



Relationships and Sexuality Education Policy

February 2024

(to be read in conjunction with the school policy on S.P.H.E)

Table of Contents

Our School.....	2
The scope of this policy will reach:	2
Our School Philosophy	2
VISION of an ERST School.....	3
R.S.E Policy Context	3
Definition of Relationships and Sexuality Education	4
The Aims of our Relationships and Sexuality programme	4
Relationships and Sexuality Education within Social Personal and Health Education	4
Guidelines for the management and organisation of R.S.E in our school	5
Informing and Involving Parents:.....	5
Offering Advice	5
Explicit Questions.....	5
Confidentiality.....	5
The division between biological and non-biological aspects of sex education:	6
Withdrawing pupils from the R.S.E programme	6
Consent to R.S.E/ Gender Identity	6
Guest Speakers	6
Homosexuality	7
Contraception	7
Additional Needs.....	7
Ongoing support, development and review	7
How R.S.E will be taught and timetabled.....	7
Resources:.....	8
Monitoring, evaluating and reviewing the R.S.E programme:.....	8
Appendix 1	9
Appendix 2	9

Relationships and Sexuality Education Policy

Our School

St Mary's CBS is an all-boys Catholic Secondary School under the trusteeship of the Edmund Rice Schools Trust with an enrolment of 739 students. As an ERST School this Relationships and Sexuality Policy will impact on the whole school community.

The scope of this policy will reach:

The Board of Management: to approve the policy and ensure its implementation.

Principal: to support the procedures of the policy and ensure its effective implementation.

Parents: to be informed of and to support the policy.

School Staff: as teachers in a Christian Brother school, the hope is that the whole staff embraces and safeguards the ethos of the school and the cross-curricular nature of Relationships and Sexuality Education (R.S.E).

Teachers of R.S.E: to implement and review the policy and to ensure a high standard and effective delivery of R.S.E.

Pastoral Care Personnel (Guidance Counsellor and Year Heads): to monitor the effects of the policy and to provide support and guidance to the students.

Students: to participate in R.S.E programme under guidance from parents/guardians.

Our School Philosophy

St. Mary's C.B.S. is a community of students, teachers, parents, management, and ancillary staff. The central purpose of this community is the intellectual, emotional, religious, physical, social, and moral education of our students. The school strives to maintain an atmosphere of respect, inclusion, Christian care, and concern in which our students can grow to maturity. St. Mary's C.B.S. promotes partnership, excellence in teaching and learning and the development of leadership skills across the school.

School Motto

"From each, their best"

The school is committed equally to the following goals:

- i. Fostering excellence in all aspects of school life.
- ii. Respecting the dignity of each member of the school community.
- iii. Preparing our students to achieve the highest possible grades in state and other examinations while preparing them vocationally and socially for the world in which they live.

- iv. The on-going professional development of the staff and promoting a spirit of co-operation and mutual support among staff.
- v. Enabling our students to develop a positive self-image and to establish good relationships with others.
- vi. Promoting an atmosphere of positive discipline and good order in our school.

Likewise, the school is committed to:

- i. Seeking the support and co-operation of parents in achieving the aims of the school.
- ii. Promoting good communications between the members of the school community.
- iii. Providing a programme of Pastoral Care within the school that is relevant to all students.
- iv. The development of Learning Support Programmes in the school.
- v. Pupil participation in appropriate areas of school life.

VISION of an ERST School

Guided by the 5 key elements and inspired by the vision of Edmund Rice, St. Mary's C.B.S.:

- Seeks to live by Gospel values
- Recognises the dignity of everyone
- Has a special concern for the poor and under-privileged
- Is challenged to develop a curriculum which promotes the harmonious growth of the whole person
- Contributes to the building up of the local community
- Works for peace and justice in society.

R.S.E Policy Context

St Mary's CBS' programme of R.S.E is provided in the context of the guidelines set out in;

- S.P.H.E Specification for Junior Cycle
- Junior Cycle Wellbeing Guidelines
- Participation Framework National Framework for Children and Young People's Participation in Decision-making
- Cineáltas: Action Plan on Bullying
- Looking at Our School 2022: A Quality Framework for Post-Primary Schools
- Circular 0037/2010 Relationships and Sexuality Education
- Circular 0027/2008 Relationships and Sexuality Education
- Circular 0043/2018 Best practice guidance for post primary schools in the use of programmes and/or external facilitators in promoting wellbeing.
- Circular 0028/2023 Arrangements for the implementation of the Framework for Junior Cycle with reference to the school year 2023/2024.

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

Some aspects of R.S.E are touched on during subjects such as Biology, CSPE, Guidance and Counselling, Home Economics, Physical Education, Religious Education and Science. Where there are cross-curricular links with R.S.E, the School ethos is always respected and informs what is taught. The R.S.E programme is supported by the Pastoral Care system and by Management and Staff of the School.

Definition of Relationships and Sexuality Education

R.S.E is a life-long developmental process of acquiring knowledge and an understanding of human relationships and sexuality. It is primarily the responsibility of parents and family. The R.S.E class gives students formal opportunities, through experiential learning, to cultivate healthy attitudes and values towards themselves and others, promoting the overall development of the person and the integration of sexuality into personal life.

The Aims of our Relationships and Sexuality programme

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

- To build on the primary school programme which strives to help young people learn at home and at school about their own development and about their friendships and relationships with others.
- To promote an understanding of sexuality.
- To promote a positive attitude towards one's own sexuality and one's relationships with others.
- To enable students to develop attitudes and values towards their sexuality in a moral, spiritual, and social framework.
- To promote knowledge and respect for human reproduction.
- To provide young people with information and skills to evaluate critically the wide range of information, opinions attitudes and values offered today, in order that they will make positive, responsible, moral, and caring decisions about themselves and the way they live their lives, while also respecting the dignity of others.

Relationships and Sexuality Education within Social Personal and Health Education

The R.S.E programme is principally delivered within the context of the School's S.P.H.E programme. It is designed to be spiral and developmental in nature, and age-appropriate in context and methodology. S.P.H.E provides students a unique opportunity to develop skills and competencies, to learn about themselves, to care for themselves and others and to make informed decisions about their health, their personal lives, and their social development. S.P.H.E covers other areas which are pertinent to the development of a healthy attitude to sexuality in oneself and in one's relationship with others, including self-esteem, assertiveness, communication, and decision-making.

The Draft Guidelines for R.S.E (NCCA (National Council for Curriculum and Assessment), June 1995, 1.2) state that Social Personal and Health Education is "spiral, developmental in nature and age

appropriate in content and methodology". The R.S.E programme is designed to follow this principle and pattern. Apart from the specific lessons of R.S.E, S.P.H.E covers other areas which would be pertinent to the development of a healthy attitude to sexuality in oneself and one's relationship with others. S.P.H.E deals with many issues such as self-esteem, assertiveness, communication, and decision-making skills - all of which can contribute to the effectiveness of the R.S.E programme.

Guidelines for the management and organisation of R.S.E in our school

Arrangements regarding the teaching of the programme and the deployment of staff will be made by the principal. The principal is aided by teachers in the subject areas of Biology, CSPE, Guidance and Counselling, Home Economics, Physical Education, Religious Education and Science. R.S.E is also supported informally through the student mentoring system (Meitheal & Treoiri), Home School Liaison, Care Team, Class Tutors, Guidance Counsellor, and School Counsellor.

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 especially important. **Parents have the right to withdraw their child from R.S.E lessons and must do so on enrolment (See appendix 1). Relevant sections of this policy will be included in the school's Information for Parents booklet, published annually in August.** This policy has been designed in consultation with Parents' Association representatives and the views expressed by parents will be considered when reviewing the policy.

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 pupils with education and information about where and from whom they can receive confidential sexual advice and treatment, e.g. their doctor or other suitable agencies. Advice offered should not be directive and should be appropriate to the age of the pupil.

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 S.P.H.E Co-ordinator or the Principal. When deciding whether to answer questions the teacher should consider the age and readiness of the students, the R.S.E programme content, the ethos of the school and the R.S.E policy.

Confidentiality

It is school policy that in circumstances where a pupil 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. The principal 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.
- Pupils must be made aware that any incident may be conveyed to the principal and to parents if the principal decides that it is in the best interests of the pupil to notify parents.

- Teachers must use their professional judgement to decide whether confidence can be maintained having heard the information.
- Teachers must indicate clearly to pupils when the content of a conversation can no longer be kept confidential - the pupil can then decide whether to proceed or not.

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 always, 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 seek advice from Tulsa or make a report on the Tulsa Portal immediately.

The division between biological and non-biological aspects of sex education:

The Science Department deals primarily with the biological aspects of reproduction.

Withdrawing pupils from the R.S.E programme

Parents have the right to withdraw their son from the R.S.E 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).

Consent to R.S.E/ Gender Identity

Teachers are aware that some students do not have consent to participate in R.S.E and or gender identity lessons. There is now an option on each student's VSWare profile which indicates if the student has consent to participate in said lessons.

- a) If a parent decides to withdraw a student, the school will organise for this student to be supervised during the R.S.E lessons.

Guest Speakers

- a) It is school policy that most of the R.S.E programme is best discussed openly with teachers who are known and trusted by the pupils. However, visitors can enhance the quality of the provision if they are used in addition to, not instead of a planned programme of R.S.E.
- b) The organiser makes the visitor aware of the ethos of the school and the manner of delivery of the R.S.E programme.

Issues to consider are:

- a) The degree of explicitness of the content and presentation
- b) For child protection purposes the teacher must accompany the guest speaker during the talk.
- c) Will the staff take an active role in the visitor's activities?
- d) How will the visitor be prepared for the visit?
- e) How will the visit be built upon and followed up?

- f) 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.
- g) The Office should be informed of the date and name of the visitor.

Homosexuality

It is inevitable and natural that homosexuality will be discussed during a programme of sex education. One of the 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.

Contraception

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

Additional Needs

Children with Additional Educational Needs (AEN) 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.

Ongoing support, development, and review

Training

All teachers involved in this work do not necessarily have to be 'experts' on the issues concerned. However, they do require sensitivity to the needs of the group, an ability to deal with questions openly/honestly and with preparedness to refer to more expert advice if necessary. The skills acquired in general teaching apply also to health education. Furthermore, many teachers have training in related areas such as counselling. Some teachers have expert training in the specific areas of health, relationships and sexuality education and will be encouraged to train other teachers. The school will facilitate teachers to obtain expert training in this field, bearing in mind the overall budgetary framework and the need for the ongoing teaching and learning programme of the school to continue with as little disturbance as possible.

How R.S.E will be taught and timetabled

1. R.S.E will be allocated a minimum of 6 lessons per year group.
2. When students engage with an R.S.E module, parents will be informed via the school app. This allows the parents to respond and build on the learning in the classroom.
3. For Junior Cycle, R.S.E will be taught as part of the S.P.H.E programme.
4. Transition Year will cover the following topics in their Religion lessons,
 - Human Growth and Development
 - Human Sexuality
 - Human Relationships
5. For 5th year students, R.S.E will be taught as an 8-week module in their Religion lessons. Any student who is normally withdrawn from Religion for resource will return to Religion class for the duration of the module. The following topics will be covered:
 - Self esteem
 - Loving Relationships

- Birth Control
 - Consent
6. For 6th year students, R.S.E will be taught as a 6-week module in their Religion lessons. Any student who is normally withdrawn from Religion for resource will return to Religion class for the duration of the module. The following topics will be covered;
- Personal Safety
 - Sexually Transmitted Infections
 - Fertility

Resources:

The school will purchase appropriate R.S.E 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 R.S.E programme:

We are committed to monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of this programme. Specifically important to the R.S.E Programme are:

- a) Pupil feedback;
- b) Staff review and feedback;
- c) Parental feedback.

This Relationships and Sexuality Education Policy was approved by the Board of Management on 26th February 2024

Signed: Anne Ahern **Chairperson, Board of Management**

Appendix 1

What we do if a parent requests that their son is withdrawn from the R.S.E programme:

- a) We discuss the nature of the concerns with the child's parent and if appropriate attempt to reassure them (initially such discussion takes place at a meeting with the Year Head and S.P.H.E Co-ordinator, the Principal may become involved if necessary).
- 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 R.S.E programme and the entitlement of the other pupils.
- c) We attempt to ensure that where a pupil is withdrawn there is no disruption to other parts of their education.
- d) We point out that pupils who have been withdrawn are vulnerable to teasing - we therefore attempt to cause minimal embarrassment to the pupil and minimal disruption to the programme.
- e) We also point out that pupils may receive inaccurate information from their peers.
- f) We offer the parents access to appropriate information and resources.
- g) The school will provide supervision for the withdrawn student, but only for the duration of the R.S.E classes.

Appendix 2

Sample wording for notification to parents on R.S.E (via the school app)

Dear Parent/ Guardian,

As part of the Social, Personal & Health Education (S.P.H.E.) syllabus, we are required to cover the area of Relationships and Sexuality (R.S.E). The teaching of this topic will commence shortly.

R.S.E plays a critical role in supporting and preparing young people for the transition from adolescence to adulthood. We encourage parents to respond and build on the learning that takes place in the classroom, through conversations at home.

Should you have any queries or concerns, we will be happy to address these.

Regards,

School Principal