



Coláiste Éamonn Rís

RELATIONSHIPS AND SEXUALITY EDUCATION (RSE) POLICY

Mission Statement

to develop responsible individuals who will participate fully in a changing society and to carry out this task in a Christian environment

RELATIONSHIPS AND SEXUALITY EDUCATION POLICY STATEMENT

Our School Philosophy

Coláiste Éamonn Rís encourages its students to consider and assess different viewpoints in relation to issues of morality. The experience gained through the working out of this policy and through respecting the needs of minority groups and individuals enriches the whole life of the school.

The school gives its students the opportunity to explore the humanities, sciences, arts, business studies and technical subject. In addition, it provides religious, moral and physical education in order to fulfil its mission statement of developing responsible individuals who will participate fully in a changing society and to carry out this task in a Christian environment.

The RSE programme aims to enhance the development of the school's mission through its content and structure.

Rationale for a Relationships and Sexuality Education Policy

Sexuality is a key element of healthy social and personal development. Young people are exposed to a bewildering variety of messages about sexuality and sexual activity. Schools in consultation with parents / guardians, need to reflect on how to provide for the needs of the students.

The Education Act 1998 requires that schools should promote the social and personal development of students and provide health education for them, in consultation with them, having regard to the characteristic spirit of the school.

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.

In Junior Cycle, the RSE programme is part of SPHE.

In Transition Year, the RSE programme is taught through SPHE time.

At Senior Cycle, the RSE programme is incorporated into Religious Education class time. It is taught as a separate and distinct module from Religious Education.

The Children First Act, 2017 requires schools to have an agreed policy to raise awareness of child abuse and neglect. This is covered in RSE provision.

Circulars M4/95, M20/96, M11/03, M27/2008 and 0037/2010 require schools to develop a Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) policy and programme, and to implement them for all students from First Year to Sixth Year.

The effectiveness of an RSE programme is dependent on a collaborative policy process involving teachers, parents/guardians, members of the Board of Management and students.

Scope

The policy will apply to all aspects of teaching and learning about relationships and sexuality. Discussion about relationships and sexuality also takes place in classes other than SPHE / RSE; it is therefore important that all teachers are familiar with the RSE policy. Furthermore, the policy will apply to school staff, students, board of management, parents / guardians, visiting speakers and external facilitators.

Definition of Relationship and Sexuality Education (RSE)

RSE is a lifelong process of acquiring knowledge, understanding and skills which enable us to develop attitudes, beliefs and values about sexual identity, relationships and intimacy. Sexuality is a key element of healthy social and personal development in all our lives, but particularly important in the life of the adolescent.

As a Catholic school, we wish to support parents / guardians in this important aspect of their child's education and preparation for life. In keeping with our mission therefore, we believe we have a complimentary role in preparing young people for their place in society.

In the school setting, it is an integral part of general educational provision, which seeks to promote the overall development of the person which includes the integration of sexuality into personal understanding, growth and development.

The Relationship of RSE to SPHE

Relationships and Sexuality Education is a developmental process through experiential learning in which students are helped to cultivate a healthy attitude towards themselves and others especially in the area of relationships and sexuality. At Coláiste Éamonn Rís, we aim to give students information and skills to evaluate the wide range of information, opinion, attitudes and values offered today, in order that they will make positive, responsible choices about themselves and the way they live their lives. The programme provides opportunities to discuss issues relating to relationships and sexuality in ways that help them to think and to act in a moral, caring and responsible way.

It forms part of the SPHE programme and as such it promotes a healthy attitude to sexuality in themselves and in others. The SPHE programme includes a wide range of topics such as self-esteem, self-identity, assertiveness, motivation, effective communication, decision-making skills, bullying, healthy eating, hygiene and safety. All of these contribute to the effectiveness of the RSE programme.

The Aims of our Relationships and Sexuality Education Programme

The RSE programme aims to give students the skills and competencies to learn about themselves and others to make informed decisions about their health and social relationships. Ultimately, Coláiste Éamonn Rís envisions that the RSE programme will enable students to participate in society as responsible adults who make decisions which respect the dignity of others and of themselves.

Relationships and Sexuality Education which is located in the overall framework of SPHE has as its specific aims:

1. To help young people understand and develop friendships and relationships.
2. To promote an understanding of sexuality.
3. To promote a positive attitude to one's own sexuality and in one's own relationship with others.
4. To educate the students to have a clear understanding of the male and female reproductive systems.
5. To enable the students to develop attitudes and values toward their sexuality in a moral, spiritual and social framework.

It is acknowledged that in a course of limited duration and contact time these aims are aspirational.

What is Provided in the Programme

In the broadest sense RSE is a whole school responsibility and all members of the school community share responsibility for modelling relationships that are characterised by justice and respect. At a more formal level, RSE is dealt with in the context of certain subjects; Science, Biology, Guidance Counselling, P.E., CSPE, Religious Education and population demographic / social studies within the Geography syllabus. However, to ensure an adequate response to the needs of all students, specific provision for RSE is made within the Social, Personal and Health Education programme, to which one class period is apportioned each week for junior cycle students. During Transition Year, a minimum of six separate class periods are allocated to RSE during the SPHE programme. At Senior cycle, two class periods per week for a minimum of three weeks is timetabled for RSE in both fifth and sixth year. The content of RSE at post primary level is described under three themes:

- 1. Human Growth and Development:** This theme consists of an age appropriate understanding of the biology and psychology of the human life cycle. This is accompanied by a rationale for responsible behaviour in relationships and sexuality.
- 2. Human Sexuality:** Sexuality is an integral part of the human personality and has biological, psychological, cultural, social and spiritual dimensions. The theme offers opportunities to develop a holistic understanding of sexuality as contributing to the development of personal well-being, enhancing personal and family relationships and ultimately contributing to the well-being of society.
- 3. Human Relationships:** This theme focuses on the importance of relationships for health and well-being. It examines how one relates to self and others, stressing the importance of self-esteem as a basis for worthwhile friendships and relationships. It addresses issues such as communication, influence, intimacy, sexual attraction and sexual expression in relationships consistent with personal and moral integrity. These themes are neither sequential nor discrete; they merge and overlap with each other. Teaching strategies should reflect this relationship.

Timetable Provision

The RSE programme as taught in our school is the programme laid out by the NCCA. The content is delivered in a minimum of six class periods per year as follows:

- First, Second and Third year students have RSE as an integral part of the SPHE programme which is timetabled for one class period per week for a minimum of six weeks.
- Transition Year students have RSE as an integral part of the SPHE programme which is timetabled for one class period per week for a minimum of six weeks. Fifth and Sixth Year students have RSE as a separate and distinct module from Religious Education, timetabled on the Religious Education line for two class periods per week for a minimum of three weeks (or 6 class periods).

Whole School Provision of RSE (Holistic Approach)

- The school encourages parents / guardians to ensure that students participate in this programme as a way of supporting parents as the primary educators of their children.
- Religious Education programme which discusses relationships, adolescence, responsibility, values, peer pressure, conflict and decision-making.
- Student-centred pastoral care structure supports include Year Heads, Class Tutors, guidance and Counselling, Pastoral Care Team, Learning Support, Student Council, Principal and Deputy Principals.

- The Student Support team are fully aware of the circumstances which may make children more vulnerable to harm. These include Parent/Carer factors, child factors, community factors, environment factors and poor motivation of parents/guardians to engage.
- Possibility of one-to-one conversations with the school Guidance Counsellors.
- Anti-bullying strategy and programme of prevention emphasising respect for the rights and dignity of others.
- Education of human physiology and human reproduction – Science and Biology classes.

Guidelines for the Management and Organisation of RSE in our School

All education partners are consulted before ratifying school policy and programmes, i.e. staff, Board of Management, parents / guardians, and students through The Student Council.

Arrangements for the teaching programme and the deployment of staff will be made by the Principal

- 1. Informing and Involving Parents:** Informing and involving parents will take place with the understanding that parents are the primary educators of their children and their role in this is seen by the school as very important. Relevant sections of the RSE policy will be included in the school's communications with the parents of Junior Cycle pupils and with the parents of Leaving Certificate pupils as appropriate with regard to outside speakers. Information will also be shared via the Parents' Council and through the parent representation on the Board of Management. All views expressed by parents will be taken into account when reviewing the policy.

It is our hope that all students will avail of the RSE programme provided by the school. We understand however that at times parents/guardians may wish to withdraw their sons from particular aspects of the RSE programme because of perceived conflict with their own values and beliefs; the school respects this parental right but will engage with parents with a view to resolving any perceived difficulties. Parents / guardians are not obliged to give a reason for withdrawal but we respectfully ask for one so that we might help resolve misunderstandings.

Parents/Guardians may request that their son be withdrawn from RSE by, written request or email(principal@wexfordcbs.ie), and, following a meeting with the Principal and/or RSE teacher.

If students are withdrawn arrangements will be made where possible between parents/guardians and management for their care while the programme is in progress.

- 2. 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 will be respected unless a mandated person becomes aware that a child is at risk, in which case the appropriate action will be taken. It is school policy that in circumstances where a student is considered at some risk of any type of abuse or in breach of the law, the mandated person (eg class teacher) must refer this immediately to the Principal as the Designated Liaison Person. The mandated person, in consultation with the DLP should always inform Tusla if they have reasonable grounds for concern that a child may have been, is being, or is at risk of being abused or neglected. Mandated persons must act in accordance with Child Protection Procedures outlined in the Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools 2017 which came about arising from the enactment of the Children First Act 2015. The following is also school policy:

- Mandated persons must not promise absolute confidentiality;

- Students must be made aware that any incident may be conveyed to the Principal and possibly to parents if the Principal and/or the mandated person decides that it is in the best interests of the student to notify parents;
 - Mandated persons must use their professional judgement to decide whether confidentiality can be maintained having heard the information;
 - Mandated persons must indicate clearly to students when the content of a conversation can no longer be kept confidential – the student can then decide whether to proceed or not.
3. **Sexual Abuse:** It should be remembered that sexual activity involving a young person may be sexual abuse even if the young person concerned does not themselves recognise it as abusive. A full list of relevant offences against the child which are considered sexual abuse - See Appendix 1.
 4. **Explicit Questions:** It may not be appropriate to deal with some explicit questions in class. Teachers may choose to say that it is not appropriate to deal with that question at this time. If a teacher becomes concerned about a matter that has been raised he / she should seek advice from the SPHE coordinator or the Principal. When deciding whether or not to answer questions the teacher should consider the age and readiness of the students, the RSE programme content, the ethos of the school and the RSE policy.
 5. **Visiting Speakers:** It is school policy that most of the RSE programme is best discussed openly with teachers who are known and trusted by the students. However, visitors may enhance the quality of the provision as long as they are used in addition to, not instead of, a planned programme of RSE.

In keeping with *Children First: National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children*, all visiting speakers and facilitators to the school with unsupervised access to students will have Garda clearance. The SPHE co-ordinator will provide the visitor, well in advance of the visit with a copy of the RSE policy. The organiser makes the visitor aware of the ethos of the school and the manner of delivery of the RSE programme. Visiting speakers will be made aware of the school's ethos and will agree to work within those parameters. Visitors should be given advance notice of the composition of the class and an idea of how their contribution fits into the scheme of work. In order to inform the visitor of the precise requirements of a group and to make better use of the time of the visitor it is advisable for the group to draw up questions in advance and these should be forwarded to the visitor. This will involve the students in the visit and will make the experience more relevant for them – it also facilitates planning.

6. **Sensitive Issues:** From time to time some issues within the RSE programme may present as particularly sensitive for some students. Every effort will be made by staff to become aware of the profile of the group in advance of the delivery of the programme and our Guidance and Counselling services or external counselling will be offered where necessary.
7. **LGBTQ+:** Teachers do not promote any one lifestyle as the only acceptable one for society and therefore it is inevitable and natural that LGBTQ+ will be discussed during a programme of sex education. One of the many advantages of exploring issues concerning LGBTQ+ is the opportunity to correct false ideas, assumptions and address prejudice. Discussion of LGBTQ+ should be appropriate to the age of students and the language used by teachers should respect all sexualities.
8. **Special Needs:** Students with special needs may need more help than others in coping with the physical and emotional aspects of growing up, they may also need more help in learning what sorts of behaviour are and are not acceptable, and in being warned and prepared against abuse by others.
9. **The Division between Biological and Non-Biological Aspects of Sex Education:** The school policy is that the Science Department deals primarily with the biological aspects of reproduction but within the teaching of RSE biological terms will be used and there may be a cross-over of content within both areas. This may provide an opportunity for cross-curricular co-operation and team teaching.

10. Consult Regularly with Students and the RSE team to ensure that the teaching is relevant to the students RSE needs. The SPHE and RE co-ordinators have regular conversations to ensure that students have adequate and relevant RSE education incorporated into each school year.

Ongoing Support, Development and Review

Training: All teachers involved in this work have completed the relevant training prior to undertaking their role as SPHE or RSE teacher. The school will continue to facilitate teachers' CPD in these areas as relevant.

Resources: The school will purchase appropriate RSE teaching materials which have been identified by staff as useful and which have been approved by the Principal, within the normal budgetary framework and as general school resources allow.

Monitoring, Evaluating and Reviewing the RSE programme

The policy will be reviewed and evaluated at certain pre-determined times under the direction of the Board of Management. Ongoing review and evaluation will take cognisance of changing specifications, information, guidelines, legislation and feedback from parents / guardians, students, teachers and others. The SPHE/RSE coordinator will have the role of monitoring aspects of the policy. The policy will be revised as necessary in the light of such review and evaluation and within the framework of school planning.

To review and evaluate the policy, it will be necessary to gauge the impact and effectiveness of the policy by examining the extent to which:

- RSE is being successfully taught through SPHE for all students and Senior Cycle RE;
- Where SPHE may not be timetabled, e.g. at Senior Cycle, that these students are receiving RSE distinctly on the Religious Education line;
- Resource materials are available to teachers;
- Appropriate in-service for teachers is available and relevant teachers are availing of it;
- Staff are aware of the policy;
- 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.

Ratified by the Board of Management on:

Date:

Chairperson: Gerry Forde

Mission Statement

to develop responsible individuals who will participate fully in a changing society and to carry out this task in a Christian environment