April, 2013

Dear Parent/Guardian,

Social Personal and Health Education (SPHE) is a very important element of the school curriculum. SPHE covers a wide range of topics such as self identity, making decisions, citizenship and relationships, which equip children with many of the skills and knowledge needed in today’s world.

The Relationship and Sexuality element of the programme (RSE) includes the learning, understanding and the development of attitudes, beliefs and values about relationships, sexual identity and intimacy.

The main aims of the RSE programme are:

* To enhance the personal development, well being and self-esteem of each child
* To enable each child to gain an understanding of and respect for human love, reproduction and sexual activity in a sensitive and measured way
* To enable the child develop healthy friendships and relationships
* To develop and promote a sense of wonder and awe at the process of birth and new life

Within this context, there are a number of sensitive issues such as the naming of parts of the body, pregnancy, adolescence and reproduction. Our school policy outlines that these issues will primarily be taught in 3rd, 4th, 5th and 6th class. We are now advising parents in advance that this will take place in the coming weeks. We encourage you to talk to your son about what he will learn through RSE in a mature and respectful way.

The following guidelines have been put in place to ensure everyone is happy with the delivery of the RSE programme. These are taken from our RSE policy, which, along with other school policies, is available to parents on the School Website. Please read through the guidelines and do not hesitate to contact me should you have any queries or comments.

* The sections within the RSE programme which have been identified as sensitive issues will be taught in 3rd, 4th, 5th and 6th class:

3rd class: naming the parts of the body

4th class: pregnancy

5th class: adolescence

6th class: reproduction

* The programme is taught within the ethos of the school and contemporary issues/topics are dealt with by the teacher at a level appropriate to the age and stage of development of pupils within a moral and spiritual framework.
* Relationships and Sexuality Education is an on-going process throughout life. A child's first experience of love, of intimacy and of relationships takes place in the family. Parents and the family are acknowledged as the primary educators of their children. We work in a supportive role with the parents, by complementing their role with a school based programme in RSE.
* All the content objectives of the RSE Programme will be covered by the time children leave sixth class.
* If a visitor or guest speaker is invited to a class to enhance the delivery of the RSE programme, the class teacher will remain present in the class. Parents will be informed of such a visit in advance of the visit. Parents are encouraged to use this opportunity to discuss these topics with their children beforehand.
* A parent's right to withdraw a pupil from the sensitive issues process will be honoured on the understanding that the parent(s) is taking full responsibility for this aspect of education themselves.
* Parents are obliged to inform the school in writing of their decision to withdraw the child from the sensitive issues classes. Any parent who wishes to withdraw their child are asked to discuss with the principal how this may be facilitated.
* Teachers do not cover topics such as contraception and same sex friendships. Children who ask questions in class on content outside the designated curriculum are encouraged to discuss the issue with their parents.
* **The course content for 5th and 6th is presented via the DVD *Busy Bodies.* This will be on loan to the parents of the boys in 5th and 6th and it is meant to be for parental viewing only. Parents will receive the DVD shortly following this letter. It would be appreciated if it were returned to the school as soon as possible after viewing. The 5th class boys will be presented the part of the *Busy Bodies* Programme that pertains to adolescence only ie puberty and menstruation. Reproduction ie sexual intercourse and conception is covered in 6th class only.**
* The school has no responsibility for any information which the pupil may receive outside the direct teaching of the RSE lessons. It is important that parents be aware that these topics will be discussed amongst the boys and often leads to confusion and /or misinformation. Parents play a vital role in consolidating this course content through informal discussions at home.
* Questions arising from curriculum content will be addressed by the teacher or by the visitor in a sensible, sensitive and age-appropriate manner. Questions arising outside of the curriculum will be referred back to the parent(s).

We are very aware of the importance and sensitivity of teaching the RSE programme to our pupils and we thank you for your ongoing support in ensuring your son will have received a balanced education in Scoil Mhuire Naofa, which will prepare them not only for secondary school, but for life.

Is mise le meas,

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Anne Marie Moylan