



Catholic Diocese of Portsmouth  
**HUMAN SEXUALITY AND PERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS**

**Revised Instruction for Catholic Schools on  
Relationships Education (RE) and  
Relationships and Sex Education (RSE)**

The aim of this Instruction is to help each school devise its own policies, guidelines and teaching materials for educating children in the true meaning of human sexuality and personal relationships according to the teaching of the Catholic Church and in light of the legislation on Relationships and Sex Education of 2020. The document thus endeavours to articulate the Christian vision of human happiness in a life lived in fidelity to Christ with love and respect for neighbour.

It has six parts:

- Legislation of September 2020
- Doctrinal Principles
- Today's Context
- RE/RSE in a Catholic School
- Some Practical Principles
- Recommended Resources

**1. LEGISLATION FROM SEPTEMBER 2020**

*The 2015 diocesan guidelines*

1. In June of 2015, after extensive consultation, I issued the policy document, *Human Sexuality and Personal Relationships: Guidelines for Catholic Schools on Sex and Relationships Education* to the governors, head teachers, chaplains, staff and parents of the Catholic schools of the Diocese of Portsmouth. In the light of the regulations (*Relationships Education, Relationships and Sex Education [RSE] and Health Education*) from September 2020 for all schools in England, I wish to reiterate the vision outlined in the previous document, whilst encouraging fresh approaches, with an endorsement of reliable resources, towards delivering these subject areas within the curriculum. Catholic schools have always had the duty of forming children in the true meaning of human sexuality and personal relationships according to the teaching of Christ and the Catholic Church, in full cooperation with parents. In his Foreword to the guidance, the then Secretary of State reminds us: "parents and carers are the prime educators for children on many of these matters. Schools complement and reinforce this role and have told us that they see building on what pupils learn at home as an important part of delivering a good education."

*The impact of the new legislation*

2. Our schools should feel reassured by the expectations placed upon them. Much of what is required from September 2020 they are already doing in many ways, day to day. There are practical challenges to face such as designing and delivering these new subjects and integrating them into the timetable. As many schools face financial pressures around

personnel and resources, this will not be easy. Yet the DfE and Ofsted do not expect schools to strike a perfect balance straight away on time and resources allocated to implement the guidance. This is a gradual process over time and the DfE reviews the regulations every three years.

Catholic schools in the Channel Islands have to comply with different but similar requirements set by their education authorities but the principles and instructions laid out in this new Instruction here apply equally to them.

Catholic schools, as *Catholic Formation Communities*, will need to step up to the challenges the changes in the law bring. I am confident that with creativity, deeper generosity and fidelity to Christ, our schools can continue to be the centres of love, care and the formation of intentional discipleship that they have always aspired to be and use this new expectation as an opportunity to redouble efforts in appreciation and understanding of Christian anthropology. Clause 19 of the DfE Guidance states: "A good understanding of pupils' faith backgrounds and positive relationships between the school and local faith communities help to create a constructive context for the teaching of these subjects." I want us all to draw new inspiration and courage from this especially in regard to the way our schools can, indeed must, actively engage with parents/carers in developing both policies for and provision of the new subjects.

#### *The role of parents*

3. It is imperative that we continue to fully recognise that parents and carers are the primary educators and protectors of their children. Parents/carers must always be kept fully informed about all aspects of RE/RSE so that they can be assisted to discuss with their children at home about what they are learning. Whilst the aim is for every parent/carer to have the fullest confidence and trust in the provision of these areas of the curriculum in all our schools in the Diocese, it is most important both in terms of natural law, Catholic teaching, as well as statutory regulation that parents/carers are clearly made aware of their right to withdraw their child from sex education if it is taught in primary schools which must be automatically granted. What may be more challenging is the change in the law in respect of parents only having a right to request withdrawal from any sex education component within RE/RSE in secondary schools. The Guidance stipulates that this can only be up to age 15 or three terms prior to the child's 16<sup>th</sup> birthday. (See paragraphs 45-50 pp. 17-18). This obviously cuts across our cherished principle of the natural rights of parents, at least until age 18. Senior leaders and governors will therefore need to exercise great prudence and diligence if such situations arise, particularly if a pupil over 16 chooses to claim legally the right to override the wishes of their parents on such sensitive issues in relation to the school. The Catholic Academies and Schools Office ("CASO") team is always available to assist upon request. Should parents/carers wish to withdraw their children for whatever reason, no matter how rarely the request or few in number, the school must do all it can to engender an authentic dialogue with the family clarifying issues of concern and at all times encouraging as well as supporting the natural capacity of the parents/carers to supplement the learning at school within the home.

#### *Challenges for a Catholic school*

4. This revised document reiterates a summary of the teaching of the Church about human beings – created, fallen and gloriously redeemed – and the role of sexuality in our well-being and happiness. It acknowledges the difficulties today both in transmitting the Church's teaching and living up to it. In offering this vision, we recognise the challenges that everyone in our school and parish communities faces in living up to these Christian ideals and the genuine pastoral sensitivity that should always be shown to those who fall short or view these matters differently. Yet we must also recognise with thanksgiving that through his Church God has given us the manifold means of his grace, with the help needed to grow in human maturity and to aspire in practice to what Christians profess.

Many of our children have a different lived experience at home from what is put forward here and care and sensitivity will be needed in presenting RE/RSE teaching. Yet know that the mandate from the Lord, over and above any obligation in civil law, is always to propose the Gospel never to impose it. We must teach and preach the truth in love about the human person and bodily integrity however challenging it may be. These principles some of which I outlined

in 2015 should be read again in conjunction with the new *Directory of Recommended Resources* from the CASO Office, the contents of which I endorse by way of offering our schools practical support, encouragement and inspiration for the task ahead.

## 2. DOCTRINAL PRINCIPLES

### *Human beings are created in God's image*

1. One of God's most wonderful gifts to man and woman is sexuality. Sexuality, erotic desires and the ability to experience physical pleasure is God's ingenious way of making us capable of entering into intimate, happy and loving relationships with others (YOUCHAT 400). Indeed, the Catholic tradition teaches that loving relationship is at the very heart of God. In the Blessed Trinity, the Father and the Son give themselves totally to each Other in love, and the Love that unites Them is a Person, the Holy Spirit. As in the Blessed Trinity, so too human love involves both self-giving and self-sacrifice. In the Book of Genesis, we read that every human person is made in "the image and likeness of God" (Gen 1: 27) and God has 'written into' the humanity of man and woman the vocation, capacity and responsibility of love and communion (*Catechism of the Catholic Church* [CCC] 2331). There is an immense dignity in being human! The Catholic reverence for all human life, from conception through to natural death, is rooted in this conviction. Furthermore, Genesis portrays men and women as equal partners who enjoy a relationship of intimacy with God. Every man and every woman, in acknowledging their common nature as human beings, can also acknowledge the difference and complementarity of each sex (CCC 2333). There are of course many forms of love, but the most beautiful form on earth is the love between a man and a woman who give themselves to each other in marriage (YOUCHAT 402).

### *... wounded by sin*

2. The intimate and happy relationship between human beings and God, established in the beginning, was wounded by sin (cf. the narrative of Adam and Eve in Genesis 3: 1-24). The account in the Book of Genesis reminds us how sin brings about isolation, division and conflict. Sin impedes our growth as loving persons. Even after Baptism, which takes away Original Sin, wayward desires remain ('concupiscence') that threaten to weaken us and to lead us away from the right path into unloving and immoral actions. Consequently, chastity and purity, that is, the "successful integration of sexuality within a person leading to their inner unity as a bodily and spiritual being" (CCC 2337), can be a life-long and sometimes challenging project, an "apprenticeship in self mastery" (CCC 2339)

### *... yet gloriously redeemed by Christ*

3. Through his life, death and resurrection, Jesus Christ has rescued humankind from the power of sin. The belief that 'the Word was made flesh' (John 1:14) underlines the goodness and significance of the human body. The Christian's life is a life lived in union with Jesus Christ in his Body the Church ('discipleship'). Formed by the Word of God and nourished by the sacraments, especially the Holy Eucharist, the Christian life is an extension of the incarnation, death and resurrection of the Master. Indeed, Christ has left us an example of selfless love, which both shows us the way and also empowers us ('grace') to fulfil our potential as loving human beings, body and soul. We reach true happiness through dying to self and rising to a new way of living.

### *The two sexes and the bond of marriage*

4. The Book of Genesis shows the union of man and woman in marriage as the chief purpose of God's creation of the two sexes (cf. CCC 1605). This bond between husband and wife involves total self-giving and self-sacrifice, one for the other, just as Jesus said: "Have you not read that the Creator from the beginning made them male and female and that he said: This is why a man must leave father and mother and cling to his wife and the two become one body? They are no longer two, therefore, but one body" (Matthew 19: 5-6). Moreover, this bond of 'one flesh' is also meant to be fruitful and generative of children and a family. This is why the Catholic tradition teaches that marriage has a two-fold purpose: it is for love and for life. In other words, marriage is a union of one man and one woman. It is based on total, exclusive, faithful, self-giving mutual love (cf. *Gaudium et Spes* 47-52) and this union is meant

to be 'open to life.' it is fruitful and it leads, by procreation, to the establishment of new life, the birth of children and the community of a family (John Paul II *Letter to Families* 7-8).

#### *Developing the virtues*

5. St. John Paul II spoke of sexuality as 'saying something': that the body itself has a language (*Familiaris Consortio* 32). When we act with our bodies, we are speaking to others, and we can communicate in ways that are unhealthy as well as healthy. The key issue is how to develop the virtue or good habit of chastity. A chaste person is one who is not the slave of their drives and emotions but one who has consciously accepted their sexuality and integrated it well into their personality (YOUCAT 404-5). Chastity is for every person, young and old, alone or married (YOUCHAT 406). It can involve a struggle, especially during adolescence and early adulthood. Whilst the Church is not afraid to profess that sexual union should always take place in the context of that committed love-relationship which is marriage, we all recognise that the adolescent journey toward sexual maturity can be difficult and confusing, not least in today's context. Even so, adolescents should be encouraged and actively helped to grow towards maturity and responsibility and thus to realise the Christian life. Constant prayer, frequent confession, receiving the Holy Eucharist, along with the cultivation of self-discipline and virtuous habits, are essential. Chastity can be achieved by God's grace through the supernatural means he gives us in his Church, for grace perfects nature and strengthens our weakness (cf. CCC 2338-45). Successful role models for the young, as seen in the examples of family life well lived, not least in the Scriptures and in the lives of the Saints, can be a great help and an inspiration.

### **3. TODAY'S CONTEXT**

#### *Different views*

1. Today, people in our society have all sorts of different views about sexuality and human relationships and often the popular beliefs of society can be markedly different from the teachings of the Catholic Church. Indeed, even many Catholics hold beliefs and views on sex and relationships that are different from what the Church teaches. In a society where divorce, same-sex partnerships, sex before marriage and cohabitation are often accepted as part of 'normal' life, the Church's teachings can appear outmoded, authoritarian and even unrealistic. Contemporary culture treats sexual morality in relativistic terms - a world of mixed messages visible in the social media and across the internet. The Catholic position, based on objective moral principles, is decidedly counter-cultural.

#### *The way to true happiness*

2. In a Catholic school, our teaching should reflect the Church's teaching, since we believe that this is the sure way to lasting human happiness and fulfilment. We need to show our children and our young people that the teachings of the Church are not about restricting fun or pleasure but about helping people to find true happiness through love and responsibility. We need to enlighten them about Christian values and to explain and promote positively our teachings in everything we do, enabling them to reject damaging cultural trends or peer pressures. We do recognise that Christian love and family life require effort and self-sacrifice. We should not keep youngsters ignorant, but we must also give them an opportunity to explore and to understand the teachings of the Church, their meaning, wisdom and beauty.

#### *Various resources*

3. Sometimes the resource material for RE/RSE for use with children in schools is at best unhelpful or too sexually explicit; others portray casual sexual relationships as 'normal.' It is important to take care when selecting resources that they accord with the Church's teaching and the Christian way of life. This is why the *Directory of Recommended Resources* is so important. It is by no means the finished product as it will incorporate new initiatives and programmes as time goes by from mutual sharing of best practice across schools or networking with other dioceses.

#### *The ethos*

4. RE/RSE content must contribute to the students' development of a positive self-image,

with real respect and love of each other, whilst emphasising sexuality as a gift from God, which recognises the beauty and dignity of the human person. We need to assist students with the physical and emotional changes that puberty brings, encouraging them to think seriously about the sacredness of their body and why it is important to use respectful terminology when talking about sex, relationships and their bodies. Purity and the virtue of chastity must be promoted. We must help students recognise that the proper place for sexual relationships is within the loving and permanent relationship of matrimony.

#### **4. RE/RSE IN A CATHOLIC SCHOOL**

##### *The need to offer RE/RSE*

1. In the section, 'The Need for Sex Education' of his 2016 Apostolic Exhortation *Amoris Laetitia* on love in the family, Pope Francis states:

*"The Second Vatican Council spoke of the need for "a positive and prudent sexual education" to be imparted to children and adolescents "as they grow older", with "due weight being given to the advances in the psychological, pedagogical and didactic sciences." We may well ask ourselves if our educational institutions have taken up this challenge. It is not easy to approach the issue of sex education in an age when sexuality tends to be trivialized and impoverished. It can only be seen within the broader framework of an education for love, for mutual self-giving. In such a way, the language of sexuality would not be sadly impoverished but illuminated and enriched. The sexual urge can be directed through a process of growth in self-knowledge and self-control capable of nurturing valuable capacities for joy and for loving encounter (280)."*

The Church, through its ministry of catechesis and education is involved in formation of relationships and sexuality precisely because of our Christian beliefs about God and the absolute dignity of the human person made in the image and likeness of God. This belief underpins the approach to all education in a Catholic school. Our approach therefore is rooted in the Catholic Church's teaching of the human person and presented in a positive framework of Christ's message of unconditional love.

##### *A Catholic perspective*

2. At the heart of the Christian life is our desire to live in communion with the Holy Trinity of the Father, and the Son and the Holy Spirit who are united in loving relationship, embracing all of humanity and creation. At the root of this belief is the doctrine that human sexuality is God's gift, reflecting God's beauty, which shares in His creativity. RE/RSE must be concerned with nurturing all that is integral to the physical, spiritual, emotional, moral, social and intellectual development of pupils. It is centred on Christ's vision of being fully human that is good news. It must be positive and prudent, taking great care to foster a healthy sense of modesty, the natural means whereby we defend our personal privacy and prevent ourselves and others from being turned into objects to be used. As I stipulated clearly in 2015; "Objectively, the content of classes should not offend against modesty. Subjectively, the content of classes must not offend against privacy." Again as Pope Francis declares in *Amoris Laetitia* n 281:

*"The information has to come at a proper time and in a way suited to their age. It is not helpful to overwhelm them with data without also helping them to develop a critical sense in dealing with the onslaught of new ideas and suggestions, the flood of pornography and the overload of stimuli that can deform sexuality. Young people need to realize that they are bombarded by messages that are not beneficial for their growth towards maturity. They should be helped to recognize and to seek out positive influences, while shunning the things that cripple their capacity for love. We also have to realize that a new and more appropriate language is needed in introducing children and adolescents to the topic of sexuality."*

##### *An education for relationships*

3. From a holistic Catholic perspective, it is good to think of RE/RSE as relationship and sexuality formation. The 'relationship' ought to be first and foremost about how we understand ourselves in relation to God and that this in turn, is enriched and embellished by our appreciation of human sexuality as a gift with which to return God's love for us in the way we

love and respect others. This is what a theology of the body is essentially about and must be increasingly drawn upon to better inform and shape how educators can approach this sensitive and delicate area. It is not just about passing on information, relationship and sexuality formation must be a truly virtue-based formation over several years, that leads the young person at the appropriate time in their personal development to understand what the profound difference is between simply 'having sex' [with anyone] and a husband and wife 'making love' in a lifelong committed marital relationship open to life.

#### *Promotion of chastity*

4. As unfashionable as it sounds, we must never lose sight of the need to promote and encourage that virtue for which every human heart, no matter how wounded by sin yearns. Chastity should be promoted as the underlying theme. To be chaste is "to love with an undivided heart" (YOUCHAT 406). Chastity needs to be presented positively, not as repression but as a spiritual energy ('grace' and 'virtue'). Irrespective of whatever topics or areas are covered in RE/RSE, the underlying message must always be that Christ is the Model of chastity and amplified through the joyful witness of His Blessed Mother and that the Saints echo down through the ages, the real possibility of living this virtue daily by dependence on the Holy Spirit through the sacramental and spiritual means provided by the Church. To be unchaste is to be torn and not free, which is why the Church has a special duty to assist and heal those who are broken or fallen. This is why our Catholic schools are so uniquely placed to deliver these subjects well and fruitfully because our vision is always distinguishing the sinner from the sin, treating those who struggle to live up to the Christian ideals with true mercy and compassion, without being judgmental.

#### *Coping with alternative viewpoints*

5. Alternative views about sex outside of marriage, about contraception, homosexual acts and same sex marriage, IVF and so on should not be presented as neutral or value-free information, but always in relation to the Church's teaching on marriage and loving relationships. It is one thing to acknowledge to and with pupils at an appropriate time what the civil law permits in relation to these choices. It is an altogether different thing to be able to impart clearly and objectively that just because something is legal, does not mean that as Catholics, we regard it as morally permissible. Approaching these topics within the right and proper framework of RE/RSE at secondary school can be done effectively, not least through open and honest discussion and debate but where the essential Christian message of truth and redemption permeates and challenges pupils to think again about the counter-cultural message of the Church's vision for human life and loving.

#### *Sexual Orientation, Transgender and 'LGBT content'*

6. Statutory Guidance requires teaching about sexual orientation and gender identity (which the Guidance calls collectively 'LGBT content') at an appropriate and timely point in the curriculum. Helpfully, the guidance also expects schools to integrate such content fully into their RSE programmes of study. For Catholic schools, this will include a proper and rich understanding of the Church's moral framework within which pupils are enabled to approach these issues. There is no legal requirement for this content to be taught in primary school. The CES model Catholic RSE curriculum, which has been commended by the DfE, does not cover these issues within the curriculum framework until secondary school, and I expect all schools in the diocese to follow that approach.

When they do approach this part of the curriculum, secondary schools must teach the facts and the law about these issues, always within the moral framework set out above, and respecting the sensitivities described below. Schools should bear in mind that the language commonly used in this area can be unhelpful, especially when it is imprecise and / or contested (e.g. conflating various sexual orientations and transgender, varying definitions of sex, gender and gender identity).

If, outside the planned curriculum, questions about these issues arise spontaneously from pupils, schools are required to deal with those questions sensitively and appropriately, as they would any other difficult question arising spontaneously. Schools remain subject to the Equalities Duties in the Equality Act 2010, and sexual orientation and gender reassignment are two of the protected characteristics.

### *Sensitivities*

7. As said before, it goes without saying that all content ought to be sensitive to the often complex family and relational situations within which our children and young persons live. Given that many of our young come from homes with a variety of family models, care needs to be taken to ensure that the subjects at both primary and secondary phases are taught in the context of God's unconditional love, with mercy and compassion, so that parents and students feel supported, not judged or excluded, because their family for some reason does not meet the ideal type.

### *Taking care with outside agencies*

8. Students should only be referred to outside agencies currently working with, or closely associated with the school. Governors and senior leaders must review regularly the use of such agencies and authorities in order to ensure that their policies are not contrary to the teachings of the Catholic Church. These agencies should first be authorised by the headteacher in accordance with the policy of the governors, before they are permitted to give an input in this field. CASO can always be contacted for any advice or guidance on this matter.

## **5. SOME PRACTICAL PRINCIPLES**

1. Parents are the first educators in forming their child in developing personal relationships and specifically in matters of education relating to human sexuality. The school should be, as Pope Francis states in *Amoris Laetitia* 267, an extension of the home. Where RE/RSE classes are given in school, all involved in Catholic schools should accept the right, where the law allows it, for parents to withdraw their children from sex education up until three terms before their 16<sup>th</sup> birthday.

2. RE/RSE in a Catholic school must be fully and always in accordance with the magisterium [teaching authority] of the Church. It must emphasise the central importance of matrimony and the family whilst being sensitive that 'many of our children have a different lived experience at home' acknowledging that whatever household they come from, support, understanding and care is always part of the atmosphere within the school'.

3. In any school-based education relating to personal relationships and sexual relationships, emphasis should be put on the whole person and not just on the biological aspects. Any explanation should incorporate the moral dimension and information should not be imparted as if it were neutral or "value-free." Every child is unique and so the aim is to form each person in love, body, mind and spirit.

4. Chastity should be promoted as the underlying theme.

5. The virtue of abstinence should be promoted rather than suggesting that sexual intercourse is fine "as long as it is 'safe sex'".

6. Alternative views about sex outside of marriage, about contraception, homosexual acts, IVF and so on should not be presented as neutral or value-free information, but always in relation to the Church's teaching on marriage and loving relationships.

7. In their day-to-day dealings with students, all staff in a Catholic school are expected to support the teachings of the Catholic Church and are accountable to parents and governors. This is especially important in matters relating to personal relationships and sexual morality, and to what is taught in RE/RSE.

8. As stated above, parents are the first educators of their children and so the staff of a Catholic school should encourage students to seek the advice of their parents and carers when requesting counselling on issues relating to personal relationships and sex education.

9. Students should only be referred to outside agencies currently working with, or closely associated with the school. Governors and senior management should review regularly the use of such agencies and authorities in order to ensure that their policies are not contrary to the teachings of the Catholic Church. These agencies should first be authorised by the headteacher in accordance with the policy of the governors, before they are permitted to give an input in this field.

## **RESPONSIBILITIES**

Schools that offer RE/RSE at the primary phase should do so in harmony with the diocesan policy outlined here.

In secondary schools, RE/RSE is a legal requirement. It appears within the curriculum of several subject areas including science, PSHE and RE. Given this diversity of inputs and methodologies, it is important to avoid giving students confused or mixed messages. Regardless of the subject area, any instruction in sexuality should be presented in the context of the Church's teaching on sexuality and the sacrament of marriage.

All adults within the school community are responsible for promoting the Church's teaching. However, the RE department has the chief responsibility for overseeing the teaching about personal relationships, sex education and PSHE. This responsibility lies with the RE department because it situates sexuality within its 'global' human, moral and spiritual context. The school's senior management and RE staff delegate various aspects of RE/RSE to other departments and teachers.

## **PREPARING AND DELIVERING CLASSES**

1. RE/RSE is an education in love and responsibility and so the moral dimension should always be incorporated. Consciences need to be formed, so that a child is able to recognise the value of his or her peers and act appropriately.

2. Each child's formation in RE/RSE must be tailored to the needs of the individual, possibly at times with a teacher of the same sex as the students and with an emphasis on dialogue and discussion, whilst recognising the normative status of the Church's teaching.

3. Classes should refer to the Word of God. This is revealed through the Bible and the Church's Tradition, and taught by the teaching authority of the Church. The personal love of Jesus Christ should be emphasised in teaching objective moral principles.

4. We acknowledge and respect the presence in our schools of other faith-traditions and their teaching on sexuality, even though we may not be able to provide support for those communities and their teachings.

5. RE/RSE must be age-appropriate, positive, prudent, clear and delicate.

6. Objectively, the content of classes should not offend against modesty. Subjectively, the content of classes must not offend against privacy. Materials need to be age-appropriate, respecting the maturity of the students involved.

## **RECOMMENDED RESOURCES**

Please contact the Catholic Academy and Schools Office for advice on approved resources that can be used to deliver the RSE programme in school. Only approved resources and schemes can be used and are part of the compliance questions during a Catholic Schools Inspectorate inspection.