

St. Columba's College Stranorlar



Relationships and Sexuality Education

June 2023

RELATIONSHIP AND SEXUALITY EDUCATION (RSE) POLICY

Introduction

The RSE policy is a written statement of the aims of the RSE programme, the relationship of RSE to SPHE, and the organisation and management of RSE within the school. The policy was enacted in 2017 after consultation between the RSE committee, the Principal, the Board of Management, students, staff and parent representatives.

School Philosophy

St Columba's College is a voluntary Catholic secondary school under the trusteeship of CEIST and our mission statement is 'The pursuit of excellence in a caring environment.' Inspired by the vision of Catherine McAuley, Mercy education is committed to the holistic development of each student and the achievement of their full potential, particularly those who are disadvantaged or marginalised.

St Columba's College aims to provide a happy, secure environment conducive to good behaviour in which students can develop emotionally, spiritually and academically, taking the student's background, circumstances and abilities into consideration. We strive to develop a culture in which good relationships are encouraged, people feel valued and respected and pupils are encouraged to express themselves and have people listen to them.

It is the vision of the school to:

- Promote the holistic development of all members of the school community
- Promote excellence in Teaching and Learning
- To show respect, care and compassion for every member of the school community
- To share in the ongoing search for a more loving, just and peaceful world
- Equip students with high self-esteem to enable them to go to live happy and fulfilled lives

Relationship of RSE to the Schools Mission Statement

St Columba's College is committed to providing the best educational formation possible for all students by providing equally for all, a broadly based curriculum. We aim to provide an education for all students that will embrace their full human development: personal, academic, physical, moral and spiritual. RSE encompasses the development of attitudes, beliefs and values about relationships, sexual identity and intimacy contributing towards the full human development of the student. The RSE programme is developed with due cognisance of the school mission statement and Circular 0037/2010.

Definition of RSE

Relationship and Sexuality Education encompasses the acquisition of knowledge and understanding, and the development of attitudes, beliefs and values about relationships, sexual identity and intimacy.

RSE seeks to provide children with opportunities to acquire knowledge and understanding of relationships and human sexuality, through processes which enable them to form values and establish behaviours within a moral, spiritual and social framework. (Pg 7, Interim Guidelines)

Policy Context and Rationale

The Education Act (1998) emphasises that schools are obliged to promote the social and personal development of students and provide health education for them.

The policy applies to school staff, students, board of management, parents/guardians/visiting speakers/external facilitators.

The policy applies to all aspects of teaching/learning about relationships, it is cross curricular and not exclusively the domain of SPHE or RSE. It is therefore important that all staff would be familiar with the RSE Policy.

As part of the SPHE programme students are encouraged to develop their own self confidence and build relationships with others. The aim of the SPHE programme is to promote physical, mental and emotional health and wellbeing. It also encourages the development of a healthy attitude to sexuality.

Relationships and Sexuality are key elements of healthy social and personal development, but particularly in the lives of an adolescent. Young people are exposed to a wide variety of messages about sexuality and sexual activity. Schools, in consultation with parents, need to reflect on how to provide for the needs of students.

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. The RSE programme is part of Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) at both Junior and Senior Cycle, while aspects of the programme are also addressed in Religious Education and other subjects in a cross curricular approach.

Circulars M4/95 and M20/96 request schools to commence a process of RSE policy development.

Circular 15/2017 “Arrangements for the Implementation of the Framework for Junior Cycle with particular reference to school years 2017/18 and 2018/19.

The college adopts and adheres to the DES Child Safeguarding Procedures, Students First Legislation (2017) and has a Child Safeguarding Statement in place with the Principal Mr Tom Rowan as Designated Liaison Person (DLP) and the Deputy Principal Ms Georgina White as the Deputy DLP. The RSE policy is cognisant of all aspects of our current Child Safeguarding Policy and Statement. Where a child protection concern is raised, the procedures outlined in the school’s Child Safeguarding policy are followed.

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

Current circulars relating to RSE are available on the DES website.

Aims of the RSE Programme

- To help students understand and develop friendships and relationships
- To promote a holistic understanding of sexuality and to use this self-awareness in making healthy life choices in line with their personal integrity
- To develop an awareness among young people of the variety of ways in which individuals grow and change during adolescence and to develop respect for differences between individuals
- To promote a positive attitude to students' own sexuality and in relationships with others in a moral, spiritual and social framework
- To promote knowledge of and respect for reproduction in the context of family life and the responsibilities of parenthood
- To enable students to be comfortable with one's sexuality and others while growing and developing
- To provide opportunities for pupils to learn about relationships and sexuality in ways that encourage them to think and act in a moral, caring and responsible way
- To facilitate the development of attitudes and skills consistent with personal moral integrity
- To develop skills for coping with peer pressure and threats to personal safety

Objectives

- This policy ensures clarity and consensus on how RSE is taught in the school
- It articulates the relationship of RSE to SPHE
- It articulates the aims of the RSE programme
- It clarifies the rights, roles and responsibilities of all within the school community in relation to the RSE policy, with particular reference to school staff, students, parents and the Board of Management
- It ensures that teachers, parents and students understand how the teaching of RSE is linked to the school ethos
- It provides information on the practicalities of delivering the programme

Relationship of RSE to SPHE/ Wellbeing

- SPHE provides opportunities for pupils to learn basic personal and social skills which foster integrity, self-confidence and self-esteem while nurturing sensitivity to the feelings and rights of others

- The Guidelines for RSE state that SPHE is ‘spiral, developmental in nature and age-appropriate in content and methodology.’ (NCCA 1995, 1.2). The RSE programme is designed to follow this principle and pattern
- SPHE covers areas such as self-esteem, assertiveness, communication and decision-making skills – all of which can contribute to the effectiveness of the RSE programme
- SPHE adds the dimension to education of empowering people to manage their own lives. By providing RSE through the SPHE programme, we teach students personal skills to increase their personal effectiveness so that, in the context of their own lives, they are able to make informed decisions in relation to their sexuality and relationships with others
- There is continued emphasis on health and well-being, responsibility and decision-making through the RSE programme

Current Provision

- Currently SPHE is part of the Junior Cycle timetable with one period timetabled per week
- All senior classes will be taught an RSE module
- All classes at Junior and Senior Cycle will have a minimum of five classes of RSE, which will be delivered early in the school year
- Issues relating to Relationships and Sexuality are also addressed in the Religious Education programme at Senior Cycle

Our Relationships and Sexuality programme includes:

Junior Cycle

- Relationships, family, friends/peers, love and its meaning – romantic, affectionate, parental, sexual.
- Development of relationships
- Marriage and its meaning and responsibilities
- The meaning of family
- Reproductive system – development of the child
- Sexuality, gender identity and sexual health

Senior Cycle

The above topics are developed further along with the following:

- Sexually transmitted diseases and Aids
- Family planning Sexual orientations & for
- Homosexuality / homophobia discrimination
- Sexism - equality of the sexes, communication
- Human reproduction is part of the Biology programme which all students participate in up to Junior Cycle.

Some aspects of RSE are approached during subjects such as Biology, CSPE, Guidance and Counselling, Religious Education and Science. Some are taught informally using a cross curricular approach and support what is taught in Junior Cycle SPHE (See SPHE

Policy) e.g. CSPE / RE - values, rights and responsibilities. Where there are cross-curricular links with SPHE / RSE the school ethos is respected at all times and informs what is taught. The RSE programme is supported by the Pastoral Care system and by the Management and Staff of the school. All teachers will be made aware of when the RSE module is being delivered, so they may link it to learning in their own subject.

Other Policies which support SPHE/RSE:

- Child Safeguarding Policy/ Child Safeguarding Statement
- Code of Behaviour
- Anti-Bullying Policy
- SPHE Policy
- Admissions Policy
- Healthy Eating Policy
- Internet Acceptable Use Policy

Child Protection

This policy is cognisant of all aspects of our current Safeguarding Policy. The school follows the DES Child Protection Guidelines and has a child protection strategy with the Principal Mr Tom Rowan as Designated Liaison Person (DLP) and the Deputy Principal Ms Georgina White as the Deputy DLP. Where a child protection concern is raised, procedures outlined in the Child Protection Policy will be followed.

Guidelines for the Management and Organisation of RSE in our School

1. Arrangements regarding the teaching of the RSE programme and the deployment of staff are made by the Principal
2. Provision of Support, Training and Staff Development:
 - A Co-ordinator of SPHE has been provided
 - Teachers are encouraged and facilitated to attend RSE and SPHE training
 - Teachers of RSE and SPHE have access to teaching materials and resources
 - Teachers who express an interest in SPHE / RSE will be given consideration
3. Inclusion of Parents:
 - The Parents' Association is consulted on the design and review of the RSE policy. The views expressed by parents will be taken into account when reviewing the policy
 - Parents have a responsibility to inform themselves of the RSE programme content and to prepare their son/daughter for the information they will acquire around the sensitive areas covered in RSE
 - The RSE policy is available to download from www.stcolumbascollege.ie or a copy may be requested by a parent from the school office. Parents are asked to familiarise themselves with the policy content
 - While all partners in the school community - teaching staff, students, parents and management - are agreed on the programme, we recognise, nevertheless, the

right of any parent who so wishes to request that his/her son/ daughter should not participate in the programme

Organisational Matters:

- Parents will be informed in advance of lessons on the sensitive areas of the RSE programme
- If students are withdrawn from the lessons pertaining to the sensitive elements of the RSE programme, parents must give a notice in writing to the school each year that they are withdrawing their son/daughter. The student will be accommodated in another classroom in the school at the specified time.
- Parents have a responsibility to become involved, to inform themselves of the programme content and to prepare students for the information they will acquire around the sensitive areas and discuss areas covered in RSE/SPHE
- Parents are invited/welcome to view the curriculum and may speak to the class teacher if they have any concerns
- In the class situation students will be encouraged to recognise that certain information is for them only and it would be inappropriate to discuss this with younger siblings/students for example
- With regard to matters of a confidential nature, the school cannot take any responsibility for what is discussed in the yard or classroom
- Where students are withdrawn from RSE, the school cannot take responsibility for any version of class content passed on to them by other students
- If a teacher has concerns about teaching the sensitive elements in RSE they should consult with the Principal. Any teacher has the right to opt out of teaching the sensitive elements of RSE. It is the responsibility of the B.O.M. to ensure content is covered by another teacher or an outside speaker
- Special consideration will be taken to ensure that the needs of students with SEN are met. Taking into account the pupil's social and emotional development, instruction will be based on individual needs where possible. Parents will be consulted around sensitive issues
- The RSE programme will be delivered openly by teachers who are known and trusted by pupils. However, it is recognised that the quality and provision of the programme may be enhanced by the expertise of visiting professionals. When this resource is deemed helpful visiting speakers will be facilitated in keeping with the School's Policy on Visiting Speakers and will be provided with a copy of the school's RSE policy prior to the visit

Withdrawing students from the RSE programme

1. 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 eighteen years, the student. Parents have a right therefore to withdraw their son/daughter from all or any aspect of RSE. Parents must notify the Principal in advance of their wish to have their son/daughter withdrawn from all or part of the programme. The school

may wish to ask the parents to put their request in writing. The student will be accommodated in another classroom in the school at the specified time.

2. Issues such as overpopulation and birth control are met in a minor way in subjects such as Geography and Religious Education. However, as any discussion is limited and set within the context of the other subject concerned, it does not constitute part of the formal RSE Programme
3. Parents do not have to give reasons for withdrawal, but we respectfully invite them to do so - we aim to resolve misunderstandings if possible. Once a parent's written request to withdraw is made, that request must be complied with until revoked by the parent

Confidentiality

While confidentiality cannot be guaranteed, it will be encouraged in the context of total respect for the sensitivity of any student who may share something of a personal or private nature. Teachers will make students aware of how best to make contributions to class discussions without personalising the issue.

The school cannot guarantee confidentiality if a student asks a question of a personal nature or discloses personal information.

Parents are recognised as the first teachers of their students about relationships and sexuality. Parents' representatives will be part of all decisions made by the Board of Management as regards the implementation of the programme. Parents will be informed of the content of the programme and will be allowed to withdraw their son/ daughter from the programme having consulted with the Principal

The programme will be taught to the students in the class groupings with which they are familiar. Provision may be made in fifth year for the class to be taught in a mixed setting

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

Issues such as the description of sexual intercourse, teenage pregnancy, separation, divorce, homosexuality and methods of family planning will be dealt with in a sensitive manner in accord with current legislation, best practice and school ethos

Provision of Ongoing Support and Development

- Opportunities provided by our Education Centre will be brought to the attention of staff members. Teachers will be encouraged to attend CPD in RSE
- Application for in-school support from PDST sought when necessary
- Staff meetings are utilised as a platform for discussion and development of RSE materials

Ongoing Evaluation and Review

The Board of Management and Senior Management Team are committed to ensuring access to CPD opportunities for all teachers involved in RSE and to providing relevant RSE school resources. Senior Management and the Board of Management facilitate teachers to participate in professional development opportunities, with due regard to the school budget and supervision/ substitution roster and the need for the ongoing teaching and learning programme of the school to continue with as little disruption as possible. Any teacher has the right to opt out of teaching the sensitive elements of RSE, following reasonable notification to the Principal. It is the responsibility of the Board of Management to ensure content is covered by another teacher or outside speaker.

Evaluation / review will be ongoing and will involve all those involved in the planning phases. Evaluation shall be under the following headings:

a. Whole School Evaluation

This will address the impact of the RSE programme on the whole school environment from how students relate to each other both inside and outside the RSE classroom to resource requirements for the effective delivery of the programme

b. Programme Evaluation

This will examine the relationship between the stages of the programme, the building of cross-curricular links, student and parent participation and resources and strategies useful in the delivery of the programme

c. Programme Evaluation by Students

All students will complete a short review of the RSE module at the end to evaluate content and allow reflection on what has been learned.

This Relationships and Sexuality Policy is reviewed in compliance with the Board of Management's policy for the cyclical review of all school policies as set out in The School Plan.

This policy was ratified by the Board of Management on 14th June and is the agreed policy of St. Columba's College. All teaching staff will need to be familiar with this policy and aware of any changes implied in curriculum delivery

Signed: P. J. M. Gowan
(Chairperson of Board of Management)

Date: 14/6/23

Signed: Don Power
(Principal)

Date: 14/6/2023



St. Columba's College Stranorlar, Co. Donegal

Phone (074) 9131246 Fax (074) 9132528

Dear parent(s)/guardian(s),

As part of our Senior Cycle SPHE Programme, we will be teaching the module on Relationships and Sexuality (RSE). RSE is much wider than the physical aspects and incorporates the moral, spiritual, social and psychological elements of each person. In senior cycle RSE, the topics that will be covered are as follows:

5th Year

1. Self-Awareness and personal skills
2. Relationship skills
3. Sexual and reproductive health
4. Sexual identity
5. Parenting

6th Year

1. Relationships
2. Sexual Harassment
3. Building Health Literacy
4. Consent

Your son/daughter may wish to talk about the topics raised in class and you are best placed to address any concerns they may have.

If you have any questions or would like some added information to help you support your son or daughter, please feel free to contact me at the college on (074)9131246.

We would like to take the opportunity to thank you for your ongoing support.

Yours sincerely,

T. Rowan



**St. Columba's College
Stranorlar,
Co. Donegal.**

Phone (074) 9131246 Fax (074) 9132523

Date:

Dear Parent(s)/Guardian(s),

As part of our Junior Cycle SPHE Programme, we will be teaching the module on Relationships and Sexuality (RSE). RSE is much wider than the physical aspects and incorporates the moral, spiritual and psychological elements of each person. In Junior Cycle RSE, the topics that will be covered are as follows:

1. Friendship
2. Self-Awareness and Personal Skills
3. Relationship Skills
4. Sexual and Reproductive Health
5. Sexual Identity
6. Parenting

Your son/daughter may wish to talk about topics raised in class and you are best placed to address any concerns they may have.

If you have any questions or would like some added information to help you support your son/daughter, please feel free to contact me at the college on (074) 9131246.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank you for your ongoing support.

Yours Sincerely,

T. Rowan

Principal