Relationships and Sexuality Education in Primary and Special Schools

Report of an evaluation by the Education and Training Inspectorate

July 2016

ETI: Promoting Improvement in the Interest of all Learners

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The Education and Training Inspectorate
Promoting Improvement

Providing Inspection Services for:

Department of Education
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CUSTOMER SERVICE EXCELLENCE

CSE

Contents

Quantitative terms used by the Education and Training Inspectorate

In this report, proportions may be described as percentages, common fractions and in more general quantitative terms. Where more general terms are used, they should be interpreted as follows:

Almost/nearly all	-	more than 90%
Most	-	75%-90%
A majority	-	50%-74%
A significant minority	-	30%-49%
A minority	-	10%-29%
Very few/a small number	-	less than 10%

1.   Introduction

1.1   This report summarises the findings of an evaluation[1] of Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) in Primary and Special schools in Northern Ireland carried out by the Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) in late 2015 and early 2016.

The objectives of the survey were to:

- evaluate the quality of the provision for RSE within primary and special schools;

- record examples of good practice; and

- identify areas for development within RSE.

Throughout the report there are a number of short illustrative quotations drawn from the evidence gathered through the schools' responses to an online questionnaire and from discussions with principals, members of senior leadership teams, RSE co-ordinators and teachers during case study visits to the schools selected for this survey.

2.   Context

2.1   RSE comprises part of the requirement for the Personal Development and Mutual Understanding (PDMU) curriculum for primary schools in the Northern Ireland Curriculum (2007).[2] The minimum content (statutory) requirement, through which teachers are required to *'enable pupils to develop knowledge, understanding and skills',* are set out for each stage of primary education under the two headings of Personal Development and Health, and of Mutual Understanding in the Local and Wider Community. In making provision teachers are expected to '*provide a balance of experiences'* drawn from a list of examples, which are not themselves statutory. Some of the examples provided within the 2007 curriculum document take account of the fact that some RSE issues in PDMU are of a sensitive nature, namely: *being aware of the physical and emotional changes that take place during puberty; knowing how babies are conceived, grow and are born; and, being aware of the skills for parenting and the importance of good parenting.* Each is asterisked with a footnote stating that '*decisions about whether or not these topics are taught should be agreed with parents and governors.'* No reference is made in the 2007 curriculum document to aspects of sexual orientation or sexual abuse.

2.2   In August 2015, the Department of Education (DE) issued Circular 2015/22[3], which '*highlighted the need for further guidance for teachers with regard to teaching sensitive subjects such as sexual orientation and domestic abuse'* and advised schools about revised guidance on RSE produced by the Council for Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA). The need for revised guidance on RSE was identified following the recommendations of the Marshall Report[4] on child sexual exploitation (CSE) and from the findings of an earlier ETI report on the provision of RSE in post-primary schools published in 2011 and which forms the appendix of Circular 2015/22[5].

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[1] See Appendix 1 for the survey methodology
[2] See Appendix 2 for the full PDMU Specification at the Foundation Stage and at Key Stages 1 and 2
[3] DE Circular 2015/22 Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) Guidance
[4] The Marshall Report was the report of an independent, expert-led inquiry commissioned by the Minister for Health and Social Services and Public Safety (November 2014) and can be accessed at
https://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/dhssps/csereport181114_0.pdf
[5] See Appendix 3 for an extract of the ETI guidance from DE Circular 2015/22

2.3   The ETI also contributed[6] to the work of the Marshall inquiry by evaluating how effectively:

- the education sector implemented child protection/safeguarding and pastoral care arrangements to ensure schools protect and support their learners; and

- the statutory curriculum and preventative provision in schools helps children develop personal resiliencies and coping strategies to keep themselves safe.

2.4   Circular 2015/22 provided guidance to schools based upon an earlier DE Circular 2013/16[7] which set out to '*remind'* schools of the need to have an RSE policy, referring back to Circular 2010/01[8] which was published as an addendum to Circular 2001/15,[9] which predated the introduction of the Revised Northern Ireland Curriculum.

2.5   Circular 2010/01 referenced the Equality Act (Sexual Orientation) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2006 and stated that all schools should take account of the Equality Commission's guidance when developing or reviewing their RSE policy, thereby ensuring that all children are 'treated *with respect and dignity and are not treated any less favourably on grounds of their actual or perceived sexual orientation.*'

2.6   DE Circular 2015/22 states that the RSE programme *'must prepare pupils to view relationships in a responsible and healthy manner and should be taught in harmony with the ethos of the school and reflect the moral and religious principles held by parents and school management authorities'.* The 2015 Circular goes on to require *'all grant-aided schools to develop their own RSE policy based on the ethos of their school which is subject to consultation with parents and pupils'.* CCEA's guidance on policy coverage[10], prompts the partnership approach needed, including engagement with parents, as well as the need to take account of The Equality Act (Sexual Orientation) Regulations (NI, 2006). While the requirement to have a policy developed in the manner set out is not statutory, but is a matter of best practice, the ETI evaluation nevertheless considered the extent to which parental engagement was evident in practice when schools were drawing up their policies on RSE.

2.7   Circular 2015/22 advised schools about the production of guidance by CCEA which directed schools to resources helpful in addressing the RSE aspects of the primary curriculum for PDMU. The Circular states that *'the guidance prepared by CCEA does not stray into the actual content of teaching and learning as this is a matter for each school.'* However, the guidance does highlight the teaching of sensitive issues and provides advice in responding to questions posed by the children to, amongst other things, matters of sexual identity in RSE lessons.

2.8   RSE provides an opportunity for schools to play a preventative role by improving awareness amongst staff of the vulnerability of children and the indicators of CSE. With reference to a growing awareness of the importance of preparing children to cope with the potential risks posed by access to online information and online contact with others, CCEA's guidance on RSE also makes reference to child sexual exploitation. Effective RSE provision can help pupils recognise potentially exploitative and dangerous situations and how to take preventative action to avoid them. At the time the current ETI evaluation was carried out, the

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[6] An evaluation of preventative education and the statutory curriculum to inform the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Exploitation (ETI, September 2014) http://www.etini.gov.uk/index/surveys-evaluations/surveys-evaluations-post-primary/surveys-evaluations-post-primary-2014/evaluation-of-preventative-education.pdf
[7] DE Circular 2013/16 Relationships and Sexuality Education Policy in Schools
[8] DE Circular 2010/01 Guidance on Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE)
[9] DE Circular 2001/15 Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE)
[10] CCEA Relationships and Sexuality Education Guidance August 2015

National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children had started a pilot curriculum development project to develop a comprehensive age-appropriate preventative education programme for primary schools, but it was too early in the project for it to feature in the evidence base.

3. Summary of main findings

The findings are based on evidence from 121 returns to an online survey of primary and special schools and from visits to 30 schools, including the observation of 25 PDMU lessons[11].

3.1 Leadership and Management

3.1.1   Schools are at very different stages of developing a comprehensive policy and programme, which has been consulted upon with parents and governors. There is a need to ensure an agreed approach to the delivery of the RSE programme with clear linkages and explicit connections made with the aims, values and ethos, and the moral and ethical context of the school in its local community.

3.1.2   In most of the schools visited, the leaders recognise the importance of developing and promoting a comprehensive RSE programme.

3.1.3   One in four schools responding to the online survey does not have an RSE policy. Furthermore, RSE features in only a significant minority (40%) of the school development plans in schools that do have an RSE policy.

3.1.4   Of those schools visited, a small number reported that decisions, about whether or not sensitive aspects of the RSE programme were taught, were made by the principal and/or the chairperson of the board of governors alone, and not in consultation with the wider school community.

3.1.5   Of those schools which have a policy, a minority (18%) have not reviewed it since 2013, that is to say, after the most recent DE Circulars and CCEA guidance was issued. However, most schools surveyed are giving a higher priority to the development of RSE in light of Circular 2015/22, the accompanying CCEA guidance and as a result of their engagement in this ETI evaluation. A majority of schools are developing the necessary policies and procedures in consultation with their governors, but only a significant minority through consultation with their parents.

> *'The RSE Policy document was drawn up by the Senior Management Team with input from the PDMU co-ordinator and was approved by the Board of Governors.'*

3.1.6   In the best practice, primary schools have developed important links with health care practitioners, other relevant external agencies and other schools who support well the teaching of RSE, in order to ease the transition of young people to post-primary education.

3.1.7   Other schools report that their well-established Shared Education[12] and Community Relations Equality and Diversity programmes[13] are also used to create relevant enhanced educational and personal development opportunities for the children to learn to be open to diversity, within and across communities.

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[11] See Appendix 1 for more detail on methodology and a list of schools visited
[12] Sharing Works: A Policy for Shared Education (September 2015.) This policy can be accessed at https://www.deni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/de/shared-education-policy.pdf
[13] Community Relations, Equality and Diversity in Education (CRED) Policy on 24 March 2011.
The policy can be accessed at https://www.deni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/de/cred-policy.pdf

> *'One of the main challenges facing our delivery of RSE arises from being a single-sex school. We recognise that pupils do not have the same opportunities in the classroom to develop friendships and understanding of the opposite sex. We seek to reduce potential challenges by strengthening links with a local boys' primary school. All of our pupils mix together with organised sporting, musical and drama events, and meet together for select fundraising and social events.'*

3.2 Policy

3.2.1   In the best practice, RSE policy is created as an integral part of a wider suite of curricular policies as well as those for child protection, safeguarding and online safety to try to ensure that all aspects of the children's learning and well-being are provided in a holistic framework.

3.2.2   During the survey, a few principals articulated a view that the use, in the title of the Relationship and Sexuality Education (RSE) circulars and guidance materials, of '*sexuality education*,' does not help, and may indeed be hindering primary schools in consulting and negotiating with their governors and parents on how best to address the more sensitive aspects of these strands of the PDMU curriculum.

3.3.3 Furthermore, the delivery of the RSE programme can be additionally constrained where there is a range of nationalities and cultures represented within any school population. This was particularly evident in those schools with a multicultural enrolment where the terminology was unhelpful when schools were trying to consult with the parents about the content of the programme. As it was put in the context of one newcomer community, the use of the word '*sexuality'* resulted in parents perceiving that the staff may be trying to 'sexualise' their children.

> *'.. .there are cultural norms that do not coincide with the values expressed in the RSE/PDMU guidance. This can and has caused conflict due to inadequate English, lack of understanding, or ....acceptance of the values of society, particularly the role of girls/women.'*

3.3 Planning

3.3.1   All of the schools visited have plans for an RSE programme, however, these plans are at various stages; it will be important that all schools consult with all of their stakeholders, including parents as well as governors.

3.3.2   A particular strength of RSE provision in nearly all of the schools visited is that it sits well within a systematic and well-planned, progressive programme for developing positive relationships, which give the children a greater awareness of their feelings and how to express and regulate those feelings, and respond appropriately to the feelings of others.

> *'RSE forms part of the Personal Development and Mutual Understanding programme...Children learn to appreciate differences in people, build their confidence and self-esteem and use strategies for dealing with difficult situations.'*

3.3.3   A majority (63%) of the schools indicated through the online questionnaires that they are not undertaking any monitoring and evaluation of their RSE provision. In line with the guidance outlined in the DE Pupil Participation Circular 2014/14, it will be especially important that the children are enabled to play an active role in decision making about factors that affect their lives in school, at home and in the wider community. There was

recognition from only a few of the schools visited that there is a need to ensure that the children are consulted in relation to RSE, and the impact of the teaching on their learning and development evaluated. In these schools, the leadership and management plan to incorporate RSE questions into a children's survey, in addition to seeking feedback from the school council. It is important that schools recognise that evaluating the impact of teaching related to RSE issues on the attitudes and resilience of the children is at least as essential as consulting with parents in the first instance.

> *'Although the recent audit highlighted clearly the areas that are developed, it is clear that there are further areas that need to be addressed (namely, the need to) develop ways to monitor children's progress and the impact on the children's attitudes.'*

3.4 Practice

3.4.1 In all of the lessons observed during the survey a key strength was the very positive relationships, based on high levels of mutual respect between the adults and the children. The children were highly engaged in their learning through well-planned cross-curricular links and a broad range of active learning approaches.

> *'RSE is strongly linked to our pastoral care and safeguarding provision and we approach its teaching in a holistic and cross-curricular way. Themes /strands are integrated within specific topics, discussed in subject-related contexts, addressed through health education, pastoral work and at assemblies, as well as during visits from outside agencies. Our RSE programme is delivered in a connected way through PDMU, literacy, World Around Us, Physical Education, Religious Education, Information and Communication Technology and The Arts.'*

3.4.2 Almost all of the lessons observed were good to outstanding. They promoted, effectively or very effectively, the children's self-confidence and self-esteem, their insight into emotions and attitudes and developed excellent active listening and thinking skills, thus providing them with useful coping strategies and decision-making skills and heightening their awareness of, and respect and tolerance for the opinions and beliefs of others. Of the lessons observed, only a very few focussed on the more sensitive aspects of the curriculum, for example, inappropriate touching.

3.4.3 Evidence from the questionnaires and visits to schools highlights that the teaching of the sensitive aspects of the programme has not been consistent in recent years due to several mitigating factors. In particular, the withdrawal of the services of a school nurse, reported by most of the schools in the survey, has meant that for several years there have been no lessons taught related to puberty in many of those schools. CCEA's guidance on this matter states that: *'If a school does not (schedule learning about puberty during KS2) 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.'*

3.4.4 Schools report that inhibition and lack of confidence, and an overall lack of training, are reasons why the lessons no longer taught by a school nurse have not been replaced by those taught by a teacher. As a result, three quarters of the schools surveyed rely wholly on external agencies or speakers, whom they perceive to be the experts in their field, to teach the sensitive elements of RSE.

> *'Until a number of years ago a nurse from the local surgery was responsible for delivering information on changes during puberty. However, with cuts in National Health Service funding, this service is no longer available and teachers felt that without adequate training there were not equipped to deliver the physical information outlined in the RSE requirements.'*

3.4.5   Schools have access to a wide range of age-appropriate resources to support their planning and to enhance their teaching. For the most part schools use the resources provided by CCEA and (in the case of maintained schools) by the Diocesan Offices, and these are supplemented further by a wide range of pamphlets and online resources from relevant materials from other external organisations.

> *'We follow the 'Wonder of my Being' programme to develop RSE though our Religious Education, Personal Development and Mutual Understanding and World Around Us curriculum. This core programme is supported by the use of the PATHS – Roots of Empathy programme[14]. These programmes have helped our pupils develop a sense of self-worth, appropriate interactions, empathy, tolerance and kindness. The programmes we use have been effective in creating an atmosphere in which pupils can speak about their feelings, develop the language of appropriate interaction and speak about changes in a supportive and caring sensitive way.'*

3.4.6   Schools in the maintained sector are provided with additional guidance from the Diocesan Offices which are designed to help schools to ensure that the teaching and learning is in keeping with the doctrine of the Catholic faith. These resources provide the schools with a clear framework to guide the learning and teaching; most of the schools from other sectors report that they would welcome similar detailed guidance.

> *'A unique feature of our school is the contribution of the Director of Chaplaincy services who works in the school on two mornings per week. He helps to deliver programmes in classes, assemblies, circle time and specific group activities. Sensitive issues are very often addressed and challenged in these contexts.'*

3.4.7   While a majority of the schools report that they engage in some consultation with the staff about the content of the RSE programme, only a significant minority of schools consult with governors and a minority with parents.

3.4.8   A minority of the schools indicated in the questionnaire that they do not make parents aware of the content of the RSE programme. Otherwise, schools use a range of methods to inform the parents about aspects of the programme, through their attendance at school meetings, written communication, and the sharing of materials and resources to encourage them to support their children's learning and personal development, particularly with regard to the sensitive aspects. In the best practice, but only seen in a few exceptional circumstances, schools provide this opportunity in order to allay any anxieties that parents may have expressed.

> *'We have strong support from our parents for our RSE programme although on occasion individual parents have expressed concerns as to the information we are presenting to our children and whether or not it is age appropriate or in keeping with our Catholic ethos. The fast moving pace of social media and our children's access to it outside of school can be a challenge particularly where it is unsupervised by a responsible adult.'*

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[14] An emotional well-being education programme.

3.4.9   Going forward, it will be important for all schools to ensure that they engage in regular meaningful consultation with all members of the school community, particularly with regard to the more sensitive aspects of the programme, to take account of the diverse family situations within the school community, the changing societal values and moral stance, the challenges of mental health issues, and the resulting complexity in the interaction between the responsibilities of home and school.

> *'We endeavour to engage the support of our parents in the delivery of RSE. They are informed through the class newsletters and curriculum evenings of programmes such as the 'Wonder of My Being' and [a commercial Programme] and are invited to view any materials used. These programmes also involve parental input and materials used are sent home for this purpose. They are also invited to contribute to things such as the 'Compliments List' and discuss with their children areas covered in the PATHS programme. Permission is sought for a child's participation in talks on puberty and body growth and development and materials used in this are shared with the parents. Parents are invited to discuss with the school or the nurse any concerns they may have relating to any of these issues.'*

3.5   Teacher training and development

3.5.1   Small rural schools with composite classes expressed particular difficulties with delivering an age and stage appropriate programme. In these schools, there were human and financial resource implications when re-organising classes and providing release cover for the teaching principal to allow the programme to be delivered in an appropriate manner.

3.5.2   Almost all aspects of the PDMU curriculum are taught by class teachers. Teachers generally, recognise that the children must know about, for example, inappropriate touching and should be taught strategies to keep themselves safe in order that they will be less susceptible to sexual abuse and exploitation. However, through the online questionnaire a majority of schools identified that the teachers lack confidence and/or are uncomfortable in delivering the sensitive aspects and require specific training on teaching sexuality, including sexual identity, puberty, inappropriate behaviour, touching and abuse and the online exposure of children to material that is not age-appropriate. A minority highlighted that the staff have not received any training for teaching in RSE.

> *'Although the recent audit highlighted clearly the areas that are developed, it is clear that there are further areas that need to be addressed: further training for staff on dealing with controversial discussions, particularly in relation to sexual identity, sexual exploitation, puberty, conception, appropriate use of language for body parts, and inappropriate touch.'*

3.5.3   Teachers in the special schools surveyed are aware of the particular needs and abilities of the full age range of the children and young people (from 3 to 19 years of age) in their schools. As a result, the teachers know that they need to be particularly explicit about all aspects of the content of RSE, especially for those with severe learning difficulties who may have limited literacy, emotional skills and a sometimes limited understanding of the boundaries of inappropriate behaviour. During the evaluation, the practice seen in the special schools was deemed to be highly effective in providing flexible active learning that develops well the social and communication skills needed to build and maintain positive relationships. Programmes and policies for RSE are well embedded in the provision in special schools and the teachers are confident in delivering the sensitive aspects of the programme using key stage 3 materials and resources provided by CCEA, which they report are particularly helpful.

> *'The RSE programme is part of a school-wide development of relationships. It starts as young as nursery, when pupils are taught about choices, developing self-esteem and relationships with others. These concepts are developed throughout the school and form a solid basis for the teaching of RSE. This helps frame consent, relationships, personal safety and choices. Class teachers teach the majority of the RSE programme as part of topics, Individual Education Plans, Assessment for Learning, and the hidden curriculum. Parents are invited to training sessions and receive an outline of the programme to allow them to build on support at home. Feedback from parents is sought.'*

4.   Strengths and recommendations

4.1   Strengths

Based on the findings of the evaluation, the main strengths in the quality of the provision for RSE within the PDMU curriculum in primary and special schools are:

4.1.1   Leadership and management:

- the recognition of the leaders and teachers in almost all of the schools of the importance of an RSE programme.

4.1.2   Policy and planning:

- for the most part, the increasing development and implementation of appropriate RSE policies and practices, aligned to the ethos and values of individual schools;

- where it is provided, an RSE programme which complements existing pastoral care, religious education, child protection and safeguarding polices and which is appropriate to the needs and maturity of the children;

- in the best practice, a systematic approach to embedding important elements of the RSE programme across the whole primary curriculum to provide for clear progression; and

- in the best practice, the children's self-evaluation of their learning which contributes to the review and development of RSE policy and practice.

4.1.3   Practice:

- the effective, or very effective practice, in almost all of the good to outstanding lessons observed in the foundation stage, key stage 1 and key stage 2 where learning was effected through open discussion, very good engagement by the children, excellent talking and listening and the good development of the children's literacy, thinking skills and personal capabilities;

- the effective planning to promote the children's self-worth and their understanding of positive relationships, through well conceived cross-curricular and child-centred approaches to teaching which contribute effectively to the promotion of tolerance, inclusion and the acceptance of difference;

- an increased awareness of the importance of preparing children to cope with the potential risks posed by access to online information and contact with others;

- the excellent work within the special schools visited in supporting the young people to develop their self esteem, self-management skills and to keep themselves safe;

- the use of a range of age-appropriate support materials and resources provided by external agencies, including those from CCEA and from the Diocesan Offices for which schools express appreciation and which contribute to the provision of a progressive, comprehensive suite of RSE lessons; and

- the good links with a wide range of appropriate statutory and voluntary agencies, including the Health Trusts, to inform planning and contribute to the delivery of RSE programmes.

4.1.4   The findings reported here confirm that the ETI guidance, issued to schools in DE Circular 2015/22 Appendix A, remains wholly valid.[15]

4.2   Recommendations

In light of the findings reported above and in order to effect improvement, there are a number of main areas for development within RSE. Although the sensitive elements of RSE are voluntary aspects in the PDMU statutory curriculum, the need for policy, planning and provision is promoted through DE Circulars and CCEA guidance.

Therefore, there is a need, drawing on best practice, for schools, the Education Authority (EA), CCEA and DE **[as shown respectively below]** to:

- ensure that the sensitive elements are provided to all of the children in all schools, prior to their transfer to post-primary education; **[schools]**

- consult and agree with all of the parents and the governors that by the end of key stage 2 the children will have experienced the full programme of RSE; **[schools]**

- plan on a whole-school basis to promote consistency in the quality of the teaching and learning across all the year groups; **[schools]**

- monitor and evaluate, including the voice of the children, the teaching and learning in RSE and the coherence of the children's experiences across all year groups in order to assure effective impact on the children's learning and personal development; **[schools]**

- improve the training for teachers to enhance their capacity and confidence to deliver the more sensitive elements; **[schools and EA]**

- update resource materials to reflect the impact of continuing changes in society and in social attitudes, and in the risks associated with online technologies; and **[schools, EA and CCEA]**

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[15] See Appendix 3

- finally, in light of the differences which have emerged, over time, between the statutory requirements, the DE Circulars and the curricular guidance, the point made by schools in the survey that there is a need for clearer, more consistent, guidance is valid. Some have also argued for more prescription on the appropriate detail of the sensitive elements of RSE to be taught by teachers, and indicates that a review would be timely. **[DE and CCEA]**

As one principal put it: *life is overtaking teaching.*

Methodology for the study

In October 2015, the senior leaders of all primary schools in NI were invited to complete an online questionnaire to provide important background information and an overview of the provision for RSE. One hundred and twenty-one schools took the opportunity to respond to this online survey, representing a return rate of 14%, which is a relatively low response rate. In addition to the online survey, the ETI and Associate Assessors visited a sample of 30 primary schools in January and February 2016. The ETI is most grateful for the support of the Associate Assessors and for the open and willing cooperation of all of the schools visited. The sample schools were representative of the various management types as shown below. During the visits to schools, 25 PDMU lessons were inspected.

Management type	Number of schools
Maintained	11
Controlled	11
Special School	3
Integrated	2
Voluntary	2
Irish Medium Education	1

During the visits, discussions were held with the principals, members of the senior leadership team, RSE co-ordinators and teachers in the following schools:

Abbey Primary School, Newtownards
All Children's Integrated Primary School, Newcastle
Ashlea Primary and Nursery School, Derry/Londonderry
Bushvalley Primary School, Ballymoney
Darkley Primary School, Armagh
Derryboy Primary School, Crossgar
Donard Special School, Banbridge
Forth River Primary School, Belfast
Gaelscoil na Móna, Belfast
Glengormley Integrated Primary School, Newtownabbey
Hardy Memorial Primary School, Richhill
Holy Evangelist Primary School, Dunmurry
Lisanally Special School, Armagh
Londonderry Primary School, Newtownards
Loughash Primary School, Donemana
Mount St. Catherine's Primary School, Armagh
Roddensvale Special School, Larne
Rosetta Primary School, Belfast
St. Brigid's Primary School, Belfast
St Lawrence's Primary School, Fintona
St Mary's Primary School, Cabragh, Dungannon
St Mary's Primary School, Cargan, Ballymena
St Mary's Primary School, Divis Street, Belfast
St Olcan's Primary School, Ballymoney
St Patrick's Primary School, Ballynahinch
St Colmcille's Primary School, Ballymena
Stranmillis Primary School, Belfast
Sullivan Upper Primary School, Holywood
Tonagh Primary School, Lisburn
Victoria College Preparatory School, Belfast

The support of all the schools for the evaluation work is greatly appreciated.

Personal Development and Mutual Understanding
(From The Northern Ireland Curriculum: Primary. CCEA, 2007)

FOUNDATION STAGE

The statutory requirements for Personal Development and Mutual Understanding are set out below **in bold**. Examples are in plain text and *italics*.

Teachers should enable children to develop knowledge, understanding and skills in:

PERSONAL UNDERSTANDING AND HEALTH

Pupils should be enabled to explore:

- themselves and their personal attributes;
- their own and others' feelings and emotions;
- their dispositions and attitudes to learning;
- the importance of keeping healthy and how to keep safe in familiar and unfamiliar environments.

MUTUAL UNDERSTANDING IN THE LOCAL AND WIDER COMMUNITY

Pupils should be enabled to explore:

- their relationships with family and friends;
- their responsibilities for self and others;
- how to respond appropriately in conflict situations;
- similarities and differences between groups of people;
- learning to live as a member of a community.

In fulfilling the requirements above teachers should provide a balance of experiences across the two strands; (below) are suggestions from which teachers may wish to select.

Strand 1: Personal Understanding and Health

Children should have opportunities to explore:

Self-Awareness

- exploring who they are, for example, *their physical attributes;*

- recognising what they can do, for example, *their personal skills such as dressing themselves, using a knife and fork, their physical skills such as running, jumping, skipping, cutting, threading;*

- identifying their favourite things, for example, *their favourite stories, TV programmes, foods, activities in school, their likes and dislikes;*

- recognising what makes them special, for example, *their own characteristics, things that make them different from their brothers/sisters/friends.*

Feelings and Emotions

- beginning to recognise how they feel, for example, *when they are happy, sad, angry, afraid, lonely;*

- developing ways of expressing how they feel, for example, *orally, using facial expressions, through their behaviour;*

- knowing what to do if they feel sad, lonely, afraid or angry and when it is important to tell others about their feelings, for example, *when someone is making them anxious or unhappy they should talk to a safe adult;*

- realising what makes their friends feel happy or sad, for example, *when they do not share with others;*

- recognising how other people feel when they are happy, sad, angry, lonely, for example, *observing their facial expressions, behaviour, listening to them.*

Health and Safety

- being aware of how to care for his/her own body in order to keep it healthy and well, for example, *by talking about which foods are healthy, by talking about the importance of regular exercise and physical activity, the need for rest and adequate sleep;*

- recognising and practising basic hygiene skills, for example, *hand washing before meals and after going to the toilet, hygienic eating habits, developing basic skills in dressing himself/herself;*

- realising that growth and change are part of the process of life and are unique to each individual, for example, *physical: increase in shoe size; social: being able to take turns; intellectual: what I can do for myself;*

- exploring appropriate personal safety strategies and identifying situations that are safe, and those where personal safety may be at risk, for example, *knowing own name and address, knowing who to seek help from, knowing when to say 'yes' or 'no' to friends or adults , how accidents might be prevented at home, in school, on the farm or in the water;*

- beginning to realise the importance of road safety, for example, *understand that roads can be very dangerous and that there are safer places to play, there are special people who help us cross roads, it is best to hold hands with a known adult when near or when crossing a road, know how to behave safely in cars and buses, learn about the Green Cross Code;*

- understanding that many substances can be dangerous, for example, n*ever touch, taste or smell unknown substances, the importance of not taking medicines belonging to others;*

- knowing the safety rules that apply when taking medicines.

Strand 2: Mutual Understanding in the Local and Wider Community

Children should have opportunities to explore:

Relationships with Families

- finding out about their own families, for example, *their immediate and extended family, special people in their lives, roles within the family, what the family do to make them feel happy, sad, angry;*

- talking about what families do together, for example, *family mealtimes, shopping activities, what members of the family do for each other;*

- beginning to recognise how they relate to adults and other children, for example, *by building friendships, learning to co-operate, share and take turns, by taking the lead and by knowing when to ask for help.*

Relationships in School and the Community

- realising why it is necessary to have rules in the classroom and the school, for example, *to ensure that everyone is treated equally and fairly, for safety;*

- developing a sense of what is fair;

- beginning to take responsibility for what they say and do;

- beginning to recognise similarities and differences in families and the wider community, for example, *gender, race, disability, ethnic/cultural background;*

- understanding that everyone is of equal worth and that it is acceptable to be different;

- beginning to understand the interdependent nature of the class/school community and themselves as participant members;

- raising awareness of their attitudes to others in the school community;

- celebrating special occasions, for example, birthdays, weddings.

KEY STAGE 1

The minimum content for Personal Development and Mutual Understanding is set out in bold below. Examples are in plain text and italics.

Teachers should enable pupils to develop knowledge, understanding and skills in:

PERSONAL UNDERSTANDING AND HEALTH

Pupils should be enabled to explore:

- their self–esteem and self-confidence;
- their own and others' feelings and emotions and how their actions affect others;
- positive attitudes to learning and achievement;
- strategies and skills for keeping themselves healthy and safe.

MUTUAL UNDERSTANDING IN THE LOCAL AND WIDER COMMUNITY

Pupils should be enabled to explore:

- initiating and developing mutually satisfying relationships;
- responsibility and respect, honesty and fairness;
- constructive approaches to conflict;
- similarities and differences between people;
- developing themselves as members of a community.

In fulfilling the requirements above teachers should provide a balance of experiences across the two strands; below are suggestions from which teachers may wish to select.

Strand 1: Personal Understanding and Health

Children should have opportunities to explore:

Self Awareness

- feeling positive about themselves, and developing an understanding of their self-esteem and confidence;

- becoming aware of their own strengths, abilities, qualities, their achievements, personal preferences and goals;

- beginning to recognise, name and manage their own feelings and emotions and that they are a natural, important and healthy part of a human being;

- beginning to recognise and manage the effects of strong feelings such as anger, sadness or loss;

- acknowledging that everyone makes mistakes, that attempts can fail or have disappointing outcomes but that this is a natural and helpful part of learning; recognising how they can develop and improve their learning.

Health, Growth and Change

- recognising and valuing the options for a healthy lifestyle, including the benefits of exercise, rest, healthy eating and hygiene;

- having respect for their bodies and those of others;

- being aware of the stages of human growth and development;

- recognising how responsibilities and relationships change as people grow and develop;

- understanding that medicines are given to make you feel better, but that some drugs are dangerous;

- understanding that if not used properly, all products can be harmful;

- being aware that some diseases are infectious and some can be controlled.

Keeping Safe

- knowing what to do or from whom to seek help when feeling unsafe;

- being aware of different forms of bullying and developing personal strategies to resist unwanted behaviour;

- exploring the rules for and ways of keeping safe on the roads, co-operating with adults who help keep us safe on roads, and how to travel safely in cars and buses;

- knowing about potential dangers and threats in the home and environment;

- developing simple safety rules and strategies to protect themselves from potentially dangerous situations;

- identifying ways of protecting against extremes of weather, for example *being safe in the sun and protecting yourself in freezing conditions.*

Strand 2: Mutual Understanding in the Local and Wider Community

Children should have opportunities to explore:

Relationships with Family and Friends

- examining the variety of roles in families and the contribution made by each member;

- being aware of their contribution to home and school life and the responsibilities that this can bring;

- knowing how to be a good friend;

- understanding that they can take on some responsibility in their family and friendship groups;

- being aware of who and what influences their views and feelings and behaviour at home;

- knowing what is fair and unfair and what they believe to be right or wrong:

    - identifying ways in which conflict may arise at home, and exploring ways in which it could be lessened, avoided or resolved.

Relationships at School

- identifying members of their school community and the roles and responsibilities they have;

- recognising the interdependence of members in the school community;

- being aware of how the school community interacts; how they listen and respond to each other and how they treat each other;

- being aware of who and what influences their views and feelings and behaviour at school;

- beginning to understand why and how rules are made in class, in the playground and at school;

- identifying ways in which conflict may arise at school and exploring ways in which it could be lessened, avoided or resolved.

Relationships in the Community

- appreciating ways we are similar and different, for example, *age, culture, disability, gender, hobbies, race, religion, sporting interests, abilities and work;*

- being aware of their own cultural heritage, its traditions and celebrations;

- recognising and valuing the culture and traditions of one other group who shares their community;

- discussing the causes of conflict in their community, and how they feel about it;

- being aware of the diversity of people around the world;

- identifying the people, jobs and workplaces in the community;

- realising that money can buy goods and services and is earned through work;

- understanding that rules are essential in an ordered community;

- understanding how their environment could be made better or worse to live in and what contribution they can make.

KEY STAGE 2

The minimum content for Personal Development and Mutual Understanding is set out in bold below. Examples are in plain text and italics.

Teachers should enable pupils to develop knowledge, understanding and skills in:

PERSONAL UNDERSTANDING AND HEALTH

Pupils should be enabled to explore:

- their self-esteem, self-confidence and how they develop as individuals;
- their management of a range of feelings and emotions and the feelings and emotions of others;
- effective learning strategies;
- how to sustain their health, growth and well-being and coping safely and efficiently with their environment.

MUTUAL UNDERSTANDING IN THE LOCAL AND WIDER COMMUNITY

Pupils should be enabled to explore:

- initiating, developing and sustaining mutually satisfying relationships;
- human rights and social responsibility;
- causes of conflict and appropriate responses;
- valuing and celebrating cultural difference and diversity;
- playing an active and meaningful part in the life of the community and being concerned about the wider environment.

In fulfilling the requirements above teachers should provide a balance of experiences across the two strands; below are suggestions from which teachers may wish to select.

Strand 1: Personal Understanding and Health

Children should have opportunities to explore:

Self Awareness

- developing self-awareness, self-respect and their self-esteem;

- knowing how to confidently express their own views and opinions in unfamiliar circumstances;

- identifying their current strengths and weaknesses;

- facing problems, trying to resolve and learn from them;

- examining and exploring their own and others' feelings and emotions;

- knowing how to recognise, express and manage feelings in a positive and safe way;

- recognising that feelings and emotions change at times of change and loss;

- developing an insight into their potential and capabilities;

- reflecting upon their progress and set goals for improvement;

- identifying and practicing effective learning strategies;

- being aware of their different learning styles and being able to identify how they learn best.

Health, Growth and Change

- understanding the benefits of a healthy lifestyle, including physical activity, healthy eating, rest and hygiene;

- recognising what shapes positive mental health;

- knowing about the harmful effects to themselves and others of tobacco, alcohol, solvents and other illicit and illegal substances;

- understanding that bacteria and viruses affect health and that risks can decrease when basic routines are followed;

- knowing how the body grows and develops;

- being aware of the physical and emotional changes that take place during puberty;*

- knowing how babies are conceived, grow and are born;*

- being aware of the skills for parenting and the importance of good parenting;*[16]

- recognising how responsibilities change as they become older and more independent;

- knowing that AIDS is a prevalent disease throughout the world and is a major health issue for many countries.

Keeping Safe

- developing strategies to resist unwanted peer/sibling pressure and behaviour;

- recognising, discussing and understanding the nature of bullying and the harm that can result;

- becoming aware of the potential danger of relationships with strangers or acquaintances, including good and bad touches;

- recognising appropriate road use, how to best apply the Green Cross Code, how conspicuity reduces road collisions, passenger skills including boarding and disembarking from cars and home-school transport and how bicycles are best maintained and ridden;

- developing a pro-active and responsible approach to safety, for example, *at home, near water, on the internet, watching television, in school, on the farm, around equipment, in the sun, near fireworks;*

- knowing where, when and how to seek help;

- being aware of basic emergency procedures and first aid.

Strand 2: Mutual Understanding in the Local and Wider Community

Children should have opportunities to explore:

Relationships with Family, Friends and at school

- examining and exploring the different types of families that exist, the roles within them, and the different responsibilities;

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[16] * Decisions about whether or not these topics are taught should be agreed with parents and governors.

- recognising the benefits of friends and families and finding out about sources of help and support for individuals, families and groups;

- exploring and examining what influences their views, feelings and behaviour;

- understanding the need for rules and that they are necessary for harmony at home and at school;

- exploring and examining the rules within their families, friendship groups and at school;

- recognising the importance of democratic decision-making and active participation at home and in the classroom;

- considering the challenges and issues that can arise at home, at school between friends and how they can be avoided, lessened, or resolved;

- examining ways in which conflict can be caused by words, gestures, symbols or actions.

Relationships in the Community

- knowing about aspects of their cultural heritage, including the diversity of cultures that contribute to Northern Ireland;

- recognising the similarities and differences between cultures in Northern Ireland, for example, *food, clothes, symbols and celebrations;*

- acknowledging that people differ in what they believe is right or wrong;

- recognising that people have different beliefs which shape the way they live;

- appreciating the interdependence of people within the community;

- knowing about the importance of democratic decision-making and involvement and the institutions that support it at a local level;

- developing an understanding of their role and responsibility as consumers in society;

- identifying the variety of groups, the roles and responsibilities that exist within the community;

- considering the rights and responsibilities of members of the community;

- understanding that rules are essential in an ordered community and the need for different rules in different contexts;

- examining the effects of anti-social behaviour, for example, *bullying and racism;*

- appreciating how and why rules and laws are created and implemented.

Relationships with the Wider World

- developing an awareness of the experiences, lives and cultures of people in the wider world;

- recognising the similarities and differences between cultures, for example, *food, clothes, symbols, celebrations;*

- understanding that differences and similarities between people arise from a number of factors including cultural, ethnic/racial and religious diversity, gender and disability;

- appreciating the range of cultures and traditions in other countries;

- recognising how injustice and inequality affect people's lives;

- knowing about the range of jobs and work carried out by different people;

- knowing about the process and people involved in the production, distribution and selling of goods;

- examining the role of advertising at a local and or global level;

- exploring how the media present information.

Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) – Best Practice as identified by the Education and Training Inspectorate (From DE Circular 2015/22 Appendix A)

Overall best practice in RSE is characterised by:

- Clear, informed and purposeful leadership from the Principal and the senior leadership team, ensuring that RSE has a significant role in the curriculum provision.

- A whole school planning process that involves wide ranging consultation with all of the stakeholders, including the parents, pupils and governors.

- Comprehensive policies (including a RSE policy) and planning which underpin the programme and provide excellent guidance and support for all, including parent- friendly versions of the full range of pastoral policies (pastoral care, safeguarding and child protection).

- Clear linkages and explicit connections made with the aims, values, ethos, moral and ethical framework of the school.

- Coherent planning that makes very clear links with the broader aims and objectives of the curriculum as well as the internal contributions from discrete subject departments.

- The use of current and age-appropriate resources.

- A focus, within the curriculum, on the use of a broad range of teaching strategies, with a strong emphasis on active learning approaches to promote the development of pupils' coping strategies and decision-making skills.

- Judicious and appropriate use of internal personnel, external agencies and guest speakers, to handle topics which may include sexual orientation, aspects of sexual health, and suicide and self-harm.

- Supplementary guidance materials to support teachers in the implementation of the programme.

- Robust procedures for the monitoring and evaluation of the provision within the school.

- Making changes to the provision as a result of feedback.

Relationships and Sexuality Education
in Primary and Special Schools

Report of an evaluation by the
Education and Training Inspectorate

July 2016