

Love For Life

Written paper for the Committee for Education

RE: Mini inquiry into relationship and sexuality education (RSE).

23 October 2024

About Love For Life

- 1.1. Formed in 2002, Love For Life is a Christian charity with a long-standing reputation for engaging effectively with parents, children and young people in the specific area of Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE). The organisation works regionally across all school types, in many different community settings, churches and in higher education institutions.
- 1.2. Love For Life activities aim to inspire, equip and resource the next generation to know their worth, flourish in their relationships and value their sexual choices.
- 1.3. In the 2023/24 academic year, 47,792 pupils attended 752 Love For Life programmes. In the same year, 383 Primary Schools, 111 Post-Primary Schools and 4 Special/Other Schools invited Love For Life to support them in their delivery of RSE.
- 1.4. Love For Life offers ten high-quality, age-appropriate, and culturally sensitive RSE programmes suitable for each Key Stage, as well as four programmes specific for SEN Schools. All programmes are delivered by trained and qualified staff and in line with the requirements of RSE within the Northern Ireland Curriculum. Programme-specific lesson plans are available for teachers to use before or after the programme.

Summary

- 2.1. As an external agency, Love For Life supports schools in their delivery of Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) and is committed to working in partnership with teachers and schools to ensure that excellent RSE is delivered.
- 2.2. Love For Life welcomes the opportunity to submit a written briefing to the Committee for Education and will use the opportunity to outline the organisation's positive model of delivery as an external agency. This is particularly relevant to the area of focus in the inquiry around Teacher Training and External Providers.

Our Approach to RSE Delivery as an External Agency

- 3.1. Outlined below are broad principles and commitments that guide Love For Life's development and delivery of high-quality, age-appropriate, and culturally sensitive RSE.

Promoting Whole-Person Development

- 3.2. Our approach to RSE is centred on personal development and embraces the social, cultural, intellectual, physical, moral and spiritual development of pupils. In line with a balanced and broadly based curriculum, effective RSE encompasses the 'whole person'.

- 3.3. Love for Life believes that high-quality RSE gives pupils the opportunity to critically reflect and evaluate how their attitudes, values and beliefs will shape the choices that they make. Love For Life's programmes encourage reflection on questions such as 'Who am I?', 'What do I aspire to?' and 'How then shall I live?' Answering these questions is central to developing a strong self-awareness, empathy for those who are different from us, and contributes to the exploration of character – the personal qualities that contribute to our own good and the flourishing of community life.
- 3.4. RSE should be grounded in a vision of healthy relationships. Children and young people need nurturing in their capacity to form strong and positive relationships with others, promoting their emotional health and wellbeing. This includes developing personal attributes and values including integrity, kindness, generosity, trustworthiness, love, compassion, empathy, courage, humility, self-control and a sense of justice. These are the qualities that enable individuals and communities to live well and flourish together, and pupils to build strong relationships of all kinds.
- 3.5. Educating the whole person in RSE includes providing young people with the opportunity to question the overall meaning and purpose of sexuality in human life, including establishing their norms and ideals around sexual behaviour.
- 3.6. As part of our evaluation process, we gather evidence of pupil learning, behavioural and attitudinal changes. Following the Love For Life programme:
- 82% of 11-14s have a stronger understanding of the difference between a healthy and an unhealthy relationship¹
 - 78% of 13-18s said they had the opportunity to reflect on and evaluate how their attitudes, values and beliefs will shape the choices they make²

Affirming Human Dignity

- 3.7. Love For Life grounds RSE in an understanding of the infinite value and worth of every child and young person. Particular care is taken to be attentive to the individual needs of all pupils, including those with special needs and disabilities.
- 3.8. We believe each pupil deserves to be treated with the highest level of dignity and respect, and should learn to treat others likewise. In light of this, we challenge all forms of bullying, including homophobic, biphobic and transphobic bullying.
- 3.9. Love For Life supports the role of education in challenging over-sexualised cultural norms, in particular, sexual objectification in the media and in pornography.

¹ 11-14s, Love For Life evaluations, 23/24 academic year, total 740 respondents

² 13-18s, Love For Life evaluations, 23/24 academic year, total 7,612 respondents

3.10. In line with this commitment, we note the following evidence of pupil learning, behavioural and attitudinal changes following the Love For Life programme:

- 84% of 11-14s had a clearer picture of the type of friend they want to be³
- 72% of 13-18s had a deeper understanding of how unique and valuable they are⁴

Engaging with Parents/Carers

3.11. We affirm that RSE is a lifelong process which begins in the home. Parents or carers have the most significant influence in shaping attitudes, values and beliefs, as well as habits and practices around healthy relationships. They are vital partners in the delivery of school and community-based RSE, and schools and community groups should work closely with them in their planning and delivery, including in the drawing up of policies and practices.

3.12. In the 2023/24 academic year, 73% of 13-18s⁴ and 83% of 11-14s³ indicated in our evaluations that family is the strongest influence on their choices.

3.13. Love For Life is committed to supporting, resourcing and partnering with parents/carers to secure the wellbeing of all children and young people. A positive, pro-active approach to partnership includes providing information on programmes in advance of delivery, as well as delivering workshops that will enable them to have important and ongoing conversations.

3.14. The feedback Love For Life receives from these programmes is overwhelmingly positive. The statistics from these programmes in the 2023/24 academic year tell a story of parents/carers who want to positively engage to help their children and young people build strong, healthy relationships:

- 99% said they are more informed about the influences and pressures young people face⁵
- 97% felt better equipped to begin or continue conversations about the subjects covered⁵
- 99% felt inspired to help children and young people understand how unique and valuable they are⁵

Embracing Whole-School Ethos

3.15. We believe that RSE should be delivered within a strong, coherent framework, where a consistent set of principles and values are promoted and embodied throughout the school.

3.16. An RSE policy enables schools to articulate their ethos and values and adopt a whole-school approach to the teaching of the subject, which includes nurturing an ethos and culture of inclusivity for all pupils. Key stakeholders, including parents, should be involved in its

³ 11-14s, Love For Life evaluations, 23/24 academic year, total 740 respondents

⁴ 13-18s, Love For Life evaluations, 23/24 academic year, total 7,612 respondents

⁵ Parent/Carer, Love For Life evaluations, 23/24 academic year, total 178 respondents

development, and it should be clearly linked to other relevant policies, including anti-bullying, pastoral care and safeguarding/child protection.

- 3.17. As an external agency that supports schools in their delivery of RSE, Love For Life appreciates the importance of operating within and respecting the ethos of a school as well as adhering to school policies.

Respecting Diversity and Inclusion

- 3.18. RSE should be delivered in a culturally sensitive manner. This involves taking account of the cultural and religious background of all pupils and promoting tolerance and mutual hospitality in the expression and exploration of different beliefs and values.
- 3.19. In a pluralistic context, RSE should promote a better understanding of diversity. Effective, high-quality RSE teaching and learning provides young people with the opportunity to examine their own values and beliefs in light of those held by others. In doing so, this can contribute to a more tolerant and inclusive society by fostering respect and understanding of difference and empathy for the views, emotions and feelings of others.
- 3.20. Adolescence is a time of significant and often rapid change – including physical, cognitive and social development. Love For Life is therefore sensitive to the sexual feelings and identity dilemmas young people are experiencing, particularly about sexual orientation and gender, and recognises the additional pastoral support that may be needed.
- 3.21. Love For Life endeavours to create an environment of welcome, safety, inclusion and respect. The knowledge, skills and values presented are important for all young people, regardless of their sexual orientation or gender, and equips them to make healthy choices and build strong relationships.
- 3.22. As we create an environment of inclusion and respect, our aspiration is that young people can explore their differences as well as the values that they hold in common.
- 3.23. This approach is affirmed in the feedback received through the evaluation forms as 87% of 13-18s felt respected by the Love For Life team.⁶

Prioritising Delaying Sex

- 3.24. Young people need time to develop and mature without the expectation to act on sexual feelings or respond to cultural pressure and the expectation to be sexually active. This includes developing a framework of beliefs and values which will enable them to make wise, well-informed, responsible choices around relationships and sexual activity.
- 3.25. In line with this, Love For Life enables young people to understand the reasons why someone might choose to wait, even until marriage, before engaging in a sexual relationship. Where there may be a social expectation to be sexually active, young people need reassurance that

⁶ 13-18s, Love For Life evaluations, 23/24 academic year, total 7,612 respondents

resisting such pressure and saying ‘no’ is a valid and possible choice, and that this is still the case even if they have already made the choice to be sexually active.

3.26. We note the evidence of pupil learning, behavioural and attitudinal changes following the Love For Life programme:

- 87% of 13-18s had an increased understanding about consent and how it impacts on any future relationships⁷
- 78% of 13-18s felt more equipped to discuss their boundaries in relationships⁷

Advancing Holistic Sexual Health and Wellbeing

3.27. Love For Life’s post-primary programmes advance holistic sexual health and wellbeing, including providing age-appropriate, reliable, accurate and up-to-date information on contraception, sensitive to the ethical considerations that are raised. Sexual health is more than just the absence of an unplanned pregnancy or a STI, but is concerned with physical, emotional, mental, spiritual and social wellbeing. Increasing young people’s awareness of sexual health demonstrates a holistic concern for their overall wellbeing and their current and future sexual health; it is not intended to encourage or endorse early sexual activity.

3.28. In exploring unplanned pregnancy, pupils should understand not only the relevant legal framework and social context, but recognise that there will be a diversity of beliefs and values within society surrounding controversial issues like abortion. Whatever choice a woman or couple makes in the situation of an unplanned pregnancy, they deserve to be treated with compassion and respect. Love For Life gives pupils the opportunity to consider the different options presented within wider society: keeping the baby, adoption and abortion. Love For Life appreciates the important ethical issues raised and provides an opportunity for pupils to consider these and to reflect on their own attitudes, values and beliefs.

Feedback from Teachers

4.1. Teachers state that the Love For Life programmes compliment what they already do. They also note that pupils learn more effectively as a result of Love For Life input. This is evidenced in their evaluations from the 2023/24 academic year.

4.2. **Teacher – Primary⁸**

- 99% rate the content of the programme as excellent (93%), or very good (6%)
- 99% rate the relevance of the topics as excellent (95%), or very good (4%)
- 99% rate the engagement of pupils as excellent (90%), or very good (9%)
- 100% would recommend the programme to other teachers

⁷ 13-18s, Love For Life evaluations, 23/24 academic year, total 7,612 respondents

⁸ Primary Teachers, Love For Life evaluations, 23/24 academic year, total 455 respondents

4.3. **Teacher – Post-Primary**⁹

- 100% rate the appropriateness of the information contained within the presentation as excellent (86%), or very good (14%)
- 81% feel that there was no additional information that should have been provided within the presentation
- 100% feel the Love For Life programme(s) compliment what they already do around RSE in the curriculum (strongly agree 77%, agree 23%)
- 95% agree that pupils interact and learn more effectively as a result of the Love For Life programme input (strongly agree 59%, agree 36%)

4.4. Love For Life believes that its programmes are a positive contribution to the ongoing input and support that young people will need in this vital area.

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Love For Life is a Company Limited by Guarantee (NI043026) and is registered with The Charity Commission for Northern Ireland (NIC102325).

⁹ Post-Primary Teachers, Love For Life evaluations, 23/24 academic year, total 22 respondents