

St. Columba's College Stranorlar



Relationships and Sexuality Education

February 2019

Introductory Statement

This policy is an approved approach to the teaching of Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) in St. Columba's College. It was developed following consultation between staff, students, parents, senior management and the Board of Management. It was developed to inform teachers and parents as to what material is covered in the RSE programme within Social Personal and Health Education (SPHE). In this policy document the term 'parent' is taken to include 'guardian'.

School Philosophy

St. Columba's College is a Catholic Voluntary Secondary School within the Ceist Trust and is committed to the pursuit of excellence in a caring environment. Inspired by the vision of Catherine Mc Auley, Mercy education is committed to the holistic development and to the achievement of the full potential of each student, 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 ability into consideration. We strive to develop a culture where good relationships are encouraged, people feel valued and respected and pupils are encouraged to express themselves and have people listen to them.

- Mutual respect between all partners in education
- Student-centred
- Aims to ensure each student reaches full potential in the holistic sense
- Hopes that students are equipped with high self-esteem to enable them to go to live happy and fulfilled lives.

Definition of RSE

Relationship and Sexuality education (RSE) aims to provide opportunities for students in the school to learn about relationships and sexuality in ways that help them think and act in a moral, caring and responsible way ('Going Forward Together' Parent's Information Booklet, page 4).

Policy Context and Rationale

- 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. 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 Protection Procedures, Students First Legislation (2017) and has a Child Protection Policy / Child Safeguarding Statement, 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 Protection Policy / Child Safeguarding Statement. Where a child protection concern is raised, the procedures outlined in the school’s Child Protection Policy / Child Safeguarding Statement are followed
- Sexuality is a key element of healthy social and personal development. 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 the students
- 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 develop healthy friendships and relationships
- To promote a healthy attitude to sexuality and to relationships in a moral, spiritual and social framework

- To promote a good knowledge and respect for procreation in the context of family life and the responsibilities of parenthood
- To promote a holistic understanding of human 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 enable the student to be comfortable with the sexuality of oneself and others while growing and developing
- To enhance develop a positive sense of self-awareness and the skills for building and maintaining self-esteem
- 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.

We support the aims on which RSE is modelled. We encourage good behaviour, open communication, understanding and tolerance of differences, and respect for self and others. We recognise that both pupils and staff have rights and responsibilities in our school. A sense of responsibility is fostered, and attention is paid to the wellbeing of all of the members of the school community.

Objectives

- The 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 programme, 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 an 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 throughout the RSE programme.

Current Provision

- Currently, SPHE is part of the Junior Cycle timetable; one period a week is timetabled for Junior classes
- All Senior classes also receive one period a week for SPHE/RSE
- Issues relating to Relationships and Sexuality are also addressed in the Religious Education programme.

Our Relationships and Sexuality programme includes:

Junior Cycle

- Relationships; family, friends/peers; boy/girl, love and its meaning - romantic, affectionate, parental, sexual.
- Development of relationships boy/girl.
- 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 dealt with in deeper fashion along with the following:

- Sexually transmitted diseases and Aids
- Family planning
- Homosexuality / homophobia
- 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, Physical Education, 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.

Other Policies which support SPHE/RSE:

- Child Protection 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 Child Protection 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, the procedures outlined in the schools 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' Council 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(s) 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 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 that they are withdrawing their son/daughter. The student will be accommodated in another teacher's classroom in the school.
- 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.
- 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.

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.

- II. 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.
- III. 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.
- IV. If a student is withdrawn from the lessons pertaining to the sensitive elements of the RSE programme, parents must give a notice in writing to the school that they are withdrawing their son/daughter. The student may be accommodated in another teacher's classroom in the school.

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 from the programme having consulted with the Principal. The school will facilitate a regular programme of visiting speakers on the topics of relationships and sexuality to help parents inform themselves on current thinking on the matter.

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 utilised as a platform for discussion and development of RSE materials.

Ongoing Evaluation and Review

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.

This policy is ratified by the Board of Management 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.

The Board of Management and Senior Management Team are committed to ensuring access to CPD opportunities for all teachers involved in RSE, to providing relevant RSE school resources and to supporting efforts of parents to provide educational opportunities for other parents. 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 rota, and the need for the ongoing teaching and learning programme of the school to continue with as little disturbance 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 an outside speaker.

1. Ratification of policy

This policy was adopted by the Board of Management on _____.

Signed: _____ Date: _____

(Chairperson of Board of Management)

Signed: _____ Date: _____

(Principal)

2. Review of policy

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.