

Relationships and Sexuality Education Policy

This RSE policy was developed in accordance with:

- The school mission statement
- Guidelines as set out in Circular M4/95, M20/96, C23/10 Social and Personal Health Education (SPHE) and Relationships and Sexuality Education-Best Practice Guidelines for Post Primary Schools and C37/2010 as well as circular 0043/2018 in relation to external visitors.
- Guidance from SPHE Department and RE Department
- Consultation with the Student Support Team
- All members of the Colaiste Muire Cobh School Community

This RSE policy is a written statement of the aims of the RSE programme within Coláiste Muire Cobh. The policy reflects the relationship of RSE to SPHE and other subjects e.g. Religious Education, Science and Biology and the organisation and management of RSE within the school.

This policy applies to all aspects of teaching and learning about relationships and sexuality. It also applies to all school staff, students, parents /guardians, visiting speakers, invited guests, volunteers and members of the Board of Management.

Coláiste Muire Cobh 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.

Coláiste Muire Cobh gives its students the opportunity to explore the humanities, sciences, arts, business studies and technical subjects. In addition, it provides religious, moral and physical education in order to meet its founding objectives of supporting students in achieving their full academic potential and preparing them for participation in civic society and working life.

A code of behaviour has been published after consultation with parents, staff and students and the following illustrates how the ethos of the school operates on a daily basis:

- Discipline is founded on the principles of respect for people, environment, property and safety. All rules follow from these basic principles which are intended to create and maintain a happy and stable community.
- The best way in which the school can operate with the maximum happiness and fulfilment for everybody is if the maximum courtesy and respect is shown for other people. Students at Coláiste Muire are expected to respect the dignity of other students, teachers and other staff in the school and have the right to expect that their own dignity will be respected.

Spiritual, moral and religious issues will arise when teaching RSE. The RSE policy will guide teachers in the treatment of such issues in accordance with the ethos of the school. It is important that teachers of RSE understand that their role is to express the views of the whole school community on these sensitive issues and not their own personal views. In this regard, it should be noted that:

Schools are required to deliver all aspects of the RSE curriculum, including those in relation to sexual orientation, contraception, sexually transmitted infections etc. This can be done within a context in which teaching of the programme is informed by the school's ethos.

A school can express its ethos while at the same time facilitating students in discussing a range of views in relation to topics within the RSE programme.

“Junior Cycle places students at the centre of the educational experience, enabling them to actively participate in their communities and in society and to be resourceful and confident learners in all aspects and stages of their lives” NCCA Wellbeing guidelines 2015

Definition of Relationships and Sexuality Education

RSE is a developmental process through experiential learning in which students participate to help cultivate a healthy attitude towards themselves and others, particularly in the area of sexuality and relationships.

Relationships and Sexuality Education within Social Personal and Health Education

The Draft Guidelines for RSE (NCCA, June 1995, 1.2) state that Social Personal and Health Education is “spiral, developmental in nature and age appropriate in content and methodology”. The RSE programme is designed to follow this principle and pattern. Apart from the specific lessons of RSE, SPHE covers other areas which would be pertinent to the development of a healthy attitude to sexuality in oneself and one's relationship with others. SPHE deals with many issues such as self-esteem, assertiveness, communication and decision making skills – all of which can contribute to the effectiveness of the RSE programme.

The aims of our Relationships and Sexuality Education programme

Relationships and sexuality education which is located in the overall framework of Social, Personal and Health Education, has as its specific aims:

- To help students 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 students to develop attitudes and values toward their sexuality in a moral, spiritual and social framework in keeping with the policy of the school
- To provide opportunities for students to learn about relationships and sexuality in ways that help them think and act in a moral, caring and responsible way.

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

Guidelines for the management and organisation of Relationships and Sexuality Education in our school

Resources and timetabling: Arrangements regarding the teaching of the programme and the deployment of staff will be made by the Principal in consultation with the SPHE and RE Department.

SPHE Coordinator: The following are the main points applicable in the provision of an SPHE co-ordinator and areas of responsibility in the provision of RSE. This role is currently fulfilled in a voluntary capacity and is discussed further in the SPHE Policy.

- Programme Planning – The SPHE curriculum as outlined offers a flexible framework within which schools can design the SPHE programme most suitable for the students and the school. It is recommended that RSE planning take place at the start of the school year and at regular intervals
- Support Time – Due to the challenging nature of RSE, teachers need regular structured team meetings to enable them to access the support of colleagues. The co-ordinator facilitates such meetings and keeps a record of minutes.
- Evaluation – Co-ordination is necessary to establish procedures to facilitate the monitoring and evaluation of RSE within a particular school. It will also facilitate the recording of work done each year and organising a developmental sequence of work throughout the years of the programme.
- Training – Identifying and accessing training on ongoing basis for RSE teachers.
- Advising the Principal of the needs and requirements of the RSE programme
- Linking with parents
- Liaising with relevant others in the school
- Liaising with community groups and outside groups
- Linking with PDST Health and Wellbeing
- Finance – Co-ordination will ensure the ongoing provision of the resources necessary for effective teaching of SPHE and RSE.

Informing and Involving Parents: Parents are the primary educators of their children and their role in education concerning relationships and sexuality is seen by the school as very important. Relevant sections of this RSE policy will be included in the school's Information for Parents. This policy has been designed in consultation with Parents' Association representatives and the views expressed by parents will be taken into account when reviewing the policy. A copy of this policy will be made available to any parent on request to the school Office. In Junior and Senior Cycle, a letter will be sent home at the beginning of the module.

Note: *The Education Act 1998 provides that a student is not required to attend instruction in any subject which is contrary to the conscience of the parents or in the case of a student who has reached the age of 18. Hence, parents /guardians have a right to opt their child out of the sensitive issues in RSE if they wish to do so. Parents do not have to give reasons for withdrawal. Once a parent's/guardian's request to withdraw is made, that request must be complied with until revoked by the parent. Parents/Guardians must collect and supervise students at this time.*

Offering Advice: *The school's function is to provide a general education about sexual matters and issues and not to offer individual advice, information or counselling on aspects of sexual behaviour and contraception – however sources of professional information and advice will be identified when appropriate. Teachers may provide students with education and information about where and from whom they can receive confidential sexual advice and treatment, e.g. their doctor or other suitable agency. Advice offered should not be directive and should be appropriate to the age of the student.*

Explicit 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. On these, and on all questions, teachers will use their professional judgment, guided by the age of the students, the RSE curriculum and the RSE policy for the school. Students should be made aware at the beginning of the RSE programme that asking personal questions of staff and peers is inappropriate and unacceptable. It is suggested that teachers might make available a “question box” in the classroom, into which students may place questions of an embarrassing nature to be dealt with anonymously and in the strictest confidence. If a teacher becomes concerned about a matter that has been raised they should inform/seek advice from the Principal/Deputy Principal. 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 co-ordinator 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.*

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 student is at risk, in which case the appropriate action should be taken e.g. follow the procedures set down in the Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post Primary Schools 2017.*

In cases of under-age sexual activity in all cases where a school/teacher becomes aware of underage sexual intercourse the reporting procedures are to be followed including a requirement to liaise with the Designated Liaison Person and, where applicable, to submit mandated reports jointly with the DLP to Tusla. 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 teacher must refer this immediately to the Principal (DLP/DDLP) The Principal(DLP/DDLP) will decide whether to inform the parents and/or appropriate authorities and may arrange for counselling.

The following is also school policy:

- Teachers must not promise absolute confidentiality;
- Students must be made aware that any incident may be conveyed to the Principal/DLP and possibly to parents if the Principal decides that it is in the best interests of the student to notify parents.

The Child Protection Guidelines for Post Primary schools state in 4.1.1. and 4.2.1.

4.1.1. If a member of staff receives an allegation or has a suspicion that a child may have been abused, or is being abused, or is at risk of abuse he/she should, without delay, report the matter to the Designated Liaison Person in that school. A written record of the report should be made and placed in a secure location by the Designated Liaison Person. The need for confidentiality at all times, as previously referred to in Chapter 1 Paragraph 1.2 of these guidelines, should be borne in mind. The supports of the school should continue to be made available to the child.

4.2.1 If the Designated Liaison Person is satisfied that there are reasonable grounds for the suspicion or allegation he/she should report the matter to the relevant health board immediately.

Withdrawing students from the RSE programme:

Relevant sections of this policy are made available to parents with details about the parent's right to withdraw their child from sensitive aspects of RSE – parents will always be provided with a full copy of this policy following a request to do so.

Issues such as over population and birth control are met in a minor way in subjects such as Geography and RE. However, as any discussion is limited and set within the context of the other subject concerned, it does not constitute part of the RSE Programme.

Parents do not have to give reasons for withdrawal, but we respectfully invite them to do so – sometimes we can then resolve misunderstandings. Once a parent's request to withdraw is made, that request must be complied with until revoked by the parent. (See also appendix 1)

Using visiting speakers and others

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 can enhance the quality of the provision as long as they are used in addition to, not instead of a planned programme of RSE.

The SPHE Co-ordinator will provide the visitor, well in advance of the visit, with a copy of this RSE policy. After gaining approval from the Principal for the visit the organiser makes the visitor aware of the ethos of the school and the manner of delivery of the RSE programme.

All programmes and events delivered by visitors and external agencies must use appropriate, evidence based methodologies with clear educational outcomes. Such programmes are best delivered by those specifically qualified to work with the young people for whom the programmes are designed.

All programmes, talks, interventions and events should be evaluated by students and teachers in terms of the subject matter, messages, structure, methodology and proposed learning outcomes

This policy should be read in conjunction with circular 0043/2018 regarding best practice guidance for post primary schools in the use of programmes and/or external facilitators in promoting wellbeing consistent with the Department of Education and Skills Wellbeing Policy Statement and Framework for Practice and our school policy on External Visitors policy.

RSE Curriculum:

The following themes are discussed in a spiral manner in the provision of RSE as outlined by the NCCA Guidelines.

- Human Growth and Development
- Human Sexuality
- Human Relationships

Sexual Orientation:

The post-primary RSE Curriculum Guidelines include the subject of sexual orientation. RSE training courses delivered by the PDST Health and Wellbeing Team provide teachers with relevant materials. The school may decide if the topic needs to be addressed before Senior Cycle, especially if homophobic bullying is an issue. Teachers do not promote any one lifestyle as the only acceptable one for society. Therefore, it is inevitable and natural that homosexuality will be discussed during a programme of sex education. One of the many advantages of exploring issues concerning

homosexuality is the opportunity to correct false ideas, assumptions and address prejudice. Discussion of homosexuality should be appropriate to the age of the pupils. The Equal Status Act 2000 and the Equality Act 2004 prohibit discrimination across nine grounds, including sexual orientation. Consideration needs to be given to the messages that are conveyed if the subject of homosexuality is not discussed in schools. It is important that any student who is coming to terms with their sexual identity should not experience any harassment, embarrassment or isolation which may impact on their mental and emotional health and they should be offered support from the Student Support Team and/or Guidance Department.

Family Planning/ Contraception:

The post-primary RSE Curriculum Guidelines state that the subject of family planning should be covered within the Senior Cycle RSE programme. The RSE programme requires that young people are provided with information about methods of contraception, including Natural Family Planning. Age appropriate information is already taught as part of the Junior Certificate science curriculum.

Abortion:

This topic will be dealt with in an age appropriate, open manner, looking at all aspects of the issues in a non-directive way.

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.

Practical Issues

All students in the Junior cycle have one period of SPHE per week. RSE will be included as a module in the second term of school as part of their SPHE programme. Students in senior cycle will receive a minimum of 6 weeks' tuition in RSE as part of their Religious Education programme. The size of the class groups will be determined by the base class. The boundaries of the RSE programme will be delivered with due deference to: (a) The age of the students (b) The school ethos (c) Limits of confidentiality, limits to discussions and questions. (d) Ensuring that the RSE classroom is a safe place for all, including students and teachers. (e) RSE curriculum guidelines

Visiting speakers must be made aware of the schools RSE policy, Mission statement and the SPHE visitor guidelines as laid down by the Department of Education in circular 0023/2010 and 0043/2018 to secondary schools. The Student Support Team and SPHE Department/ RE Department are advised when visiting speakers are in the school. Thus, classroom teachers must remain in the classroom with the students; parents should be consulted and made aware of visiting people and agencies. All programmes and events delivered by visitors and external agencies must use appropriate evidence based methodologies with clear educational outcomes. Such programmes are best delivered by those specifically qualified to work with young people for whom the programmes are designed. Evaluation of the speakers is compulsory. Provision will be made for students with special needs as laid down by the NCCA guidelines. To comply with these guidelines, it will be necessary for the class teacher to consult with the special needs co-ordinator, prior to the programme, to discuss any students with special needs and to ascertain how they can be supported throughout the programme. SEN students 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. In the case of a small number of students with additional needs it may be necessary to "pre teach" some

elements of the RSE programme. This would be done in collaboration with the Learning Support Department.

Links to other Policies and to Curriculum Delivery:

School policies need to be consistent with one another, within the framework of the overall Whole School Plan. Relevant school policies already in place, being developed or reviewed, will be examined with reference to the RSE Policy and any implications which may impact upon them will be addressed. Similarly, the implications of other school policies and guidelines/plans for the RSE policy also need to be considered.

Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) is a Junior Cycle core subject. SPHE provides students with opportunities to develop the skills and competencies to care for themselves and others and to make informed decisions about their health, personal lives and social development. This includes providing information on relationships and sexuality. Aspects of RSE are delivered across the curriculum, through subjects such as Religious Education, Science, and Biology. In Colaiste Muire Cobh our aim is to ensure that all students receive a full and balanced RSE programme from First Year through to Sixth Year.

Ongoing Support and Review:

The skills acquired in general teaching apply also to health education. Training and CPD in Relationships and Sexuality education will be ongoing to provide the most appropriate and up to date teaching and learning for our students.

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: We are committed to monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of this programme. Specifically, important to the RSE Programme are:

1. a) Student feedback;
2. b) Staff review and feedback;
3. c) Parental feedback

Appendix 1

What we do if a request for withdrawal from the RSE programme is made by a parent:

1. a) We discuss the nature of the concerns with the student's parent and if appropriate attempt to reassure them (initially such discussion takes place at a meeting with the Year Head and SPHE Co-ordinator, the Principal may become involved if necessary)
2. b) We consider whether the programme can be amended or improved in a way that will reassure parents – care is taken not to undermine the integrity of the RSE programme and the entitlement of the other students.
3. c) We attempt to ensure that where a student is withdrawn there is no disruption to other parts of their education.

4. d) We point out that pupils who have been withdrawn are vulnerable to teasing – we therefore attempt to cause minimal embarrassment to the student and minimal disruption to the programme.
5. e) We also point out that students may receive inaccurate information from their peers.
6. f) We offer the parents access to appropriate information and resources

This Policy was approved by the Board 24th June 2021