

Relationships and Sexuality Education

Comhairle na nÓg National Executive

Meeting 20/05/2022

Your Questions:

- The curriculum
- Teacher training
- Mandatory RSE
- Involve Parents
- External providers

Background

- ▶ **1995**: RSE has been a key aspect of curriculum since 1995 - schools developed their own school policy in collaboration with parents, teachers and management and RSE was part of the wider Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) curriculum.
- ▶ **1996**: Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) Interim Curriculum and Guidelines (NCCA) introduced into primary and post-primary schools
- ▶ **1999**: RSE became a mandatory part of the Primary School Curriculum
- ▶ **2000**: RSE a mandatory part of the Junior Cycle SPHE Curriculum Framework.

Background

- ▶ **2018:** Minister for Education asked the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) to review RSE in schools across all stages of education *to ensure that it is fit for purpose and meets the needs of young people today in modern Ireland.*
- ▶ The NCCA were asked to look at specific issues:
 - ▶ the importance of **consent** and what it means
 - ▶ developments in relation to **contraception**;
 - ▶ **healthy, positive, sexual expression** and relationships;
 - ▶ safe use of the **Internet**;
 - ▶ the role of **school ethos**;
 - ▶ **LGBTQ+** matters.

Background

- ▶ **2020:** Programme for Government states that:
 - ▶ this Government will develop inclusive and age appropriate curricula for Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) and Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) across primary and post-primary schools, including an inclusive programme on LGBTI+ relationships.

The Review

- ▶ **The Report on the Review of Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) in primary and post-primary schools** was published by the NCCA in 2019.
- ▶ As part of the review there were lots of consultations:
 - ▶ an online survey,
 - ▶ written submissions,
 - ▶ round-table meetings
 - ▶ large events
 - ▶ Comhairle na nÓg were consulted and there is a report on that consultation.
- ▶ The final report included the issues that stakeholders wished to see highlighted, such as gender discrimination, sexual violence and pornography.

The Review

- ▶ The purpose of the review:
 - ▶ examine the current experience of RSE within schools,
 - ▶ the approach to teaching and learning,
 - ▶ supports needed,
 - ▶ what is needed to improve RSE.
- ▶ The review does not say what students should learn about in RSE curriculum. A curriculum is being developed separately after the review and there will be a lot of consultations on what that should be.
- ▶ Meanwhile, the NCCA is currently working to develop updated guidance materials for the teaching of SPHE/RSE (which will take the form of an online SPHE/RSE toolkit), and this will also include a repository of SPHE/RSE teaching resources.

The Review Recommends

Approaches to RSE should be grounded in the rights and needs of young people

- ▶ The provision for RSE must be grounded in the rights and needs of children and young people as set out in numerous international **human rights treaties** and instruments that refer to the **right to education** and the **highest standard of health**.

The Review Recommends

RSE should adopt a holistic approach

- ▶ RSE needs to move towards a more holistic approach. RSE should be:
 - ▶ student-centred,
 - ▶ inclusive,
 - ▶ age and developmentally-appropriate
 - ▶ whole-school.

The Review Recommends

Schools need to consult regularly with students to identify their real and expressed needs in the area of RSE

- ▶ The review emphasises the importance of schools consulting regularly with their students to **identify their real and expressed needs** in this area of education and **consider these in planning** for teaching and learning.

The Review Recommends

RSE should be part of a single integrated SPHE curriculum and updated to include areas identified by the review

- ▶ The review has highlighted the need to create **one curriculum** that sets out the learning for SPHE/RSE as a single subject and incrementally provides a **continuity** of experience in SPHE/RSE from early childhood education to post-primary. In addition, topics identified by the review and highlighted by the Minister need to be included in an updated SPHE/RSE curriculum.

The Review Recommends

Specialist training and pathways for professional development must be developed in the area of SPHE/RSE

- ▶ The review has highlighted the knowledge, skills and dispositions that are needed by teachers teaching RSE. Access to professional development needs to be enhanced across a continuum from initial teacher education to in-service education, through a collaborative, multi-faceted and multi-agency approach. Such an approach should be **front-loaded in preparation for a redeveloped curriculum.**

The Review Recommends

Development of Interim Guidelines

- ▶ The NCCA will develop and publish Interim Guidelines to support the teaching of RSE. These will provide guidance on how the current curriculum can be approached in a more **holistic** way, provide clarity on how topics can be taught to incorporate **current themes** identified by this review and suggestions on how they can be taught in a fully **inclusive** manner.

The Review Recommends

Review of current resources and development of up-to-date resources

- ▶ The NCCA will work collaboratively with relevant agencies and stakeholders to take stock of current resources and **identify resource needs** in this area. In addition, the NCCA will develop a set of overarching guidelines to inform the development of future resources and collaborate with other stakeholders in the development of a portal site where resources can be accessed.

The Review Recommends

Support schools in the enhancement of SPHE/RSE within the context of planning for Wellbeing within a new junior cycle

- ▶ The NCCA will work collaboratively to provide support and guidance to schools in planning for **wellbeing** in junior cycle.

The Review Recommends

Department of Education oversight of SPHE/RSE

- ▶ Comprehensive oversight of and support for SPHE/RSE on the part of the Inspectorate and the DE is required in order to meet the needs identified in this review.

The Review Recommends

Resources and supports for parents in the area of SPHE/RSE

- ▶ Improved communication with and engagement of parents will be an important feature of future development in this area and is vital for the successful enactment of any updated curriculum. Resources to **raise awareness** about SPHE/RSE and to **support parents** as partners in education should be developed.

Further Considerations

- ▶ the role of **school ethos** and its effect on RSE is ambiguous (not clear)
- ▶ there can be tension with this and uncertainty in how to approach teaching

Solutions

- ▶ teacher training
- ▶ teachers supported by a clear, enabling and supportive and RSE school policy
- ▶ support materials and teachers sharing practice within and across schools
- ▶ focus on **student wellbeing** across education policy and practice - some schools need further guidelines and support in making the links between wellbeing and RSE
- ▶ Inspectorate, and Department of Education to support good practice in SPHE/RSE
- ▶ Support for parents

Future Direction

- ▶ **Prioritisation of SPHE/RSE for curriculum redevelopment**
- ▶ **Interim Guidelines**
- ▶ **Resources**
- ▶ **Teacher training**
- ▶ **Accreditation for teachers**
- ▶ **Professional development (ongoing training)**
- ▶ **Interagency Collaboration**
- ▶ **Wellbeing**