A model framework for Catholic Secondary RSE

Revised Spring 2026

Introduction

Any teaching about love and sexual relationships in a Catholic school must be rooted in the Catholic Church's teaching about what it is to be truly human in Christ, what it means to live well in relationship with others and be presented within a positive framework of Christian virtue. For this reason, we encourage Catholic schools to speak about Relationship and Sex Education (RSE) rather than Sex and Relationship Education (SRE), since this emphasises the importance of healthy relationships to human well-being, as the core learning within an RSE curriculum.

Pedagogical Principles

A good RSE programme must enshrine core pedagogical virtues – that it is, it must, above else, qualify as good education. Therefore, it will be:

Progressive & Developmental

The learning needs to reflect each stage of the development of the person. It needs to be part of both the Primary and Secondary phase of education and it needs to be appropriate to the age and stage of development of children and young people during the different phases of their education. It also needs to be continuous and developmental. It should be a process which is planned from beginning to end with one phase of education informing the work of the next so that children and young people can be led to a deeper and fuller understanding by degrees at a rate which corresponds to their maturing.

Adaptive

Schools must ensure that RSE is sensitive to the different needs of individual pupils and is taught in a way that allows access to those pupils at different stages of cognitive and emotional development. Learning and teaching methods will need to be adapted and specialist resources and training will need to be provided for those with particular needs. Schools, therefore, should ensure that children with special educational needs and disabilities are not at any point withdrawn from RSE because of lack of resources and training or to catch up in other subjects.

Cross-curricular

Since a Catholic school is committed to the education of the whole person, teaching on relationships and sexuality needs to be reflected in each relevant part of the curriculum. Whilst, for example, some aspects of RSE will be more appropriately explored in science lessons and some more appropriately explored in RE lessons, each should be informed by the other. Each discipline should speak with consistency about the meaning of human love and the virtues that are enshrined in the Church's teaching on human love.

Integrated

A well-planned programme will not just ensure that there is correspondence between phases and across disciplines but will ensure that parents are fully involved in the planning and evaluation of the teaching of relationships and sexuality. Ideally, pupils should hear a consistent message about the meaning and value of human sexuality at home, in the parish and at school. This can only be achieved if the home, parish and school work to integrate the teaching of RSE.

Co-ordinated

None of these educational goals are possible if RSE is not given the time and importance it deserves by those who plan and implement its delivery in school. RSE must be taken seriously by school leaders; led properly by someone who has the time and expertise to co-ordinate the subject with dedication and commitment at a senior level; taught by those committed to doing it well; taught as part of a whole-school approach by those who are able to celebrate – not merely tolerate – the teaching of the Church on love and human sexuality.

Balanced

Promoting Catholic virtues, schools should ensure that children and young people are offered a broad and balanced RSE programme which provides them with clear factual, scientific information when relevant and meets the statutory requirements placed on schools. In secondary schools this includes teaching students about the laws relating to forced marriage, female genital mutilation, abortion and equalities legislation (including the Marriage (Same Sex Couples) Act 2013).

The structure of this model framework.

This model framework covers KS3, KS4 and KS5 and is based on three core themes within which there will be broad overlap. It is adaptable to the age and ability of the pupils. The three themes are:

- **Created and loved by God** (this explores the individual)
  The Christian imperative to love self, made in the image and likeness of God, shows an understanding of the importance of valuing and understanding oneself as the basis for personal relationships.
- **Created to love others** (this explores an individual's relationships with others)
  God is love. We are created out of love and for love. The command to love is the basis of all Christian morality.
- **Created to live in community – local, national & global** (this explores the individual's relationships with the wider world)
  Human beings are relational by nature and live in the wider community. Through our exchange with others, our mutual service and through dialogue, we attempt to proclaim and extend the Kingdom of God for the good of individuals and the good of society.

Each theme covers the core strands of 'Education in Virtue' and 'Religious Understanding' as well as strands which cover the PSHE content of the theme.

Christian Virtue and RSE

Each theme begins with a statement of the virtues which are necessary to living well in relationship with others and these virtues should underpin the teaching but also should emerge as a consequence of it. Virtues are habits which are learned from experience and are gained through imitation, the same virtues being modelled by those who teach. They express the qualities of character that schools should seek to develop in their pupils, through their exemplification by the whole community of which the pupils are a part. These virtues reflect our Christian tradition but they are also, of course, fundamental human virtues which are universally shared.

Theme 1: Created and Loved by God

	KS3	KS4&5
Education in virtue	**In a Catholic school, pupils are growing to be:** 3.1.1.1. Respectful of their own bodies, character and giftedness 3.1.1.2. Appreciative for blessings 3.1.1.3. Grateful to others and to God 3.1.1.4. Self-disciplined and able to delay or forego gratification for the sake of greater goods 3.1.1.5. Discerning in their decision making 3.1.1.6. Determined and resilient in the face of difficulty 3.1.1.7. Courageous in the face of new situations and in facing their fears	**In a Catholic school, pupils are growing to be:** 4.1.1.1. Respectful of their own bodies, character and giftedness, including their emerging sexual identity 4.1.1.2. Appreciative of blessings 4.1.1.3. Grateful to others and to God 4.1.1.4. Self-disciplined and able to delay or forego gratification for the sake of greater goods, appreciating the nature and importance of chastity in all relationships 4.1.1.5. Discerning in their decision making, able to exercise wisdom and good judgement 4.1.1.6. Determined and resilient in the face of difficulty, including the strength of character to stand up for truth and goodness in the face of pressure 4.1.1.7. Courageous in the face of new situations and in facing their fears, including the courage to be different
Religious understanding of the human person: loving myself	**Pupils should be taught:** 3.1.2.1. To appreciate sensual pleasure as a gift from God 3.1.2.2. To recognise that sexuality is a God-given gift and that sexual intercourse is the most intimate expression of human love and should be delayed until marriage 3.1.2.3. The Church's teaching on the morality of natural and artificial methods of managing fertility 3.1.2.4. To understand the need for reflection to facilitate personal growth and the role prayer can play in this 3.1.2.5. To understand that their uniqueness, value and dignity derive from God and hence, recognise the respect they should have for themselves 3.1.2.6. To recognise that they are responsible for their own behaviour and how to inform their conscience	**Pupils should be taught:** 4.1.2.1. To appreciate sensual pleasure as a gift from God and the difference between sensual and sexual pleasure 4.1.2.2. The concept of fasts and feasts and the importance of self-discipline and moderation 4.1.2.3. To recognise that sexuality is a God-given gift and that sexual intercourse is the most intimate expression of human love and should be delayed until marriage, building on learning at KS3 4.1.2.4. The Church's teaching on the morality of natural and artificial methods of managing fertility, building on learning at KS3 4.1.2.5. That giving time to prayer and reflection is a way of growing in understanding of themselves and their own character, as well as deepening their relationship with God. 4.1.2.6. The methods of informing one's conscience and the absolute character of conscientious demands

	KS3	KS4&5
Me, my body and my health	**Pupils should be taught:** **Me** 3.1.3.1. To recognise their personal strengths 3.1.3.2. To distinguish 'needs' from 'wants' 3.1.3.3. They have a right not to have an intimate relationship until the appropriate time and that any level of intimacy which makes them feel uncomfortable is never appropriate **My body** 3.1.3.4. To appreciate all five senses and to be able to separate sensuality from sexuality 3.1.3.5. There are many different body shapes, sizes and physical attributes 3.1.3.6. Media portrayals of the human body may present a false ideal of bodily perfection which does not reflect real life and can have a negative impact on the individual **My Health** 3.1.3.7. How to take care of their body, including physical activity and healthy eating, and the importance of taking increased responsibility for their own personal hygiene and dental health 3.1.3.8. The facts about legal and illegal harmful substances, including smoking, nicotine products, vaping, alcohol use and drug-taking 3.1.3.9. To understand the harm that excessive time spent online can have on physical and mental well-being	**Pupils should be taught:** **Me** 4.1.3.1. To evaluate their own personal strengths and areas for development 4.1.3.2. How virtues, values, attitudes and beliefs can drive a growing sense of purpose for their lives **My body** 4.1.3.3. The influences on their body image including the media's portrayal of idealised and artificial body shapes 4.1.3.4. The health risks and issues related to this, including cosmetic procedures **My health** 4.1.3.5. To take responsibility for monitoring their own health, for example testicular and breast self-examination, and to make informed choices that have a positive impact on their health and well-being, including physical activity, dental health and healthy eating 4.1.3.6. The facts about legal and illegal harmful substances, including smoking, nicotine products, vaping, alcohol use and drug taking 4.1.3.7 To take responsibility in avoiding excessive time spent online and know the effect this can have on physical and mental well-being

	KS3	KS4&5
Emotional well-being and attitudes	**Pupils should be taught:** **Emotional well-being** 3.1.4.1. How to develop self-confidence and self-esteem 3.1.4.2. That all aspects of health can be affected by choices made in sex and relationships 3.1.4.3. The importance and benefits of delaying sexual intercourse until ready 3.1.4.4. There are different emotions which may emerge in relation to change and loss and strategies to manage them 3.1.4.5. How to develop the skills needed to identify and resist peer and other types of pressure (including sexual pressure) to conform 3.1.4.6. The concepts of sexual identity, gender identity and sexual orientation **Attitudes** 3.1.4.7. To recognise, clarify and if necessary challenge their values, attitudes and beliefs and to understand how these influence their choices	**Pupils should be taught:** **Emotional well-being** 4.1.4.1. The characteristics of emotional and mental health, including stress, anxiety and depression, self-harm and suicide and their potential impact on oneself and others 4.1.4.2. The importance and benefits of delaying sexual intercourse until ready, considering the idea of appropriateness and the importance of marriage 4.1.4.3. Strategies for managing mental health and emotional well-being 4.1.4.4. How to develop the skills needed to identify and resist peer and other types of pressure to conform **Attitudes** 4.1.4.5. To recognise, clarify and if necessary challenge their values, attitudes and beliefs and to understand how these influence their choices

	KS3	KS4&5
Life cycles and fertility	**Pupils should be taught:** **Life cycles** 3.1.5.1. Human reproduction, including the structure and function of the male and female reproductive systems 3.1.5.2. About gestation and birth, including the effect of maternal lifestyle on the foetus through the placenta, e.g foetal alcohol syndrome **Fertility** 3.1.5.3. About human fertility, methods of managing conception for the purposes of achieving or avoiding pregnancy and the difference between natural and artificial methods 3.1.5.4. The menstrual cycle and the function of gametes (sperm and ova), in fertilisation 3.1.5.5. The negative impact of substance use on both male and female fertility	**Pupils should be taught:** **Life cycles** 4.1.5.1. Human reproduction, including the structure and function of the male and female reproductive systems and the correct terms for the reproductive body parts, both internal and external 4.1.5.2. About gestation and birth, including the effect of maternal lifestyle on the foetus through the placenta, e.g foetal alcohol syndrome 4.1.5.3. The different stages in the development of an unborn child in the womb from the moment of conception to birth **Fertility** 4.1.5.4. About human fertility, building on the learning at KS3; methods of managing conception for the purposes of achieving or avoiding pregnancy and the difference between natural and artificial methods 4.1.5.5. That fertility levels can vary in different people; can be damaged by some sexually transmitted infections and decreases with age (including information on the menopause). 4.1.5.6. The negative impact of substance use on both male and female fertility and those positive lifestyle choices which maximise fertility

Theme 2: Created to love others

	KS3	KS4&5
Education in virtue	**In a Catholic school, pupils are growing to be:** 3.2.1.1. Loyal, able to develop and sustain friendships 3.2.1.2. Compassionate, able to empathise with the suffering of others and the generosity to help others in trouble 3.2.1.3. Respectful, able to identify other people's personal space and respect the ways in which they are different 3.2.1.4. Forgiving, developing the skills to allow reconciliation in relationships 3.2.1.5. Courteous in their dealings with friends and strangers 3.2.1.6. Honest, committed to living truthfully and with integrity	**In a Catholic school, pupils are growing to be:** 4.2.1.1. Loyal, able to develop and sustain friendships and the habits of commitment and compassion which make this possible 4.2.1.2. Compassionate, able to empathise with the suffering of others and the generosity to help others in trouble, recognizing the importance of self-sacrificing love in this context 4.2.1.3. Respectful, able to identify other people's personal space and respect the ways in which they are different, valuing difference and diversity 4.2.1.4. Forgiving, developing the skills to allow reconciliation in relationships, including the ability to sincerely ask for and to offer forgiveness 4.2.1.5. Courteous in their dealings with friends and strangers, sensitive to the different ways courtesy is demonstrated in different contexts 4.2.1.6. Aware of the importance of honesty and integrity in all forms of communication
Religious understanding of human relationships: loving others	**Pupils should be taught:** 3.2.2.1. The nature of sacramental marriage and the importance of marriage as the foundation of society and its role in the domestic Church 3.2.2.2. The role of marriage as the basis of family life and its importance to the bringing up of children 3.2.2.3. To recognise the spiritual context of the family as a community where members can grow in faith, hope and love 3.2.2.4. How to express love and care for others through acts of charity 3.2.2.5. How to discuss religious faith and personal beliefs with others 3.2.2.6. To recognise the importance of forgiveness in relationships and know something about Jesus' teaching on forgiveness	**Pupils should be taught:** 4.2.2.1. To understand what the Church teaches about marriage, and when it is a sacrament and the distinction between separation, divorce and nullity 4.2.2.2. The role of marriage as the basis of family life and its importance to the bringing up of children, including an understanding of how the Church supports family life 4.2.2.3. Know and understand what human and divine attributes, virtues and skills are required to sustain a happy, authentic marriage which is life long and life giving 4.2.2.4. To recognise their responsibilities towards others, and the human dignity of others in God's eyes 4.2.2.5. To be able to discuss faith and personal belief sensitively, demonstrating mutual respect 4.2.2.6. To understand the importance of self-giving love and forgiveness in a relationship 4.2.2.7. About the sanctity of life, and the significance of this concept in debates about abortion

	KS3	KS4&5
Personal Relationships	**Pupils should be taught:** 3.2.3.1. About discrimination, prejudice and bullying and how to respond, including responsibilities towards those who are experiencing these things (See protected characteristics of the Equality Act 2010, Part 2, Chapter 1, sections 4-12) 3.2.3.2. The features of positive and stable relationships and the virtues needed to sustain them (e.g. trust, mutual respect, honesty) in a wide variety of contexts, including family, class, friendships, intimate relationships etc. 3.2.3.3. That relationships can cause strong feelings and emotions (including sexual attraction) and methods for managing these 3.2.3.4. The nature and importance of friendship as the basis of a loving, sexual relationship 3.2.3.5. That someone else's expectations in a relationship may be different to yours and strategies for negotiating possible differences. 3.2.3.6. The nature and importance of marriage; the distinctions between marriage in Church teaching, including sacramental marriage, the requirements for canonical validity, civil marriage, civil partnerships and other stable, long-term relationships. 3.2.3.7. The roles, rights and responsibilities of parents, carers and children in families and that those families can be varied and complex 3.2.3.8. Understand that loving, supportive family relationships provide the best environment for a child 3.2.3.9. That marriage is a commitment, entered into freely, never forced through threat or coercion. 3.2.3.10. Some people will choose to be celibate (unmarried) and to refrain from sexual activity, e.g. single people, priests and those in religious life 3.2.3.11. There is diversity in sexual attraction and developing sexuality, including sources of support and reassurance	**Pupils should be taught:** 4.2.3.1. To evaluate the extent to which their self-confidence and self-esteem are affected by the judgments of others 4.2.3.2. The characteristics and benefits of positive, strong, supportive, equal relationships 4.2.3.3. To manage changes in personal relationships including the ending of relationships 4.2.3.4. About harassment and how to manage this 4.2.3.5. To recognise when others are using manipulation, persuasion or coercion (and when this is a criminal offence e.g. violent behaviour) and how to respond 4.2.3.6. Parenting skills and qualities and their central importance to family life (including the implications of young parenthood) 4.2.3.7. The nature and importance of marriage; the distinctions between marriage in Church teaching, including sacramental marriage, the requirements for canonical validity, civil marriage, civil partnerships and other stable, long-term relationships. 4.2.3.8. About the impact of domestic and relationship violence (including sources of help and support) 4.2.3.9. The impact of separation, divorce and bereavement on individuals and families and the need to adapt to changing circumstances 4.2.3.10. About diversity in sexual attraction and developing sexuality, including sources of support and reassurance and how to access them

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	KS3	KS4&5
Keeping safe and people who can help me	**Pupils should be taught:** **Keeping safe** 3.2.4.1. They have autonomy and the right to protect their body from inappropriate and unwanted contact 3.2.4.2. To identify the characteristics of unhealthy relationships and where to get help 3.2.4.3. Consent is freely given and that being pressurised, manipulated or coerced to agree to something is not 'consent' 3.2.4.4. The law in relation to consent, including the legal age of consent for sexual activity, the legal definition of consent and the responsibility in law for the seeker of consent to ensure that consent has been given. 3.2.4.5. How to use technology safely, and to be a discerning consumer of information online, including social media, consideration of their "digital footprint" and the law regarding the sharing of images 3.2.4.6. That not all images, language and behaviour are appropriate, including the negative effects of pornography and the dangers of online exploitation 3.2.4.7. To recognise the impact that the use of substances (alcohol and drugs) has on the ability to make good and healthy decisions **People who can help me** 3.2.4.8. There are a number of different people and appropriate organisations they can go to for help in different situations and should be provided with information about how to contact them	**Pupils should be taught:** **Keeping safe** 4.2.4.1. An awareness of exploitation, bullying and harassment in relationships (including the unique challenges posed by online bullying and the unacceptability of physical, emotional, sexual abuse in all types of teenage relationships, including in group settings such as gangs) and how to respond 4.2.4.2. The concept of consent in relevant, age-appropriate contexts building on Key Stage 3, how to seek consent and to respect others' rights, to give, not give or withdraw consent 4.2.4.3. The risks and consequences of legal and illegal substance use including their ability to make good decisions in relation to sexual relationships 4.2.4.4. To understand the pernicious influence of gender double standards and victim-blaming 4.2.4.5. To be confident in using technology safely, and to be a discerning consumer of information online, including social media, consideration of their "digital footprint" and the law regarding the sharing of images 4.2.4.6. To understand the consequences of unintended pregnancy and of teenage parenthood (in the context of learning about parenting skills and qualities and their importance to family life) and the options available. 4.2.4.7. About abortion, including the current legal position, the risks associated with it, the Church's position and other beliefs and opinions about it **People who can help me** 4.2.4.8. About statutory and voluntary organisations that support relationships experiencing difficulties or in crisis, such as relationship breakdown, separation, divorce, or bereavement 4.2.4.9. The importance of the school, the parish and other Catholic voluntary organisations in providing help and advice for young people 4.2.4.10. Where and how to obtain sexual health information, advice and support

		4.2.4.11. About who to talk to for accurate, advice and support in the event of unintended pregnancy

Theme 3: Created to live in community (local, national and global)

	KS3	KS4&5
Education in virtue	**In a Catholic school, pupils are growing to be:** 3.3.1.1. Just, understanding the impact of their actions locally, nationally and globally 3.3.1.2. Self-giving, able to put aside their own wants in order to serve others locally, nationally and globally 3.3.1.3. Prophetic in their ability to identify injustice and speak out against it locally, nationally and globally	**In a Catholic school, pupils are growing to be:** 4.3.1.1. Just, understanding the impact of their actions locally, nationally and globally, including the knowledge and understanding to ensure that such judgements are well-informed 4.3.1.2. Self-giving, able to put aside their own wants in order to serve others locally, nationally and globally, including a recognition of the importance of service as the purpose of human life 4.3.1.3. Prophetic in their ability to identify injustice and speak out against it locally, nationally and globally, including the recognition of the necessity to accept the unpopularity this often entails
Religious understanding of the importance of human communities	**Pupils should be taught:** 3.3.2.1. To discuss moral questions in a balanced and well informed way 3.3.2.2. Understand the features of the home, school and parish and how each work for the good of all	**Pupils should be taught:** 4.3.2.1. To debate moral questions in a way which is well informed, nuanced and sensitive, taking into account the teaching of the Catholic Church in the relevant areas 4.3.2.2. The main principles of Catholic Social Teaching and how these relate to our relationship to each other and to creation

	KS3	KS4&5
Living in the wider world	**Pupils should be taught:** 3.3.3.1. The purpose and importance of immunisation and vaccination 3.3.3.2. That certain infections can be spread through sexual activity, including HIV, and ways of protecting against sexually transmitted infections, including abstinence 3.3.3.3. The physical and emotional damage caused by female genital mutilation (FGM); that it is a criminal act and where to get support for themselves or their peers. 3.3.3.4. They have responsibilities towards their local, global and national community and creation 3.3.3.5. There are some cultural practices which are against UK law and Universal Rights (e.g. FGM, forced marriages, honour-based violence, human trafficking, radicalisation etc); to have the skills and strategies to respond to being targeted or witnessing the targeting of others 3.3.3.6. That discriminatory language and behaviour is unacceptable (e.g. sexist, racist, homophobic, transphobic, disablist) and the need to challenge it and how to do so 3.3.3.7. Recognise stereotypes and how they can encourage damage and prejudice 3.3.3.8. The potential tensions between human rights, English law and cultural and religious expectations and practices 3.3.3.9. That everyone is created unique and equal in dignity (including reference to protected characteristics defined in the Equalities Act 2010)	**Pupils should be taught:** 4.3.3.1. About STIs, including HIV/AIDS, how these are transmitted protective practices, including abstinence, and how to respond if they feel they or others are at risk 4.3.3.2. To understand the need to respect others' faith and cultural expectations concerning relationships and sexual activity 4.3.3.3. That extremism and intolerance in whatever forms they take, such as online bullying, hate speech, physical violence and knife crime, are never acceptable 4.3.3.4. The definitions of sexual consent, sexual exploitation, abuse, grooming, coercion, harassment, rape, domestic abuse, forced marriage, honour-based violence and FGM and why they are always unacceptable 4.3.3.5. The shared responsibility to protect the community from violent extremism and how to respond to anything that causes anxiety or concern 4.3.3.6. About the unacceptability of all forms of discrimination, and the need to challenge it in the wider community 4.3.3.7. To recognise when relationships are unhealthy or abusive (including the unacceptability of both emotional and physical abuse or violence including honour-based violence, forced marriage, sexual harassment, sexual abuse and rape) and strategies to manage this or access support for self or others at risk 4.3.3.8. The role peers can play in supporting one another (including helping vulnerable friends to access reliable, accurate and appropriate support)