands of governors. Governors therefore must be aware of their responsibilities for the policy and provision of RSE in their schools and comply with statutory requirements. Whilst recognising their responsibility for determining general policy, it is important that the governors acknowledge the responsibility of the headteacher and staff to use their professional expertise in delivering the curriculum in accordance with that policy. It is the responsibility of the governing body to check that the content and organisation of RSE complies with the policy set by them. It is also essential that governors involve parents and carers in developing and reviewing their policy, as outlined above.

Governors will:

- draw up an up-to-date and fit-for-purpose RSE policy, in consultation with parents, carers and teachers;
- ensure that the policy is available to parents and carers;
- ensure that parents and carers know of their right to withdraw their children and young people;
- ensure that the policy is in accordance with other whole school policies and the teaching of the Church
- ensure that the policy provides proper and adequate coverage of relevant National Curriculum Science topics and the setting of RSE within Personal Social Health Economic Education (PSHE);
- ensure that RSE provision is included in the school's annual self-evaluation and that necessary improvements to it are included in the school development plan.

Governors may also find it helpful to review the resources that are being used by school to support its RSE programme.

Some governing bodies may choose to give one foundation governor lead responsibility for RSE but aspects of RSE will be shared by the whole governing body when decisions are being made.

The foundation governors of Catholic schools are appointed by the Bishop in order to promote and safeguard the Catholic character of the school. As such they should also be aware of and implement the Church's teaching and any diocesan guidelines regarding RSE, for the benefit of children and young people in their care.

They recognise that parents have the primary responsibility for the education of their children, and that parents and carers have special rights and duties over relationships and sex education.

Governors also have a key role in ensuring that RSE is of the highest quality and meets the needs of children and young people in their school community.

The Headteacher

The headteacher takes overall delegated responsibility for the implementation of the RSE policy and its integration into the school's curriculum and Catholic life. The headteacher will also liaise with the governing

body, parents and carers, the diocese, the Local Education Authority where appropriate, those responsible for academies and any other appropriate agencies.

Headteachers have a particular duty to respect and support the primary role of parents in this field. They should make alternative arrangements if parents express the right to withdraw children and young people from RSE (Section 405 of the Education Act 1996) and provide material for parents to help the children and young people with their learning. The head teacher should ensure that there is a statement in the school prospectus on RSE and that the details of the RSE curriculum are included on the school website. The duty to publish details of the RSE programme on the school website is mandatory.

The headteacher should appoint a suitable and appropriately trained RSE coordinator. The coordinator with the headteacher has a general responsibility for supporting other members of staff in the consultation and implementation of the school's RSE policy. They should provide a lead in the dissemination of the information relating to RSE and the provision of continual professional development (CPD) in RSE. This CPD should also ensure that all teachers of RSE are familiar with the Church's vision and teaching in this field. They will ensure that any discussion or treatment of sexuality in the school curriculum is consistent with Catholic teaching. They will be supported by the curriculum deputy and the designated member of staff with responsibility for child protection.

The headteacher and/or delegated RSE Coordinator will provide parents with opportunities for consultation and involvement in any proposed RSE programme before it is initiated and make parents aware of their right to withdraw their children from these lessons.

Teachers and other members of staff

RSE is a whole school issue. All staff will be involved in developing children and young peoples' personal and social skills and the attitudes and virtues aspect of an RSE programme.

Each child and young person is entitled to experience "a school climate in which the quality of relationships between staff and pupils, between pupils themselves, is marked by honesty, personal identification, warmth, trust and security."⁴ All adult members of the school community are role models of good, healthy, wholesome relationships and educators in this dimension of pupils' development. However, the teacher is the single most important contributor. The teacher's role, in particular, is to value and affirm all pupils, to actively promote open and honest relationships, to develop gospel-inspired pastoral systems and to provide effective learning in RSE.

All teachers have a responsibility of care; as well as fostering academic progress they should actively contribute to the guardianship and guidance of the physical, moral and spiritual well-being of their pupils.

Teachers and all those contributing to RSE are expected to work within the agreed values framework as described in the guiding principles above and outlined in the school's policy documentation. The school's RSE policy must be in line both with the school's Catholic ethos and current legislation. All staff should have been included in the development of this policy and all staff should be aware of how the policy relates to their work.

Responsibility for the specific RSE programme lies with the relevant curriculum staff. This will normally include those responsible for Science, Religious Education, Physical Education, ICT/Computing, RSE and PSHE.

Appropriate training should be made available for all staff teaching RSE.

⁴ Education in Sexuality. Some Guidelines for Teachers and Governors in Catholic Schools, CES, 1994

Visitors and external agencies including the school nurse or any on-site health clinic

Catholic schools exist within society and the Church is aware of the valuable contribution that external visitors make to our schools for the benefit of their children and young people.

Working with visitors from the local community offers children and young people an opportunity to interact with a wider range of people and develop important personal and social skills. Visitors, such as a health professional can also add value to RSE because of their expertise. Creative arts and theatre in education bring the richness of a particular style of learning. Some visitors can add value by sharing real-life experiences which can be very compelling and can help pupils understand different points of view.

Visitors and teachers will need to work together to establish boundaries about personal questions and to ensure that the visitor is adequately trained to handle the classroom setting.

Health professionals are bound by their professional codes of conduct. However, all visitors to the classroom should work in a way which is consistent with the Catholic school's beliefs and values set out in the school's RSE policy. They should also be made aware of the school's confidentiality and safeguarding policies. Schools should ensure that the contribution of visitors fits within the scheme of work for RSE, enhances learning and is compatible with the school's Catholic character. Responsibility for RSE lies with the school and any contribution from a visitor should complement rather than substitute teacher led sessions and never replace a planned and coordinated RSE curriculum. The involvement of the School Nurse or any on-site health clinic in RSE should also be set within the context of the school's RSE policy. In circumstances where a pupil or young person is at some risk, advice should be sought from the headteacher or delegated senior teacher.

Visitors with particular expertise can also support schools through CPD, supporting the RSE coordinator with curriculum design and working with parents.

Parish and Diocese

If there is a whole school approach to RSE it is also helpful to involve the parish and/or deanery. Parishioners who are, for example, members of the medical profession or Catholic Marriage Care may well be useful resources upon which the school can call. Diocesan Advisers will also be available to provide advice and support.

It is the role of the bishop (cf Can 806), through the delegated authority of his education officers, to ensure that all teaching in Catholic schools, including RSE, is in accordance with Catholic principles and is excellent in its own right.