

Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) Policy

Introduction

Relationships & sexuality are key areas in the healthy social & personal development of all individuals. This is particularly true for adolescent development as adolescence is a time of great physical, psychological & emotional change and growth. This policy was developed in the second half of the academic year 2014-2015 by a group comprising teachers, parents/guardians, senior students and members of the board of management. Coláiste Éamonn Rís seeks to build on the work done in primary school in the area of RSE. RSE is incorporated into our SPHE (Junior Cycle) and Personal Development (Senior Cycle) programmes. We seek to educate our students in social, personal & health skills and to help them to grow in understanding of their development, sexuality and relationships and to enjoy good living and healthy relationships.

Scope

- The policy applies across the curriculum, it is therefore necessary that all teachers are familiar with the RSE policy.
- The policy applies to school staff, students, board of management, parents/guardians, visiting speakers and external facilitators.

Rationale

- Relationships and Sexuality are key elements in the healthy social and personal development of all individuals. This is particularly true for adolescent development, as adolescence is a time of great physical, psychological & emotional change and growth. Young people are exposed to a bewildering variety of messages about sexuality and sexual activity. We seek to educate our students in social, personal & health skills and to help them to grow in understanding of their development, sexuality and relationships and to enjoy good living and healthy relationships.
- The [Education Act, 1998](#) requires that schools should promote the social and personal development of students and provide health education for them.
- Section 4 of the Rules and Programme for Secondary Schools requires schools to have an agreed policy for RSE and a suitable RSE programme in place for all students at both junior and senior cycle. At Junior Cycle, the RSE programme is part of Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE).
- Circulars [M4/95](#) and [M20/96](#) request schools to commence a process of RSE policy development.

Relationship to characteristic spirit of the school

The RSE programme takes place within the context of the school mission statement.

“Our school community exists primarily to develop responsible individuals who will participate fully in a changing society and to carry out this task in a Christian environment.”

It also reflects the philosophy of ERST, a philosophy of inclusiveness and development of caring relationships.

The spiritual, moral and ethical issues which arise when teaching RSE should reflect the school ethos on these sensitive issues, and not their own personal views. In this regard, it should be noted that the RSE curriculum includes sexual orientation, contraception, sexually transmitted infections etc.

Aims/Objectives

The RSE programme aims:

- to help young people understand and develop friendships and relationships
- to promote an understanding of sexuality
- to promote a positive attitude to one's own sexuality and in one's relationship with others
- to promote knowledge of and respect for reproduction
- to enable young people to develop attitudes and values towards their sexuality in a moral spiritual and social framework.
- to assist all members of the school community to fulfil their responsibilities in relation to the RSE programme within the context of the school ethos and climate

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The objectives of the RSE programme should enable the students to:

- acquire the understanding and skills necessary to form healthy friendships and relationships
- develop a positive sense of self-awareness and the skills necessary for building and maintaining self-awareness
- raise awareness of the different ways people grow and change throughout life, especially during adolescence
- to develop respect for difference in individuals and a belief that all people are equal
- understand human physiology with respect to the reproductive cycle, human fertility and sexually transmitted infections
- have an appreciation of the value of family life and the responsibilities of parenthood
- develop strategies for decision making and actions consistent with personal integrity and respectful of the dignity and rights of others
- develop skills for coping with pressure from peers and other sources of pressure, conflict and threats to personal safety

Key Measures

A. Provision of Training and Staff Development

- A SPHE co-ordinator is in place and has a clear understanding of the role
- Teachers are released to attend RSE/ SPHE training

- Teachers should be consulted prior to being timetabled to teach SPHE/RSE
- The school seeks to achieve gender balance in the provision of SPHE/RSE teaching
- All teachers of SPHE/RSE have access to the SPHE and RSE teaching materials and resources

B. Inclusion of Parents/Guardians

- The RSE policy and programme content is available on the school website and a hard copy is given to all incoming parents/guardians
- Parents are also directed to a link to the RSE parent booklet '[Going Forward Together](#)'

Note: The [Education Act, 1998](#) (section 30, subsection (2)(e)) provides that a student is not required to attend instruction in any subject which is contrary to the conscience of the parent or in the case of a student who has reached the age of 18 years, the student. Hence, parents have a right to opt their child out of the sensitive issues in RSE if they wish to do so. In order to withdraw a student from these RSE classes a parent/guardian must inform the school of their request at the beginning of the school year. This facilitates the responsibility of the school to make alternative arrangements for the student in this situation.

C. Ethical/Moral Considerations

The school's RSE policy provides guidance for teachers on the moral and ethical framework within which the programme will be taught.

- **Answering Questions:** While it is important to create an environment in SPHE/RSE in which students can discuss issues openly, teachers may not be able to answer all questions asked by students and can set appropriate limits. Students may ask questions about issues which are not included in the curriculum, such as masturbation or abortion. On these, and on all questions, teachers should use their professional judgement, guided by the age of the students, the RSE curriculum and the RSE policy for the school.
- **Confidentiality:** While students should not be encouraged to disclose personal or private information in SPHE/RSE classes, there may be times when they do talk about their own lives. Confidentiality should be respected unless a teacher becomes aware that a child is at risk, in which case the appropriate action should be taken e.g. follow the procedures set down in the

Child Protection Procedures and Guidelines for Post-Primary Schools or the school's Substance Use Policy, notify parents etc.

In cases of under-age sexual activity, P10 of the [Child Protection Guidelines for Post-Primary Schools](#) (2004) state: '*In all cases where a school becomes aware of underage sexual intercourse the school shall take appropriate steps to inform the child's parents.*'

It is important that students are made aware of the limits of confidentiality and that teachers do not give unconditional guarantees of confidentiality.

- **Sexual Activity:** The pace of social change in Ireland over the last number of years has been rapid. Parents, students and teachers can experience a sense of confusion in relation to sexual mores. The religious ethos of a school may seem to be in conflict with the lived experience of the students. The RSE policy statement should give teachers guidance on the moral and values framework within which the issue of sexual activity should be addressed. It is advisable for teachers to give young people information on the age of consent which, following the passage of the [Criminal Law \(Sexual Offences\) Act, 2006](#), is 17 years of age for both males and females.

- **Family Planning:** The subject of family planning is covered within the Senior Cycle RSE programme. Materials used are from the RSE Senior Cycle Resource Materials on P77 of the TRUST resource booklet and cd. The preciousness of human life is the starting point for all areas of the RSE programme. The gift of a child is not available to all individuals and so before the issue of contraception is dealt with the issue of assisted fertility is addressed with all senior students. This is in line with the ethos of our school.

The RSE programme requires that young people are provided with information about methods of contraception. This issue is covered within the ethos and culture of our school, as set out in the school 's mission statement and the terms of the Edmund Rice Schools Trust Charter.. Fertility and contraception are dealt with in a comprehensive, sensitive and respectful manner.

Homosexuality:

The post-primary RSE Curriculum Guidelines include the subject of sexual orientation. There is a lesson on sexual orientation in the RSE Senior Cycle Resource Materials on P151. RSE training courses delivered by the SPHE Support Service have provided further materials which are available to all our RSE teachers. The [Equal Status Act, 2000](#) and the [Equality Act, 2004](#) prohibit discrimination across nine grounds, including sexual orientation. The issues of homosexuality and transgender individuals are addressed in the context of respecting difference and a belief in equality for all irrespective of their gender, age, race, demographic class or sexual orientation. If and when these topics are introduced to the class group is left to the discretion and professional judgement of the individual teacher and the particular class group he/she is teaching SPHE to in junior cycle. There may be a need to address these issues if bullying behaviour is considered likely. Both these issues are dealt with in all Personal Development & RSE modules for senior cycle students.

Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs):

While awareness of STIs is one of the objectives of the Second Year SPHE/RSE syllabus, STIs are mainly addressed in Senior Cycle. There is a lesson on STIs in the RSE Senior Cycle Resource Materials on P103. Given that rates of STI transmission are increasing, it is important that the subject is addressed in schools.

D. Practical Issues

Some of the practical issues which the policy may need to address are:

- SPHE is timetabled for one period per week for all Junior Cycle classes
- Provision is made for teaching RSE to Fourth Years within the two timetabled periods per week of Personal Development
- Provision is made for teaching RSE to Fifth and Sixth Years within the 33 class period module on Personal Development, which is greatly in excess of the statutory requirement in this area
- Normal class groupings apply to the teaching of SPHE/RSE
- Outside speakers are directed to our RSE policy and the SPHE Handbook for Schools www.sphe.ie online
- The school's policy of inclusivity extends to the provision of RSE for children with special needs
- If it is deemed appropriate RSE may be taught in the appropriate small group setting by a suitable teacher
- Any parental requests for the withdrawal of students from the RSE programme should be put in writing and submitted to the principal

Links to Other Policies and to Curriculum Delivery

Relevant school policies already in place, being developed or reviewed, should be examined with reference to the RSE Policy and any implications which it has for them should be addressed. Similarly the implications of other school policies for the RSE policy also need to be considered.

Links to school policies

The following policies may be among those considered:

- Child Protection Policy
- Guidance Plan
- Anti-Bullying Policy
- Substance Use Policy.
- Dignity at work policy
- Code of Behaviour

Links to curriculum delivery

- In addition to the delivery of RSE as part of SPHE (Junior Cycle) and Personal Development (Senior Cycle) as outlined above, aspects of RSE are delivered across the curriculum, through subjects such as Religious Education, Science, Biology and Home Economics.
- The school needs to ensure that all students receive a full and balanced RSE programme from First Year through to Sixth Year through constant reviewing of the RSE policy and its implementation.

Implementation Arrangements, Roles and Responsibilities

The principal is responsible for co-ordinating implementation of the policy in consultation with the co-ordinators of the relevant subjects and other individuals who have relevant roles in the school. This is carried out

- where relevant in the planning of subjects
- in meetings of Year Heads
- in meetings with the Pastoral Care Team
- as part of the school's Guidance Plan.

Ratification & Communication

When the finalised draft policy has been ratified by the board of management, it becomes the school's agreed RSE Policy. It should then be circulated within the school community. The entire teaching staff should be familiar with the policy and aware of any changes implied in curriculum delivery.

Parents/guardians should be informed of the RSE Policy from the time of enrolment of the student.

Implementation Date

The policy will apply from December 2015.

Monitoring the implementation of the policy

The implementation of the policy will be monitored by the school principal in consultation with the SPHE/RSE co-ordinator, Year Heads, Guidance Counsellor and any other individuals deemed necessary by the principal.

Reviewing and evaluating the policy

The policy will be reviewed and evaluated biennially under the direction of the board of management. This process will be co-ordinated by the policy committee (the composition of which will be agreed by staff) in consultation with the wider school community. The review and evaluation will take cognisance of changing information, guidelines, legislation and feedback from parents/guardians, students, teachers and others. The policy will be revised as necessary in the light of such a review and evaluation and within the framework of school planning.

Indicators that will be used to gauge the impact and effectiveness of the policy will include the extent to which:

- RSE is being successfully taught through SPHE for all relevant students
- where SPHE may not be timetabled, e.g. at Senior Cycle, RSE is provided as a module in Personal Development as part of Religious Education
- resource material is available to teachers
- appropriate in-service for teachers is available and relevant teachers are availing of it
- students are aware of the policy
- parents/guardians are aware of the policy
- feedback is received from teachers, other school staff, students, parents/guardians, members of board of management and trustees
- feedback from student council or student body
- the behaviour of the students indicates respect for difference and the importance of respect in all relationships
- (the fact that students feel that the school is a safe place for them to acknowledge their sexual orientation)

Ratified by the Board of Management on 7th December 2015.

This policy will be reviewed in November 2017.

The RSE Policy will be put on the school's website. Staff members have received a copy of the policy. Every parent/guardian of a new entrant will be given a copy of the policy as part of the enrolment process.