



Archdiocese of Southwark

# **Education in Human Love**

## **Policy Statement for Relationship & Sex Education**

Published October 2020

Last Reviewed January 2025

## Preamble to the Policy Statement

This policy statement has been developed to assist schools in the Archdiocese of Southwark in the creation of their own Relationship and Sex Education (RSE) Policies. The document has been developed by the religious education advisory team with input from the Link Headteachers group, the Local Authority Representative group, the Diocesan Trustees, and the Diocesan Youth Engagement Board. Governing Bodies in Catholic schools within the Archdiocese of Southwark may use this policy as a basis for their own Relationship and Sex Education policy. All policies and guidance are reviewed on a three-year cycle or earlier if necessary.

### 1. Introduction

*“The Second Vatican Council spoke of the need for “a positive and prudent sex education” to be imparted to children and adolescents “as they grow older,” with “due weight being given to the advances in the psychological, pedagogical and didactic sciences”. ... It can only be seen within the broader framework of an education for love, for mutual self-giving.”<sup>1</sup>*

In a Catholic school any teaching or formation on human love and human development must be within the whole context of our faith in God who reveals himself in Jesus Christ, as it is through our love of God and of our neighbour that we reciprocate God’s love for mankind. As the term ‘Relationship and Sex Education’ indicates, the emphasis is placed on the understanding and formation of respectful, loving relationships which exist between friends and within families.

Understanding the nature of relationships and developing skills in relationships gives context for understanding human sexuality and sexual health. This is consistent with the Church’s view that the purpose of RSE is to secure “an adequate knowledge of the nature and importance of sexuality and of the harmonious and integral development of the person towards psychological maturity, with full spiritual maturity in view, to which all believers are called”.<sup>2</sup>

Within the Catholic Church, marriage is believed to be the fundamental bond on which family life is based. It is a mutual commitment to total fidelity which is open to the gift of life. The Church’s sacramental understanding of marriage explains how we can meet Christ through the adventure of learning to love one another. Pope Francis told us that, “Christian marriage is a sign of how much Christ loved his Church in the covenant sealed on the cross, yet it also makes that love present in the communion of spouses”<sup>3</sup>. He then explains that, “the sacrament of marriage flows from the incarnation and the paschal mystery, whereby God showed the fullness of his love for humanity by becoming one with us”<sup>4</sup>. 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 have a fundamental right to have their life respected whatever household they come from. It will also prepare pupils for life in modern Britain.

### 2. Legal requirements

As of September 2020, it is expected that all schools in England will meet the statutory requirements for RSE as set-out by the Department for Education (DfE) <sup>5</sup>. In addition, there are further statutory requirements relating to RSE pertinent to legislation covering different parts of United Kingdom. They can be summarised as follows:

- All maintained primary and secondary schools must teach the Sex Education and Health Education elements of the National Curriculum Science Order;
- All secondary schools must provide RSE as part of the basic curriculum, including as a

minimum education about HIV, AIDS and STIs<sup>6</sup> and the national curriculum content about human growth and reproduction (Health Education is also part of the legislation for maintained schools and academies and included in the Independent Schools Inspections framework);

- In all primary schools, Relationships Education is now compulsory. There are also statutory elements for Relationships Education within the Early Years Foundation Stage. Sex Education is not compulsory in primary schools but is recommended to be taught.
- All schools must have an up-to-date RSE policy which is made available to parents and others. Schools must provide a copy of the policy free of charge to anyone who asks for one and should publish the policy on the school website;
- Parents right to request that their child be withdrawn from some or all of Sex Education delivered as part of statutory RSE is preserved within the guidance. The DfE statutory guidelines permits children to opt into Sex Education from three terms before their 16<sup>th</sup> birthday.

### 3. Roles

#### 3.1 PARENTS

*"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 co-operates in sex education, by entering into the same spirit that animates the parents"*<sup>7</sup>.

The Church recognises that parents are the first teachers of their children. It is their right and responsibility to inform and educate their children in matters relating to human relationships and sexual development. Catholic schools help parents in this task and seek to work in partnership with them. To meet this expectation school leaders and governors seek to work in partnership with them by following these principles:

- parents must be fully informed about the content and delivery of RSE on an annual basis;
- parents must be provided with opportunities to view and discuss the content of any programme of RSE along with any resources that are to be used;
- parents must be consulted whenever the school's RSE policy is reviewed/updated;
- parents must be fully informed about their statutory right to request their child be withdrawn from Sex Education because the Archdiocese of Southwark affirms the parents' right as 'first educators';
- school leaders and governors must ensure that there are transparent processes which enable parents to exercise this fundamental right as 'first educators'.

It is expected that in the unlikely event that a parent wishes to exercise the right to withdraw their child, headteachers first discuss the request with the parents and, if appropriate, with the child, to ensure that their concerns are understood and to clarify the nature and purpose of the curriculum. It is anticipated that in most cases, the parents' request would be accepted. Schools will want to document this process to ensure a record is kept.<sup>8</sup>

#### 3.2 GOVERNORS

The 1996 Education Act places responsibility for the school's policy on RSE in the hands of the Governing Body. They are required to ensure that there is an up-to-date RSE policy that is available for parents to read and that the policy is consistent with other relevant whole school policies (e.g. SEND; Safeguarding; Anti-Bullying; Pastoral Care). Foundation Governors are

appointed by the Archbishop to promote and safeguard the Catholic character of the school. They have a particular responsibility to ensure that the RSE policy for the school, the RSE curriculum and all resources are informed by and in harmony with the teachings of the Catholic Church. They must ensure that RSE provision complies with Diocesan policy, directives, and guidance regarding RSE.

### 3.3 HEADTEACHERS

Responsibility for the implementation of the RSE policy is delegated to the Headteacher. It is the task of the Headteacher to integrate RSE into the school's curriculum.

### 3.4 RSE LEADER

An appropriately trained RSE Leader should be appointed to oversee curriculum planning, training and support for teachers. With governors and the headteacher, this person should ensure that there is a planned process for informing parents about RSE in the school. Elements of RSE will be delivered in different curricular areas. A practical suggestion for ensuring accuracy in RSE is the establishment of a cross-curricular liaison group to support the RSE Leader.

### 3.5 TEACHERS AND OTHER ADULTS

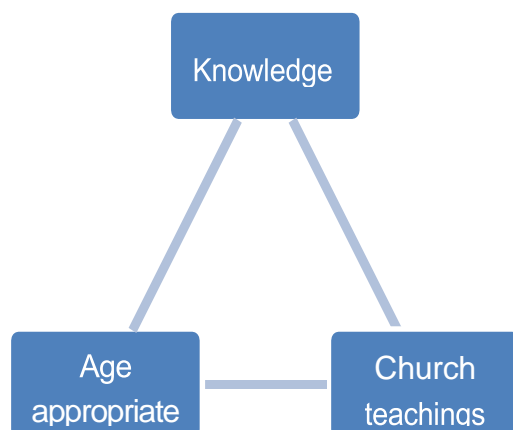
Relationship and Sex Education is a whole school task. All staff are involved in developing the personal and social skills that contribute to human flourishing. As well as delivering curriculum content in the classroom, staff are also role models around the school, giving examples of conflict resolution and establishing relationships of mutual trust and respect. All staff have a responsibility of care and safeguarding of pupils. They should actively contribute to guidance of the physical, moral and spiritual well-being of their pupils. This work must be in line with the school's Catholic ethos and current legislation.

## 4. The Aim of Relationship and Sex Education in Catholic Schools

*“Sex education should provide information while keeping in mind that children and young people have not yet attained full maturity. The information has to come at a proper time and in a way suited to their age”.<sup>9</sup>*

Effective RSE in Catholic schools must be designed around three cornerstone principles, if it is to provide children and young people with a “positive and prudent sexual education”<sup>10</sup> compatible with their physical and psychological maturity. These are:

1. pupils' need for clear, accurate and sound knowledge;
2. the presentation of Church teachings in a forthright and clear manner, using the specific references provided by the Church;
3. that education programmes should consider children's developmental levels and, as with all learning, be aware of individual children's differences.



## 5. The Objectives of Relationships and Sex Education in Catholic Schools

- To provide children and young people with a knowledge and understanding of the Church's teaching on marriage, relationships and sexual love;
- To provide children and young people with a positive understanding of what constitutes good, loving relationships;
- To provide children and young people with a knowledge and understanding of the biological facts about human reproduction;
- To provide children and young people with the skills and confidence to defend themselves against unwanted pressures to be sexually active and to keep them safe;
- To provide children with a clear understanding of the Catholic Church's teaching on contraception and the Catholic Church's teaching to refrain from sexual intercourse outside marriage;
- To provide children and young people, at an appropriate age, with an understanding of sexual health including how to protect themselves against unwanted pregnancies and STIs.

### Choosing and using resources, working with external speakers

Relationships and Sex Education must be in accordance with the teachings of the Catholic Church. It is the responsibility of the Governing Body, working with the Headteacher and Senior Leadership Team, to ensure that this is achieved through careful monitoring of the teaching resources used. In considering the resources which will be used for RSE, governors should consider:

- The need to support parents and carers by providing education which is faithful to the teachings of the Church and appropriate for the ages and stages of development of the pupils;
- The extent to which specific materials can be used to illustrate the beauty of the human being created by God;
- The values implied by specific resources and the way in which they may be used to enhance pupils' understanding of human development and Catholic teaching;
- The accuracy and clarity of material presented.

The Catholic Education Service has created a Model Curriculum for Relationships and Sex Education for both primary and secondary schools. It is expected that all schools use this as the basis for their curriculum.

It is important that any external visitor to the school is also clear about their role and responsibility while they are in a school. Such visits should complement the school's current programme. Visitors may need guidance to ensure that sessions they deliver are respectful of the teaching of the Catholic Church. Further guidance on working with external visitors can be found in the Education Commission's document *Guidance on visitors and external speakers working with pupils in Catholic schools in the Diocese*.<sup>11</sup> This is available on our website [www.rcaoseducation.org.uk](http://www.rcaoseducation.org.uk) and should be consulted before inviting external agencies or visitors into the school.