

St Matthew's RSHE – Some Questions and Answers

This document was generated from questions raised during our consultation with parents and carers about that took place as we developed our new RSHE policy and curriculum during the summer of 2021. It is best read alongside our RSHE policy and curriculum that can be found on our website at www.stmatthews.cambs.sch.uk/website/our_rshe_curriculum. We think that parents and carers will find some of the questions and answers relevant to queries that they have about our practice in this important area.

1. How are schools developing the curriculum to educate children in online use, especially in regards to pornographic content that is widely available? How does parental responsibility fit into this?

One of the most significant changes to the RSHE curriculum is the increased emphasis on the use of the internet. Specifically this is covered under two of the subject areas: Internet Safety and Harms, and Online Relationships.

Within Internet Safety and Harms, the children learn about privacy, respectful behaviour, permissions and negative online behaviour. They learn what to do if they see inappropriate content and where they can get help. They learn about age-restricted content from year 3 onwards and move into what this may be in Year 6 in terms of sexual content.

Learning to say 'No' starts in Nursery and is developed through the theme of Online Relationships. Children learn how to identify safe sites and searches, the risks of opening unknown attachments and sharing their webcam.

The themes of consent, respect and permissions are constant across all the RSHE themes, particularly in Being Safe and Respectful Relationships.

In terms of involving parents, staff are asked to send information to parents when teaching Internet Safety and harms to remind them of age-appropriate sites that school recommend and age-restrictions on social media sites.

In Secondary School they are taught specifically about the impact of viewing harmful content, that sexually explicit material (such as pornography), presents a distorted picture of sexual behaviours that can damage the way people see themselves in relation to others and negatively affect how they behave towards sexual partners.

2. How is consent being taught?

Consent is a central part of the RSHE curriculum and starts being taught in Nursery through the 'Being Safe' theme. This is taught at an age-appropriate level, with children learning about personal space and what it means if someone says 'no' in terms of play. They develop this as they get older through practising ways of saying 'no' and ensuring the children have the vocabulary and confidence to express when they are uncomfortable with something.

They learn about appropriate and inappropriate touch. In Early Years and Key stage 1 the NSPCC 'Pants rule' is used to support this leaning and in Key Stage 2 this is developed at a more age-appropriate level. They also learn how and where to access support.

This is developed further in Secondary school, where they learn what constitutes sexual harassment and sexual violence.

3. Where is human sex education going to be taught?

Human reproduction does not fall under the Primary Curriculum for RSHE, although the Department for Education recommends that it is taught in Year 6, and that is where it

appears on our framework. Since it is not Statutory, it is the only aspect of the RSHE curriculum that parents may withdraw their children from taking part in. We have placed it under the theme 'Changing Adolescent Bodies', which can be viewed on our website. The statutory statements (which parents may not remove their children from) are in blue font, and the non-statutory statements (which parents may remove their child from) are in red font.

4. Is there a need to introduce the idea of 'inter-sex' to year 6? There are so many different variations, why is there a focus on this one?

Under the guidance for 'Changing Adolescent Bodies' the Department for Education has recommended that children are taught about what it means to be born intersex. It is important to recognise that whilst teaching about puberty, there may be some children who will not experience it in the same way as others and staff in school may not be aware of this. It is believed that 1 in every 1000 children are born intersex. The term intersex is broadly used to describe children who are born without typical male or female anatomy. This can also be termed differences in Sexual Development (DSD). There are several different diagnoses for this, but it is useful for pupils to understand that not everyone is born biologically male or female. This is a scientific fact and should not be confused with sexual identity or gender identity.

5. Could we have more information about the Kite Trust, who sometimes run workshops with the children?

The Kite Trust is a local charity supporting schools (as well as young people and families) in promoting an inclusive society. They are one of the approved providers working with schools to achieve the Rainbow Flag award, which St Matthew's was awarded in 2018.

The Rainbow Flag Award is a national quality assurance framework for primary schools, secondary schools, SEND schools and colleges. The award focuses on positive LGBTQ+, (lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, questioning plus other related identities), inclusion and visibility. The Rainbow Flag Award encourages a whole organisation approach to LGBTQ+ inclusion, as well as developing strategies to effectively challenge and combat LGBTphobic bullying.

Their services for schools and colleges work to promote a positive culture of acceptance through educating staff and pupils on the challenges faced by minority sexualities and gender identities, while providing young people with tools to better support their peers, and staff with skills to better support their LGBTQ+ students. They work with schools enabling them to confidently tackle HBT bullying.

The workshops they run with Years 3 and 5 were written by St Matthew's, but we benefit from the knowledge and expertise they bring and we find that the children often respond more openly to having adults to talk to who are not their teachers. The workshop on homophobic and transphobic bullying that Year 6 access gives the children the opportunity to hear about the experience of young people who have been on the receiving end of it and how they dealt with it. The young people from the Kite Trust are all trained in working with schools, and work with the children alongside their class teachers and the programme Manager from the Kite Trust.

If you would like more details on the Kite Trust, you can click on the link to their website:

<https://www.thekitetrust.org.uk/about-us/>

6. Could parents have an overview of the topics covered at the start of each term, so they can reinforce them or field any questions they generate?

The RSHE topics to be covered will be detailed in the Curriculum Overview that each year group put on the school website. The RSHE curriculum itself is also on the website, which provides further detail about how the framework develops across the year groups. We will also ensure that parents are given notice of when Year 5 and Year 6 will be teaching 'changing adolescent bodies'. The website will provide details of what is being taught and the resources being used. We will also provide helpful websites and information on how to answer tricky questions.

7. Will school remain neutral on the 'trans' question, sticking to science and biological facts with regard to sex and gender, (and be mindful of the wider implications of basic children's safeguarding and women's rights)?

School have a duty to ensure that children understand there are adults who are 'transgender' and this means they have changed their gender. This aspect of the curriculum forms part of the 'Respectful Relationships' theme, in terms of their understanding there are different family units and respect and tolerance for others. Gender reassignment is one of the protected characteristics of the 2010 Equality Act and so it is important for pupils to understand that people must not be discriminated against because of this, by law. Children do not need to learn about the scientific or biological issues around this at primary level.

It is important for children to understand that their biological sex does not dictate their choices in life. This includes the friends they choose, what they enjoy doing, the clothes they wear and later in life, their careers and pathways. Our aim is that as we educate children away from gender stereotypes, (such as boys liking blue and girls liking pink), they don't experience any limitations or restrictions. We want children to understand that at times they might like playing football and the next week they may prefer dressing-up. Both choices are equally valued and should not be defined by their biological sex.

For the older children, we want them to know that as they grow up it is normal to experience different and changing feelings. They will discuss how some people choose to present as a male, some as female and some as neutral or non-binary. Likewise, some people may use male pronouns, others female and some neutral (non-binary). They also need to know that people may present differently at different times. These discussions are part of mental-well-being and body image. It is important to put it in the context of choices around hairstyles, clothes, friends etc. and that as children get older, the choices they make may repeatedly change.

8. Will traditional family structures and values be overlooked in favour of promoting alternative family models?

How do ideas about gender and relationships intertwine with RE and different faith groups beliefs?

Woven throughout the strands of the RSHE curriculum is the underlying message of safe and secure relationships. The school recognises that many values are shared by families, regardless of the structure of them. Children need to understand what makes relationships 'healthy' in terms of all their relationships, including their family. School does not promote any one type of family structure above another, but rather the dynamics of the relationships within it. Children need to recognise that in society, families are different, and to respect that difference. Within that, children will be taught the different perspectives faiths place on families and

relationships and that religious beliefs themselves are also a protected characteristic under the Equality Act. Children should understand that each family may have its own beliefs and values around relationships, and whilst they may not uphold the same beliefs as others, they need to respect them. Marriage and commitment are explored specifically in year 5, and this area of work can be seen in more detail on the school website under the theme 'Families and People who care for me'.

9. Could the topic managing screen time be covered earlier than Years 4,5 and 6?

Managing screen time is introduced to children in reception, under the theme of Internet safety and harms. They begin to learn about the importance of balancing sleep and physical activities alongside screen time. This is also reinforced from reception onwards under the theme of Health and Prevention, where they look at good routines and the importance of sufficient sleep. This concept of balance and routine is returned to each year in an age-appropriate way.

10. Could sustainable development information be strengthened? Could it be extended to include diet, including vegan/vegetarian food, growing your own food and the benefits of choosing second-hand over new purchases?

Exploring growing food and teaching cooking fall under the cooking and Nutrition curriculum. Children would usually have half a term of looking at nutrition and preparing healthy meals. As part of this, each class has a designated growing space to grow food they will cook. This has not been possible to continue under the current restrictions, but we are hoping to do so as soon as possible. Whilst children may learn to cook vegetarian/vegan meals, school can not promote one lifestyle choice above another.

Sustainability forms a large part of the Diversity Curriculum. This is looking at what they do at a personal level, class level, school level, wider community and global. They have the opportunity to put into action ideas to support this. This is a new strand to our curriculum, so staff are in the process of planning the content to support the statements that will be taught.

11. The primary curriculum is too early to have sex education and LGBT. Too much too quick information makes them confused.

As discussed above, human reproduction does not fall under the primary curriculum, but it is recommended that primary schools teach it. At St Matthew's we have placed it in the Autumn term of Year 6. This is so that children have the opportunity to process the information and ask any questions they have throughout the year, and staff can return to it later in the year, if needed. Parents can withdraw their children from these lessons, but of course need to be mindful of the fact they then may hear about it from their peers.

Primary schools do not talk to children about their own sexual orientation. They learn that some adults are gay, lesbian or bi-sexual, just as some are heterosexual. It is important that children understand the terminology and use it in the right way, so they are respectful of pupils who may have same-sex parents or family friends. We have found that children who do not understand the terminology correctly may be more open to using the words in the wrong way, which can be perceived as homophobic, even if it was unintentional.

The curriculum has been designed to be age-appropriate and cyclic, so ideas can be introduced and then returned to at a greater level each time. This can be as simple as making sure our resources

and books are diverse, representing all family types, even if they are not being used to directly teach RSHE. We aim to create an ethos where children feel safe and secure to ask questions if they are confused. By embedding the themes into our curriculum, rather than teaching one-off lessons, we also hope that we will be able to pick up any confusion and misconceptions and address them. Staff will also work alongside parents, if they think a child is struggling to understand something, so they can be supported at home.

12. Sex is a good and positive act, please don't dwell on the negative parts.

Sex is only taught as the science of human reproduction, not as part of a relationship. Although children are taught that there are ways of preventing pregnancy, contraception and sexual relationships form the secondary curriculum.

13. Can boys stay with the girls when they are taught about menstruation?

Puberty is taught in class groups, with all children learning about the changes that male/female bodies go through during puberty. There should be nothing taught to either group separately. However, it is good practise to allow the child time to ask questions in their specific biological sex groups, as they may be more confident asking questions in this way.

14. When teaching puberty, do children learn about the changes in their body clock and why they may have more difficulty getting up in the morning?

Yes, this forms part of the work covered in year 6 and is returned to at Secondary level.

15. It is sex and not gender that is a protected characteristic under the Equality Act – there is an error on the school's website, can this be changed?

Yes and thank you for noticing and bringing it to our attention.

16. Can children be introduced to the idea of 'echo Chambers'?

Children are taught about echo chambers in Year 6 as part of the topic Online Relationships.

17. Actively teaching kids about same-sex relationships should not be allowed.

We are obliged by law to teach about relationships and different family groupings and this is statutory for all children. In order for children to flourish as tolerant adults, they need to be aware of the differences around them, even if their own beliefs are not the same. Just as there are adults in our community of different faiths, ethnicity and abilities, there are adults with different sexual orientations who have a right not to be discriminated against. We will be mindful when teaching not to promote one set of beliefs above another, but would expect all children to be respectful of others' choices and beliefs.

There further comments on several issues (listed below), which will be discussed in more detail by the working party.

- *Can sexist attitudes towards female gender roles be challenged?*
- *Can healthy relationships be a priority?*
- *Can school ensure they model what they are teaching? For example, not having unhealthy food at class parties, so it is in line with what we teach around healthy eating.*
- *Can school ensure the curriculum is exciting and engaging?*
- *Work around resilience and what to do when saying 'no' doesn't work*
- *Ensure the curriculum addresses the needs of a child who has made a mistake and how they can go about resolving it.*

- *Is some of the content being taught too late in terms of meeting the needs of the children in accordance with their life experiences outside the classroom?*
- *Should St Matthew's go further in the content it teaches on consent, gender, sexuality and anti-racism?*