

EDUCATION FOR PERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS POLICY



Bishop Challoner
Catholic Secondary School

Introduction

"I came that they may have life and have it abundantly."
(John 10:10)

Education focuses on the growth and development of the whole person. It should aim to integrate a person's intellectual, spiritual, moral, emotional, psychological, social and physical development. The quote from St. John's gospel (above) gives Christians an image of how that life is to be fulfilled. God as Trinity provides the model of all relationships – the communion of Father, Son and Spirit. God is love and the communion of love is reflected in the Godhead. We love because we have first been loved by others; we are called to love one another as we have first been loved by God.

Throughout a student's time at Bishop Challoner Catholic School they will receive a variety of learning experiences, some formal, others 'hidden', which all form part of the educational process and which teach a student how to form, nourish and sustain relationships.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church states:

"The human person needs to live in society. Society is not for him an extraneous addition but a requirement of his nature. Through the exchange with others, mutual service and dialogue with his brethren, man develops his potential; he thus responds to his vocation."

[1879]

Attitudes and values develop in many different school contexts making it vitally important that the school reflects values of Christian community. In this way, Education for Personal Relationships stands within the broader context of the spiritual life of the school, the school's pastoral support system, and approaches to rewards and discipline or behaviour for learning within the school as a whole. More specifically, attitudes and values in relation to sexuality will be developed through Religious Education, Personal, Social and Health Education (PSHE) and the Science Curriculum.

Parents are also key figures in educating their children for relationships and sexuality. Therefore, parents are seen by the school as the primary partner in supporting the personal growth of an individual child. By working together it is hoped that school and parents can realize the school's mission of 'doing ordinary things extraordinarily well' in caring for each student's personal development. This school / parent partnership will always be invaluable in nurturing Christian values in our young people, but it is particularly important for both the school and parents to have a shared understanding in relation to relationships and sexuality in the context of our present social climate. Parents have been consulted during the writing of this policy and will be consulted at future policy reviews.

Relationships are central to our human life in general and our school life in particular. As a Catholic school we should aspire to the dominical commands to 'love God, neighbour and self'. Relationships between all should reflect this in the spirit of the Gospel and specifically the Beatitudes. As educators of the whole human person in our context we have a calling to present the Catholic view on human relationships. Tradition and reason give us a perspective that often conflicts with the experience and context of our young people. Therefore EPR, both present and future for our students must be implicit in our own interactions and teaching and explicit in appropriate areas of the curriculum.

Definitions

"Sexuality" is defined in this document as the capacity to love and procreate, particularly the aptitude for forming bonds of communion with others.

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“Love” is defined in this document in the sense of ‘agape’; a free act of self-giving towards another.

Theological and Ethical Framework

“. . . they (children and young people) should receive positive and prudent education in matters relating to sex . . . and young people have the right to be stimulated to make sound moral judgements based on well-informed conscience and to put them into practice with a sense of personal commitment.” (Gravissimum Educationis - para. 3)

“Some children are more sexually aware than in the past and they need to be imbued with sound Christian principles on which to base their relationships. It is all the more urgent that we answer their questions with sensitivity and frankness. They have the right to know the consequences of their actions and true basis on which to form their judgement.” (Bishops’ Low Week Letter 1987)

There are many ways of expressing love for another, and as Christians, we believe that every human relationship should reflect the loving relationship of the Trinity. God is reflected in human love between persons. Sexuality is one means of expressing that love amongst many others. The tragedy of our cultural context is that sexuality has been distorted and diminished because it has become separated from its essential reference to the person as a whole.

The key principles upon which Education for Personal Relationships and Sexuality are based at Bishop Challoner Catholic School reflect the vision for each individual student set out in the school’s mission statement and aims, combined with the positive Catholic vision of sexual relationships.

They are:

- Sexuality is a gift from God.
- We are made to love and be loved.
- What we say with our bodies should reflect what we mean in our hearts and mind.
- Mature Christian sexuality involves openness and long term commitment to others. This is most clearly reflected through the permanence of the sacrament of marriage.
- Genuine love is creative.
- Each person has a duty to inform their own conscience.

Aims and Objectives

As a result of the 1993 Education Act, all Catholic secondary schools are required to make provision for sex education for all pupils registered at the school. The Sex and Relationship Education Guidance document (DFEE, 2000) exemplifies the current guidance on SRE. As a Catholic school our mission is to promote the wellbeing and freedom of the whole human person, understood as created in the image and likeness of God. This means that our approach to Education for Personal Relationships will, of necessity, go well beyond this legal minimum.

In the light of our mission statement the aims and objectives of our Education for Personal Relationships programme are as follows: -

Aims

- To support the development, growth and journey of the whole person towards becoming ‘fully human, fully alive’ as a unique creation made in God’s image.
- To develop positive self esteem.
- To complement and support the education that is already being undertaken by home and family.
- To enable young people to make free lifestyle choices providing a counter culture to the portrayal of sex in the media and society.
- To offer our young people a Catholic Christian framework to help them make informed decisions.

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Objectives

In the light of the aims of our Education for Personal Relationships programme our main objectives are:-

Methodology

- To gain an understanding of where students are in relation to their own knowledge, values and attitudes so that Education for Personal Relationships is both supportive and challenging.
- To provide a forum where pupils can share their concerns and offer a climate of support where they know they will be listened to sensitively.
- To correct misinformation.
- To ensure students recognize the importance of the choices they make (in conscience) and the ways in which these choices mature through knowledge, understanding and Christian belief.

Attitudes and Values

- To encourage students to become aware of their own attitudes and values and understand that these will affect the way they view themselves and others.
- To encourage growth in self respect and self worth recognising that each of us is created in the image and likeness of God.
- To enable students to understand that love (agape) is central and the basis of meaningful relationships epitomized through marriage and family life.

Personal and Social Skills

- To enable students to reflect on their relationships and to recognise the qualities that help relationships grow and develop positively.
- To enable students to recognise the importance of the choices they make and that they are responsible for the decisions they take.
- To help students resist negative peer, social and media pressure.

Knowledge and Understanding

- To increase student understanding of themselves, their own bodies, their emotional development as they grow and change and their relationships with others.
- To explain the process of human procreation.
- To consider carefully responsible parenthood and family planning.
- To give careful consideration of the issue of homosexuality.
- To inform students about HIV and AIDS and other sexually transmitted infections (STI's).
- To enable young people to know and understand the legal framework relating to sexual activity.
- To learn the reasons for delaying sexual activity and for restricting sexual activity to marriage.

Education for Personal Relationships – Ground Rules

In any classes considering issues of relationships and sexuality whether they are delivered through RE, PSHE or Science guidelines are always given to the students about the way in which the class will be conducted. They are: -

- Listen to people when they are speaking.
- Everyone has the right to pass on a question.
- Only one person to speak at a time.
- Laugh with people not at them.
- Encourage people who are less confident.
- Respect other people's opinions.
- Use positive and appropriate language.
- No "put downs".
- No one should be put on the spot or feel threatened.

Good practice suggests that students are more likely to conform to these guidelines if they have ownership of them. So, inviting suggestions for guidelines often elicits those above and more besides.

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Dealing with Sensitive Issues

Pre-Marital / Extra-Marital Sex

From the Christian perspective love, defined as agape, and sexual love are unconditional. Therefore, any attempt to search for happiness through casual sex is fruitless. Sex without commitment or real relationship is far from the self-giving that enriches the whole person. From this perspective, the approach to Education for Personal Relationships at Bishop Challoner will emphasize that marriage represents the desired context for perfect union. Students are encouraged to recognise the consequences of behaviours and taught to educate their consciences in accordance with the traditions of the Church.

Responsible Parenthood

Young people should be made aware that the Church teaches that natural methods of family planning respect the dignity of the married couple. If, however, students are sexually active then the approach at Bishop Challoner seeks to make students aware of the wholeness of sexual actions and to assure them that whatever pressures are put upon them they are not obliged to begin or continue sexual relationships.

HIV and AIDS

To speak as if HIV/AIDS were God's punishment for promiscuity is untrue and grossly offensive. Such thinking is a rejection of human compassion revealed in Jesus.

Homosexuality

The Church recognises the dignity of all people. However, since the Church has always taught that sexual love should always find its true place in marriage, a homosexual partnership and a heterosexual marriage can never be equated. This is the case in English law. The Church seeks to affirm the homosexual as a person, but cannot approve of homosexual genital acts.

Parental Right of Withdrawal

Section 241 of the Education Act 1993 gives parents the right to withdraw their children from any or all parts of a school's programme of sex education, other than those elements which are required by the National Curriculum Science Order (See DFE Circular 5/94 Section 241, paragraphs 16,17,20,23,35). This parental right of withdrawal extends to all pupils in maintained schools, including those over compulsory school age. A pupil in the latter category who sought to challenge the parental decision would if he or she could not resolve the matter with parents, ultimately have to apply to the Courts.

Support Agencies and Guidelines for Operating

Where a student seeks advice on personal matters of sexuality or welfare the role of the adult in a position of responsibility within the school (generally a teacher) is confined to the educational context, following the theological and ethical framework set out in this policy. This means that the teacher should not offer individual advice to a student which is the proper remit of the medical profession or chaplain. The teacher would encourage the student to seek parental advice and to talk to the appropriate support person within the school. In this way, the school makes a distinction between the information and values-based work done in the classroom and advice to individual students.

In addition to the pastoral system of the school, support for students is also available from the Chaplaincy, School Matron and the School Nurse. In relation to their work each of these follow the guidelines set out below:-

- All professionals working at Bishop Challoner School (whether teaching or medical) should be sensitive to the school's distinctive ethos and seek to present their medical advice in this moral context.

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- All professionals working at Bishop Challoner School should seek to bring the school and the home into a closer partnership for supporting young people. As the school is acting *in loco parentis* the school has a duty to inform the parent unless there is a good reason for not doing so.
- Except within the Sacrament of Reconciliation which may take place at St. Joseph's RC Church or within the school grounds, the school can not offer a student complete confidentiality. The degree of confidentiality would always be governed by the need to protect the child.
- If a teacher or medical professional judged that a student's disclosure might raise the possibility of the child being at risk, that is, that there was "reasonable cause to suspect that a child is suffering or is likely to suffer significant harm", then the designated teacher for Child Protection would be informed. (See School Child Protection Procedures).

Organisation of Education for Personal Relationships at Bishop Challoner Catholic Secondary School

1. The Head of RE and Head of PSHE are responsible for the planning and delivery of the Education for Personal Relationships policy. This is completed in consultation with the Assistant Headteacher (Pastoral) and Chaplain.
2. The RE, PSHE (Form tutors) and Science staff will teach the programme.
3. The RE, PSHE and Science staff will co-ordinate their teaching as outlined in this policy. Training will be given to staff involved in teaching sensitive issues as necessary.
4. The specific programme for each year group will be taught in RE, PSHE and Science in mixed classes, with the exception of several PSHE classes as appropriate.
5. The effectiveness of the programme will be reviewed annually in the late summer term by the Heads of RE, PSHE, Chaplain, Head of Science and any other appropriate staff as necessary. This will involve significant elements of student voice.
6. As reflected in all good educational practice our programme of Education for Personal Relationships will be:

Progressive - taking into account all aspects of the growth and development of our pupils.

Integrated - with the whole of the school curriculum recognising the contribution that each element of the curriculum can make.

Co-ordinated - by appropriate senior members of staff.