

# **The St Michael Steiner School**

## **Relationships and Sex Education Policy**

This policy should be read in conjunction with our Equality and Diversity Policy.

### **Statutory requirements and definitions**

Independent schools are required by law to provide Relationships Education to all primary age children. In our school, this means the final year of Kindergarten up to Class 5.

Independent schools are required by law<sup>1</sup> to provide Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) to all secondary age pupils. In our school, this means from Class 6 to Class 12.

The focus of Relationships Education for the younger children is on fostering healthy, positive relationships between the children and their teachers, their parents, other adults and each other; encouraging respect and consideration for other people; managing friendships; developing and maintaining a feeling of security around other people.

The focus of Sex and Relationships Education, for pupils over 11, includes all of this but also begins to address the issues that arise from puberty onwards, around romantic, intimate and sexual relationships, as well as questions about gender identity and sexuality.

Parents have the right to withdraw their children from RSE, for religious, faith or other reasons, on request, but not from Relationships Education.

In drawing up this policy, the school has gathered the views of parents through class parents meetings and individual meetings, and from pupils through discussions in class. Parents' and pupils' views, feelings and concerns will continue to be taken into account when the policy is reviewed.

This policy is subject to approval by the Chair of trustees.

### **Introduction to our approach**

Relationship in our school is characterised as the way in which human beings think of and behave toward each other as active members of the community, without losing their sense of self, and it lies at the heart of our teaching.

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<sup>1</sup> Guidance in the DfE document *Relationships Education, Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) and Health Education* has been withdrawn pending a review. The statutory requirement to provide this education remains for the time being.

**Our Code of Conduct and Behaviour Policy for pupils** reflects the school's picture of what constitutes healthy human relationships and how we foster them. At their heart are these principles:

Everyone has the right to be treated with respect, so:

Be considerate towards other people

Do not use language that may offend, insult or harm anyone who may hear it

Do not hurt other people; either physically or emotionally

Respect other people's right to personal space

Do not interfere with, take or use other people's belongings without their permission  
Strive to be honest and truthful at all times

This policy also explains what we believe constitutes bullying, how we manage incidents and help pupils to improve their behaviour toward others, and the trusted adults they can turn to for support.

**Our Staff Code of Conduct** has this central tenet:

School staff are in a position of trust and have a strong influence on children and students; we all have a duty to ensure that the way we conduct ourselves is, as far as possible, worthy of their imitation or respect.

Through these principles, we strive to create an atmosphere of trust and respect in the school; staff are expected to exemplify this in their behaviour toward each other, pupils, parents and visitors; expectations of pupils are based on these principles as some of the most important aims and purposes of education. As such, they are embedded in our practice throughout the school.

## **Relationships Education and RSE and the school's ethos**

As far as possible, we try to integrate the teaching of Relationships education and RSE into the curriculum, rather than through designated lessons, although some topics need this. In this way, the children learn that relationships are part of every aspect of life; that the way we relate to other people is always important.

Waldorf Education recognises a series of developmental stages through which children pass, and our curriculum is designed to meet the children at those different stages. Our view of child development includes, importantly in relation to this subject, an evolution of consciousness, i.e. young children do not perceive or experience the world in the same way as adults do, and so cannot understand, remember or act out of information given to them until they reach a certain stage of development. What and how we have decided to teach Relationships Education has this, and the school's wider ethos regarding the importance of a positive view of humanity, as its basis.

## **Overview of the Relationships Education and RSE Curriculum**

The following are examples of how Relationships education and RSE has been integrated into the curriculum at different ages.

The Class Teacher receives the children (most of whom have already been in our kindergarten) in Class 1 and continues as their Class Teacher until the end of Class 8. The majority of Class 8 graduates enter our High School, which means that the teachers observe the students over a long period of time and know the children and their parents well. Parents' evenings, school festivals and fairs organised by parents give plenty of opportunity for teachers and parents to come together on a regular basis. Class teachers are always available for one-to-one meetings and parents are encouraged to contact the teachers if they have questions or concerns. In this way a relationship of trust can be developed between teachers, parents and children, which is the foundation for learning.

Storytelling is an integral part of the kindergarten and the lower school curriculum and all stories teach about relationships. From Fairy Tales, Fables, Norse, Indian, Egyptian and Greek myths to biographies of personalities such as Julius Caesar, Joan of Arc, Leonardo Da Vinci, Galileo, Henry VIII, Benjamin Franklin or Nelson Mandela, the students are continuously taught about what it means to be a human being and the kinds of relationships that human beings can have to one another. (For a more detailed summary of the stories taught between Classes 1 - 8, please refer to the Lower and Middle School Curriculum Directory).

Daily poetry recitation, Drama, group discussions (in the form of recalling the previous day's story in Classes 1 to 5 and Class conversations and debating from Class 6 onwards) and oral project presentations (from Class 4 onwards) give pupils experience of expressing themselves clearly and speaking in public, while they allow them to sharpen their communication skills, which is an important part of relationships.

### **Kindergarten**

Fostering strong relationships and communication between staff and parents is essential to the wellbeing and on-going development of each child. In our diverse community and city it is important to acknowledge that each family is unique and is recognised. This informs not only our festivals and cultural celebrations throughout the year but the choice of picture books, other visual materials, stories, toys, etc.

In kindergarten the seasonal curriculum fosters a healthy and respectful relationship with the children's surroundings and the natural world through activities, festivals, songs and stories.

The mixed age constellation of our kindergarten groups with children from three to six years old creates numerous opportunities to work on nurturing relationships and

to develop the importance of: how to treat each other with kindness, consideration and respect; welcoming others and turn taking; understanding one's own and others' boundaries in play, in negotiations about space, toys, books, resources and so on; permission seeking and giving, and the concept of personal privacy and boundaries.

The relationships between children and teachers are based on trust and children are taught and helped in an age-appropriate way. Teachers support the children's play, negotiations and social development through imitation of the teacher, pedagogical stories and fairy tales, and golden rules such as 'everyone is welcome to play', 'kind words' and 'gentle hands'. Children are supported by the teachers to develop their resilience and a safe and secure environment is created to ensure that children know that they should come and talk to their teachers if they are unhappy or do not feel comfortable about something that is happening to them or around them.

Activities reflect the concerns and interests of the children and the carefully structured environment is designed to nourish positive and healthy relationships and boundaries, respecting and understanding differences and what is appropriate and inappropriate. Conversations during activities and snack time often provide opportunities to talk about family relationships and others outside of kindergarten.

## **Classes 1 and 2**

In a similar way to the kindergarten, the children are playing with natural materials that help them create a respectful relationship with their environment.

Through the daily rhythm - alternating between movement and quiet sitting - and handwork activities, which take time and focus to be completed, as well as sharing materials and taking turns in activities and games, the children learn to endure lack and to cultivate pleasure. The structure of the day and the daily rhythms also provide a safe and secure space for the children to be with each other. Free play offers tremendous opportunities for the children to learn how to interact with each other. The Class Teacher is able to intervene whenever the children need help in recognising the boundaries of each other's personal space. Disrespectful language and behaviour should always be challenged and guided towards 'correction'.

Regular practice through will activity (saying sorry for example) will develop into a habit, which then becomes a sense for what's appropriate in the longer term. In this way a culture of respect and care is developed in the school.

Healthy, respectful relationships between people are exemplified in stories.

Pedagogical stories told by the Class teacher allow the children to feel what is appropriate behaviour. Nature stories, describing natural seasonal phenomena, help the children develop a feeling of reverence for their environment and consequently the people around them. Through listening to fairy tales the children

experience the troubles, joys, worries, distress and redemption of the characters. They delight in the good and are repelled by the wicked. Fables explore traits of human behaviour such as greed, jealousy, foolishness, pride, slyness and other and are told in juxtaposition to Saint Stories, where qualities of kindness, piety, understanding and love for the fellow human being are prevalent.

## **Classes 3 and 4**

The children become more self-aware, and more aware of the differences between boys and girls, mainly in terms of what they like to do, but also in the clothes they wear. They go through a period of wanting to be with their own gender, although there is always some crossover. Romantic attachments can develop.

The Hebrew Scriptures stories in Class 3 provide a model of authority. The story of Adam and Eve corresponds to the awakening of nine-year-olds as they are leaving the “paradise” of early childhood. The children are comforted by the image of the Head God, that always ensures things happen the way they should because at this age they respond to boundaries.

In Norse Mythology in Class 4, Loki’s behaviour in particular provides opportunities for discussion about right and wrong, betrayal, deceit, honesty/dishonesty, punishment, but the other gods also have weaknesses and faults, like all of us.

Through lessons on Gardening and Farming, the children continue to develop a meaningful relationship with their environment, as they engage with lots of practical activities such as making cheese and butter or kneading bread. Led by the Class Teacher, they work with their hands along with their classmates, which further develops their senses and well-being and cultivates a sensitivity for the other because knowing and relating to oneself through the senses, enables one to relate to others.

During this time, the students might have questions about their own origin, how they came to be and consequently how babies are made. These questions are almost always directed to the parents but if children ask the teacher such questions, they answer truthfully but in a way appropriate for young children. We recommend that love is at the origin of the baby’s conception because this is important for the child. We also suggest an appropriate image, that makes sense for the child, such as that of both parents offering a gift of their own body to make the first part of the child’s body (the mother gives her precious pearls and the father his seeds of light for example) and not explicit details that the child would not be able to relate to.

In Class 4, the children are introduced to the study of animals and to the way in which some animals propagate and a comparison can be made between, for example, fish eggs, that are floating outside of the mother’s body, and the human embryo in the mother’s womb. They are also presented with the idea that, unlike

animals, which are bound by their nature, human beings are free to choose what they are going to do with their life and whether they apply their talents and strengths to do right or wrong. Class discussions about ways in which human beings can do good in the world can emerge.

If a social issue has arisen between different members of the group, the teacher might deem it necessary to have a group discussion with the children about it. Each child is given space to speak and express what the problem is for them. Often the mere presence of the teacher and the fact that each side has been heard are enough for the relationship between the children to be restored. Sometimes the teacher has to decide on consequences for a behaviour that is inappropriate or careless. If the issue does not seem easily resolved, the teacher might invite the parents for a conversation or discuss the issue during the teachers' pedagogical meeting. In this way, the relationship between the children is paid attention to and nurtured by the wider school community.

## **Class 5**

The subject of Botany, taught at this age, allows the children to understand the processes of the plant world, one of which is fertilisation. They learn about the male and female parts of flowers and the way in which they propagate, which lays an appropriate foundation for the teaching of the human reproductive system in Class 7.

The students also learn that each fruit is preceded by a blossom, which provides a basis on which the fruit can grow. We also speak about the sun rays, the life-giving light that makes the seeds germinate and the little shoots sprout.

A comparison can be made with a newborn child, who is in a way also a fruit that grew out of the blossom which was the womb of its mother. The womb is always closed like a flower bud.

At this age the children's bodies start to change and to define their gender externally, where everyone can see it. This is difficult for everyone, but more so for those who are not comfortable with their sexuality or biological gender.

During this year, the children listen to stories from the ancient Indian, Mesopotamian, Egyptian and Greek mythologies and prepare for a summer camping trip, where they meet children of the same age from other Steiner schools and compete at "Olympic Games".

In Egyptian mythology, gender issues can be raised through images of Akhenaten, because he had male and female characteristics, and through Hatshepsut, a female pharaoh who worked in a man's world. In Greek mythology, Artemis crosses the boundary between male and female. These are presented as stories and images so they can live in the children in a positive way without the need to be explicit.

Gender issues need to be addressed gently and with tact; we don't want to encourage the children to question their gender if the question is not already there, but we want those who are already wondering to feel that they are not strange or alone.

At the 'Olympics', the children find themselves training in groups of children they have never met before, led by Class teachers from all over the country. For the first time in a school setting, they spend a big part of the day outside their Class group, which provides them with the opportunity to create new relationships. The early evenings are spent with the Class group and Class teacher. Around the camp fire the experiences of the day are shared and discussed: what went well, what they enjoyed and sometimes comments are made about an encounter with another child who was "too competitive" or "not very kind". The Class teacher listens to these stories and offers advice if necessary.

### **Middle School (Classes 6 to 8)**

During adolescence, students are physically suddenly bigger and heavier and often unaware of how much space their physical body occupies. Their sense of others' personal space is still developing and they can sometimes be unaware of inappropriate touching or language. Friendships also become very powerful during this time.

During History lessons the children listen to biographies of people such as Hannibal, Spartacus, Julius Caesar, Joan of Arc or Nelson Mandela. Group discussions about how and why these people acted, help the children develop an understanding for the multifaceted and often contradictory traits of human personality.

In Geography, learning about the continents of Europe, Africa and America, the children look into more detail at the different cultures of the world. They are shown the close relationship between History and Geography and are taught historical events as a continuum, encouraged to make connections between the past and the present.

Through the lessons in Physiology, the students become familiar with the anatomy of the male and female reproductive system. They learn about the menstrual cycle (luteal, follicular, ovulation phases), conception and contraception.

Group discussions where students can ask questions about sex and relationships are part of these lessons. Boys and girls can be separated, if the Class teacher deems it necessary, so that the students feel more comfortable to ask questions.

During these discussions, the teacher speaks about sex as part of a meaningful, trusting relationship. When both partners decide to have sex, they should do so out of their own freedom, without feeling coerced. The importance of someone's

personal space that needs to be respected by the other is also part of the conversation.

The discussions have involved the following:

- How not to be offensive to other people (language, physical contact) What is appropriate contact - touching
- Social consent
- Awareness of personal space
- Being safe and behaving respectfully online
- Bodily changes
- Peer pressure
- Biology: how the reproductive system works
- Being safe and behaving respectfully online

Sometimes the pupils are prompted to discuss and decide on what areas of the school need tidying, mending or cleaning. One week they might rake leaves in the Parent & Child garden, cautious about the toddlers playing there. The following week, they offer their assistance in another area. By working together and often alongside other age groups, serving the school community, the pupils learn about responsibility, reciprocity and generosity, important parts of any healthy relationship.

Through group discussions that cover relationships, social media communication and its dangers, global issues, and through assigned tasks where the students have to choose and research a topic and work independently (such as the Class 8 project), the students are given more responsibility. By the time they enter the High School, they have been given plenty of opportunity to develop an interest in the world and recognise the value of serving others and not acting out of self-interest alone. They have also experienced again and again, through all the practical activities, the amount of work and effort it takes for something to be completed and the feeling of accomplishment that comes with patience and perseverance and has nothing to do with the instant gratification that describes the modern age. They have therefore laid the foundation for meaningful relationships, where one's own interests and desires are not the priority but where a mutual effort to understand and care for each other is made.

Some examples of discussions that have occurred from time to time are:

- Why is circulating someone else's photo (a friend's for example) to other people, without the person's consent, is wrong? What problems can such an action lead to?
- Is retaliation the best way to solve an issue with someone who has treated you unkindly? -Why repeatedly touching someone's hair (a child with an afro in this



instance) can make the person feel uncomfortable? What is an invasion of someone's personal space?

- Is an online friendship a real friendship? How is it different to a friendship outside of the virtual world?
- Think about the influence other people have on you - good and bad. Have you ever agreed to do something you didn't really want to do, because you didn't feel able to say no to that person?

## **High School**

Most of the students in our High School come up from the Lower School and therefore remain with peers they know well. The benefits and challenges of being in the same group for so long a time are central to the ways in which the students develop understanding of human relationships, and navigating social dynamics with their peers is something of which their teachers are ever conscious.

Throughout the High School the curriculum covers a huge variety of topics including social, ecological, and political issues. These are discussed and out of these discussions often arise questions around consent, equality, and privilege, offering an organic route into talking about relationships. These ongoing discussions are further supplemented by dedicated lessons on consent, coercion, gender, sexual orientation, and sex, and students are also given the opportunity to ask questions both openly and anonymously.

Teachers are also active participants in these discussions, giving students the opportunity to engage with adults directly on topics of all kinds. In addition, class groups in the High School are held by Class Guardians to whom they can go with worries or for advice, and individual tutors are assigned to students who are particularly in need of adult support.

We offer Drama and during the four years of High School each student will be involved with at least two major theatrical productions. In this work students have to work together as a group, problem solving and engaging with the creative process in relation to each other, as well as taking on performance roles through which they explore different kinds of relationships, intentions and perspectives as characters and, again, in relation to each other.

As well as discussions on the social aspects of sex and relationships, the students also receive a strong education in the biological aspects of sex and reproduction through dedicated science blocks.

In Class 10 biology students study human body systems, specifically looking at the dynamic wholeness of the human organism. This includes the endocrine system: hormones and their relationship to the male and female reproductive system, detailed study of the anatomy and physiology of these systems, and study of the

menstrual cycle. Sexually transmitted infections (such as genital warts, chlamydia, HIV/AIDS) are looked at in detail as well as contraception. In-depth studies of diseases allows students to identify how body systems work in balance with each other, how to keep healthy, and how and what happens when they malfunction.

Embryology is a core main lesson block in Class 11. Students recall their understanding of the female and male reproductive systems and related hormones leading on to an in- depth study of the development of the human embryo from conception to pregnancy. Details of organ formation and the phases of birth, childhood and the human life journey are discussed down to the cellular level: cell structure, and function, life processes are and genetics are also discussed. Evolutionary aspects of human embryo development are compared with animal embryo developments questioning self-consciousness and individuality. Students are also given the opportunity to meet and talk with a mother and baby and ask questions about pregnancy and birth. The block culminates in a self- directed project on an aspect of embryology, wherein the students engage in more in- depth study or topics such as abortion, the effect of alcohol and drugs on conception and pregnant, genetic diseases, CRISP-R babies etc.

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Approved by the Chair of Trustees

June 2023