



RELATIONSHIP AND SEXUALITY EDUCATION (RSE) POLICY

Scoil Bhríde, Mercy Secondary School

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 will be enacted in 2017/2018 after consultation between the SPHE co-ordinator, the RSE team, the Principal, the Board of Management, staff, students and parent representatives.

School Information

Scoil Bhríde Mercy Secondary School is a voluntary Catholic girls only secondary school under the trusteeship of CEIST, grant aided by the Department of Education and Science.

Scoil Bhríde Secondary School values and maintains a Christian ethos of Mercy, Justice and Equality for all. Its aim is the pursuit of excellence in a centre of holistic learning. We actively nurture a caring environment in which respect for all is the hallmark

The Aims of Scoil Bhríde

- We will continue to promote equality of opportunity for all using a student-centred approach
- We will continue to enhance a climate which values individuals and nurtures learning through a disciplined environment
- Pastoral Care will continue to be an integral part of school life
- We will avail of our personnel and resources to provide new and develop existing courses that meet the educational needs of the community
- Parental involvement is welcome through our Parent Council and through the Parenting and other educational programmes
- We will encourage responsible student participation through the Student Council and other school based clubs and groups
- We support co-operation between the parents and the pupil council
- We endeavour to link the above aims with our school motto “Seriamus in veritate” – We serve God in truth.

Relationship of RSE to the Schools Mission Statement

Scoil Bhride Mercy Secondary School 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 which 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.

Scope of RSE policy:

- **To whom the policy applies**

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

- **To what aspects of the curriculum**

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.

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)

Goals /Objectives of RSE Programme

1. Relationship of RSE to SPHE

The Education Act (1998) emphasises that schools are obliged to promote the social and personal development of students and provide health education for them. 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 well being. It also encourages the development of a healthy attitude to sexuality. Relationships and Sexuality are key elements of healthy social and personal development in all our lives, but particularly in the lives of an adolescent. The RSE programme is designed to specifically deal with these issues and encourage students to deal with their own sexuality and develop relationships. RSE is one of ten modules to be taught in SPHE at Junior Cycle and is mandatory for all year groups from first year to sixth year. The course will be developmental in nature and will be age appropriate.

2. Aims of RSE programme

The RSE Programme will be taught as part of the SPHE Programme. The aims of RSE are

- To help students understand and develop friendships and relationships
- To promote an understanding of sexuality
- To promote a positive attitude to student's own sexuality and in relationships with others

- To promote knowledge of and respect for reproduction
- To enable students to develop attitudes and values towards their sexuality in moral, spiritual and social framework in keeping with the ethos of the school
- 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

It is acknowledged that these aims are aspirational due to the time constraints of the course.

Key Measures

1. Provision of training and staff development

It is school policy that

- An SPHE Coordinator be appointed
- A core group of staff who are trained and comfortable to teach SPHE be established as a Department grouping in it's own right
- Only staff who have received training **and** who are comfortable dealing with RSE be allocated class groups.
- Staff be consulted directly **prior** to their being timetabled for RSE.
- School management take full responsibility for the facilitation of on going training of staff. To this end Management will liaise with the SPHE coordinator and inform staff of training opportunities and make every effort to facilitate their release from school when/where necessary.

2. Inclusion of Parents/Guardians

It is recognised by the school that the parents/ guardians are the primary educators of the children and their role in education concerning relationships and sexuality is seen by the school as very important. Information will be provided for parents about the content and timing of the RSE module in the following ways:

Parents Association

This policy has been designed and reviewed in consultation with the Parents Association representatives and the views expressed by parents will be taken into account when reviewing the policy.

- **School website**

There will be a link to the RSE policy on the school website.

- **Letter to parents**

In order to inform parents/guardians of when these topics are being taught in school and to enable them to discuss these topics at home a letter will be sent home in advance of the programme being delivered. Parents/guardians will also be informed about the SPHE website, <http://www.sphe.ie/resources.aspx> which provides comprehensive details on the RSE curriculum.

3. Ethical and Moral Considerations

- **Answering Questions**

It is important for teachers to create an environment in RSE/SPHE in which students can discuss issues openly. However, boundaries need to be established around the appropriateness of certain questions in a classroom setting. In this matter the teachers will exercise their professional judgement guided by their training and the age of the students. If a teacher becomes concerned about a matter that has been raised the teacher will seek the advice of the 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/RSE co-ordinator or the Designated Liaison / Deputy Liaison Person. 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 and core values of the school and the RSE policy.

- **Confidentiality**

It is important that teachers facilitating classes in SPHE/RSE establish clear boundaries around confidentiality at the outset. Students must be made aware that they will not be asked to disclose personal information in SPHE/RSE classes. Students must also be informed of the limits of confidentiality and teachers must not guarantee confidentiality. Pupils will be informed that if a teacher becomes aware that a pupil is at risk of abuse, or in breach of the law, the procedures set down in the Child Protection Guidelines for Post Primary Schools will be followed.

The following is also school policy:

- a. Teachers must not promise absolute confidentiality
- b. Pupils must be made aware that any incident may be conveyed to the Principal and possibly to parents if the Principal decides that it is in the best interests of the child to notify parents;
- c. Teachers must use their professional judgement to decide whether confidence can be maintained having heard the information;
- d. Teachers must indicate clearly to students when the content of a conversation can no longer be kept confidential. Students should be made aware of a teacher's obligation to follow the child protection guidelines.

- **Sexual Activity**

As part of the RSE programme all students should be made that, under the Criminal Law (Sexual Offences) Act 2006, the age of consent for sexual activity for both males and females is 17 years of age in the Republic of Ireland. In circumstances where a teacher becomes aware that a pupil is engaging in underage sexual activity, the teacher must refer this immediately to the Designated Liaison Person (DLP).

- **Offering Advice**

The school's function is to provide a general education about sexual matters and not to offer individual advice or counselling on aspects of sexual behaviour. Where teachers become aware that a student needs extra support, they will refer her to the appropriate member of the Student Support Team. Teachers may provide pupils with education and information about where and from whom they can receive confidential advice and treatment.

- **Contraception**

The subject of contraception is covered within the senior cycle RSE programme. It is acknowledged that the topic may need to be addressed before senior cycle. Students will be provided with information about methods of contraception and the topic will be dealt with in an age appropriate, open manner looking at the issues in a **non- directive** way.

- **Sexual Orientation**

The subject of sexual orientation is included in the RSE curriculum at senior cycle however it is acknowledged that the topic may need to be addressed before senior cycle especially if homophobic bullying is an issue. Discretion will be used with regard to the age at which students discuss sexual orientation and it will be discussed in an open manner and in a non - directive way.

- **Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs)**

This topic will be dealt with in an age appropriate and open manner. While awareness of STI's is an objective of the Second Year SPHE/RSE programme this issue is mainly addressed in Senior Cycle.

4. Practical Issues

- **Timetabling**

SPHE is timetabled for 30 class periods across each academic year for Junior Cycle students. Within this framework RSE is taught as a module over six class periods.

Transition Year students will also be taught RSE as part of the SPHE programme. Fifth and Sixth Year students are taught a minimum of 6 RSE classes per year. These may be delivered as part during the RE programme. RSE will only be taught in the second and third terms of each school year in line with best practice around delivery of RSE.

- **Withdrawing pupils from RSE**

The school recognises that the parent/guardian has the right to withdraw their child from the RSE programme if they wish to do so. Parents/Guardians wishing to withdraw their daughter must contact the Deputy Principal in the first instance. This request should be made in writing to the Deputy Principal in September of each year; otherwise the student will take part in the RSE

classes. Parents/Guardians will be informed that where students are withdrawn from RSE, the school cannot take responsibility for any versions of class content passed on to them by other students.

- **Special Needs**

Students with special needs may require more help than others in coping with the physical and emotional aspects of growing up. In the context of RSE each student with special needs will be considered individually depending on his/her needs. Additional support/expertise may be sought in providing appropriate RSE education for students with special needs.

- **Visiting Speakers**

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. It is the responsibility of the teacher who organises the visit to ensure that the talk/programme is consistent with the School's ethos and policies. They should also ensure that it is appropriate to SPHE/RSE programme and to the age/needs of the students.

Visitors to the classroom should be made aware of relevant school policies beforehand and the Principal should be informed in advance of the visit and the content of the presentation. Teachers will remain with the class for the duration of the visit. Vetting requirements will be met.

- **Resources**

Resources are available to teachers of SPHE/RSE in the form of textbooks and workbooks. Students in Junior Cycle are required to have a textbook for SPHE. Supplementary resources are available from the SPHE storage area in the staff room.

- **Links to other School Policies**

All school policies strive to be consistent and cohesive within the framework of the overall school plan. The RSE policy is developed in this context and shares links with SPHE Policy, Substance Use Policy, Anti Bullying Policy, Whole School Guidance Plan and Child Protection Policy.

- **Links to other School Subjects.**

Teachers of the relevant subject areas such as Science, Home Economics and Religious Education will be informed of the content and the timing of the delivery of RSE, and in so far as possible RSE will be taught in a cross curricular way.

- **Roles and Responsibilities in implementing policy**

All partners, including the Board of Management, Parents/Guardians, School Management and Teaching Staff, have roles and responsibilities in ensuring the implementation of RSE Policy in our school. Given the sensitive nature of the work involved training of staff is paramount. Accordingly, teachers delivering the RSE programme will attend the training provided by the SPHE support service.

- **Ratification**

The RSE policy was ratified by the Board of Management on _____

- **Review/ Evaluation**

We are committed to monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of this policy. A review of the RSE policy will take place on a regular basis and may include review and feedback from pupils, staff, parents and representatives from the BOM. Any amendments necessary as a result of such a review will be undertaken

This policy was adopted by the Board of Management on:

Date: _____

Signed: _____

Chairperson, BOM

Mr Gearoid Leen – Principal

Dear Parent/Guardian,

I am writing to inform you about the Social, Personal and Health Education Programme which is a core part of the national school curriculum. S.P.H.E. provides a unique and exciting opportunity for students to develop skills and competence, to learn about themselves and others and to make informed decisions about their health, personal lives and social development.

Relationship and Sexuality Education (RSE) is one module within the S.P.H.E. curriculum. It is a developmental process through which pupils participate in order to cultivate a healthy attitude towards themselves and others, particularly in the area of sexuality and relationships. Thirty class periods, spread across the school calendar, is allocated to S.P.H.E. and out of the S.P.H.E. Programme in the year; six timetabled periods will be assigned to Relationships and Sexuality Education. This module will be taught to all year groups from first to sixth year. A complete breakdown of the S.P.H.E. curriculum, which includes comprehensive details on the RSE module, is available for your information on <http://www.sphe.ie/resources.aspx>.

As you are the primary educators of your children, we recognise the right of any parent/guardian who so wishes to request that his/her daughter should not participate in the programme. The school will respect this choice. Where students are withdrawn from RSE the school cannot take responsibility for any versions of class content passed on to them by other students. Any Parents/Guardians wishing to withdraw their daughter must contact **the Deputy Principal** to make their wishes known. This request should be made in writing before **the 5th of September** in order to allow for the provision of supervision for these students; otherwise the student will take part in the RSE classes.

We take this opportunity to express our appreciation of your interest and we look forward to welcoming your daughter into our school,

Yours sincerely,

Name??