

**Conduct of Relationships, Sexual Health & Parenthood Education in Schools
statutory guidance published by the Scottish Government**

ADVICE FOR CATHOLIC SCHOOLS

January 2015

Background

On 12th December 2014 the Scottish Government published statutory guidance on the Conduct of Relationships, Sexual Health & Parenthood Education in Schools¹, replacing the former Circular 2/2001 which had been in place since March 2001.

This guidance, which applies to all schools managed by local authorities, sets out the Scottish Government's expectations in relation to the manner in which such education is conducted in local authority schools. It reflects the introduction of the Marriage and Civil Partnership (Scotland) Act 2014 which now permits same sex couples to marry.

Implications for Catholic Schools

The statutory guidance is unambiguous in its statement that "religious authorities with a role in denominational education provide guidance on RSHP education for their denominational schools and that right will continue as at present" (para. 41).

N.B. The section of the document which refers to how the guidance affects Catholic schools is included as an appendix to this paper.

This means that Catholic schools in Scotland are enabled by the Scottish Government and required by the Church to follow Church guidance, provided via the Scottish Catholic Education Service, to give witness to the Catholic faith and to uphold the tradition of Catholic education.

Within this tradition, Catholic schools deliver education about sexual health and relationships in a holistic way which is not confined to learning only about how our bodies develop biologically, or about how our emotions can affect our behaviour. Across the range of experiences which Catholic schools provide, teachers help children and young people to learn about themselves as God's children, about the beauty and dignity of their bodies, their gender and their sexuality which God has gifted to them, about the care which they should take to protect their health, about personal relationships which are respectful, responsible and loving towards others, about understanding moral truth and about their capacity for creating new life as parents. They also learn about why the Catholic Church teaches that marriage is the ideal context for sexual intimacy and self-giving between a man and a woman.

¹ The document can be read on-line here: <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2014/12/8526/1> or downloaded here: <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2014/12/8526/downloads>

Teaching about these important issues cannot be separated from teaching about the fullness of life - physical, emotional, intellectual and spiritual - which God intends for us and which we experience in and through love, in our relationships with God and with each other. In Catholic schools, learning about how life begins, about our hopes and aspirations, about our relationships with others and about our ultimate destiny are all predicated on our belief in Jesus Christ and our values which are grounded in the Gospel.

Thus, learning about RSHP is directly connected to learning in Religious Education. This is evident in the resources which SCES has developed to guide teachers on the content of teaching programmes.

So, Catholic schools which follow Church guidance for Religious Education and RSHP² will be fully compliant with the requirements of Equalities legislation and with national and local government expectations. Head Teachers should ensure that school programmes and policy documents reflect the advice provided within guidance published by SCES. They are able to seek advice via their local Diocese, or from SCES, if they are uncertain about the suitability of certain resources.

Issues to note

Schools should take into account the following additional guidance when reviewing school policy and practice.

■ Involving parents (paras. 54-61)

The Catholic Church teaches that, in this area of human formation, the responsibility of the school should be subsidiary to that of parents. Ideally the role of teachers should be to support parents in nurturing their children's physical, emotional and spiritual growth. So schools must take care to be sensitive to the views of parents & carers and must apprise them of the schemes that they use to deliver RSHP. Schools should follow best practice in providing parents & carers annually with information and with opportunities to view teaching materials and to discuss relevant issues or concerns. This information should be provided within school handbooks and on school websites. Parents & carers must be consulted and kept informed by schools when schools are reviewing or developing teaching programmes which touch on particularly sensitive issues.

Experience shows that, where parents are fully briefed on the school's approach to this important area of the curriculum, most feel content and assured. However, Head Teachers should note that parents, or young people over the age of 16 themselves, have the right not to participate in specific lessons on sex education. Of course in a Catholic school, where RSHP is largely integrated with and closely connected to the teaching of Religious Education, it could be difficult to isolate particular lessons in which aspects of RSHP are discussed in a discrete way, separate from other aspects of learning.

² This Is Our Faith, God's Loving Plan (Primary), Called to Love (Secondary)

■ **Family contexts**

Recognising that children and young people come from a diverse variety of family contexts, teachers must take care to avoid making comments which might appear to imply moral judgements on individuals, their relationships or their family circumstances. Conversely, such sensitivity should not prevent a positive presentation of the rich Christian vision of the human person, relationships, sexuality and Matrimony. In delivering this sensitive area of the curriculum, teachers should take particular care with their use of language to ensure that they are being both “faithful to God and faithful to the human person”. In other words, while being sensitive to the realities of their pupils’ diverse family circumstances, teachers should not offer advice which condones relationships or actions which are at odds with the moral teaching of the Church.

Further advice for teachers is provided in the resources and training provided for *‘Called to Love’* and *‘God’s Loving Plan’*, the core resources which have been developed for Catholic schools.

■ **Being inclusive**

Catholic schools are inclusive communities which welcome, value and support all young people. They promote respect for the dignity and worth of each individual person, as we believe that each of us is made in God’s image and likeness. This tenet underpins our approach to promoting respectful, positive relationships and countering bullying and discrimination of any form. We should expect teachers to challenge behaviour, language or attitudes which demean or damage the dignity of any person by criticising their ethnic or social background, creed, disability, gender, appearance or sexual orientation.

■ **Teaching about Marriage**

While the Scottish Government guidance states that “no school or individual teacher is under a duty to support, promote or endorse one type of relationship over another” (para. 28), it is quite clear that Catholic schools are required to promote the Catholic vision of marriage and to help young people to understand its significance. However, it will be appropriate at certain stages, when discussing various forms of relationships, for teachers to acknowledge that the Marriage and Civil Partnership (Scotland) Act 2014 enables same-sex couples to marry.

■ **Training for Teachers**

Catholic schools should ensure that all teachers who are responsible for delivering RSHP education are provided with appropriate training and opportunities for career-long professional learning.

■ Working with External Partners

Head Teachers must ensure that any input to RSHP education which is to be delivered by “external partners” is from individuals and groups who respect and complement the beliefs and values of the school (para. 50). All such inputs should be planned and materials should be previewed to ensure their suitability. IT is not appropriate for materials to be used to promote relationships or actions which are at odds with the moral teachings of the Church. To ensure continuity of teaching and effective support for pupils, class teachers should always be involved in working alongside external partners.

Head Teachers are encouraged to contact SCES to discuss any aspect of this advice.

Appendix 1

Extract from Conduct of Relationships, Sexual Health & Parenthood Education in Schools, referring to Catholic schools

Denominational Education

38. In Scotland, provision is made for some publicly funded schools that are denominational in character. The majority of these schools are Roman Catholic and they are an integral part of the public education system. Denominational schools play an important part in Scottish education. The Scottish Government values this provision and is committed to maintaining it.
39. The Scottish Government supports the right of the Roman Catholic Church to give witness to its faith, and to uphold the traditions of Catholic education. We value the contribution made by Catholic schools, and have no intention of changing the current position where faith aspects of the curriculum in Catholic schools are determined by the Scottish Catholic Education Service acting on behalf of the Bishops' Conference of Scotland. These faith aspects relate to religious education and religious observance.
40. In February 2011, the Scottish Government issued advice to local authorities and head teachers reiterating that the experiences and outcome for Religious Education in Roman Catholic schools should be delivered in conjunction with guidance provided by the Scottish Catholic Education Service. We have no plans to change this advice.
41. National guidance on the curriculum is always developed on the basis of wide consultation. It is recognised that religious authorities with a role in denominational education provide guidance on RSHP education for their denominational schools and that right will continue as at present. This national guidance should be seen to be complementary to the guidance provided by the religious authority while at the same time serving as a useful basis for everyone.