



Relationship and Sexuality Education Policy

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Contents

| | |
|--|-----------|
| 1. Scope | 2 |
| 2. Relationship to Schools' Mission Statement | 3 |
| 3. Rationale..... | 3 |
| 4. Goals and Objectives | 4 |
| 5. Guidelines for the Management and Organisation of RSE in our School | 4 |
| 6.Management and Organisation of RSE | 5 |
| 7.The division between biological and non-biological aspects of Sexual Education..... | 9 |
| Appendix 1: Disclosures and reporting | 10 |

1. Scope

- A. Definition of Relationship and Sexuality Education (RSE)**
- B. What curricular areas is this policy relevant to?**
- C. Who is this policy relevant to?**
- D. Relationship and Sexuality Education (RSE) within Social Personal and Health Education**

A. Definition of Relationship and Sexuality Education (RSE)

Relationship and Sexuality Education (RSE) refers to a process of experiential learning that supports students in cultivating a healthy attitude towards themselves and others, particularly in the areas of sexuality and relationships.

B. What curricular areas is this policy relevant to?

This policy applies to all aspects of teaching and learning about relationships and sexuality. Discussions about relationships and sexuality take place in many subject areas including, but not limited to Science, Ethical Education and CSPE as well as being taught in the school's Autism Support classroom and a variety of programmes. As such, this policy will be provided to all staff in preparation for potential eventualities which might see them dealing with this area of post-primary education.

C. Who is this policy relevant to?

This policy applies to all school staff, students, the Board of Management, parents/guardians, carers, visiting speakers and external facilitators and will be freely available to all relevant personnel. The policy can be made available to external speakers if and when appropriate.

D. Relationship and Sexuality Education (RSE) within Social Personal and Health Education (SPHE)

The SPHE/RSE programme should be underpinned by the Junior Cycle Key Skills and Wellbeing Indicators and should not be delivered in a solely information-based format. Our approach to teaching RSE is learner-centred and should aim to place learners as active contributors in RSE lessons. In RSE, learners will develop skills in creative and critical thinking, communication, teamwork, research and leadership, as is the aim in all other SPHE lessons. While the Junior Cycle Key Skills and Statements of Learning are all relevant to teaching both SPHE and RSE, "Staying Well" is focused on more heavily than the others in almost all cases.

The Wellbeing Guidelines identify six Wellbeing Indicators; active, responsible, connected, resilient, respected and aware. These indicators are central to student

wellbeing and are identified in the RSE programme. In the SPHE classroom, the teacher seeks to use active, relevant, challenging and enjoyable teaching methodologies to allow students to access and explore these indicators of Wellbeing.

RSE units within SPHE aim to assist learners in the development of a healthy attitude to sexuality, in the development of a healthy attitude to oneself and in the development of healthy, positive relationships with others. SPHE deals with many issues such as self-esteem, assertiveness, communication and decision-making skills, all of which contribute to an effective RSE programme.

2. Relationship to Schools' Mission Statement

Goatstown Educate Together Secondary School is a voluntary secondary school under the sole patronage of Educate Together. We are an equality based, democratically run, inclusive and student-centred community of lifelong learners.

We place great store in establishing a positive partnership between home, school, and the wider community. In prioritising inter-personal relationships, and in acknowledgement of the effect such has on the wellbeing and effective functioning of our school community and the individuals within it, we remain alert and responsive to the changing needs of our learners as they grow.

The school's R.S.E. Policy is rooted in our mission to educate students in a safe and caring environment that empowers students to cultivate and maintain positive relationships with those around them and, crucially, with themselves. Our aim is to enable learners to become informed, self-aware, and compassionate individuals, equipped with the tools necessary to understand themselves and others better so that they may lead full, meaningful, and connected lives both during their time as learners at our school, and in their lives beyond. Ethical Education will be embedded across all SPHE and RSE lessons.

The topic of R.S.E. is one of significant importance to secondary school learners. It is the responsibility of the school to create and maintain policies and learning experiences that are inclusive, empowering, and fact-based.

3. Rationale

Access to sexual and health education is an important right for students under the terms of the article 11.2 of the European Social Charter. This article states that "health education be provided throughout the entire period of schooling" and that sexual and reproductive health education should be "objective, based on contemporary scientific evidence and that it should "not involve censoring, withholding or intentionally misrepresenting information for example about contraception or different means for maintaining sexual and reproductive health".

Circular 0043/2018 which details best practice guidelines for delivering RSE in the post primary setting states that “the qualified classroom teacher is the best-placed professional to work sensitively and consistently with students” and that he/she/they “can have a powerful impact on influencing students’ attitudes, values and behaviours in all aspects of Health Education”.

4. Goals and Objectives

- To support students in understanding and developing 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 healthy attitudes and values around their sexuality within an inclusive and empowering environment that aligns with the school’s mission and values.
- To provide opportunities for students to learn about relationships and sexuality in ways that help them think and act in an ethical, caring and responsible way.

Our school acknowledges the challenges of achieving such goals and objectives within a limited timeframe, as allowed by the curriculum. That said, the RSE teacher aims to work towards achieving these goals and objectives overtime, across several units and, potentially, over years of working with a set group of learners. This learning is based on an ongoing and developing relationship between the RSE teacher and the learners and is founded on trust, understanding and mutual respect.

5. Guidelines for the Management and Organisation of RSE in our School

The principal will make decisions regarding the teaching of the RSE programme and the deployment of staff. The SPHE teacher will follow the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) guidelines and lesson plans and avail of CPD when required.

- One time-tabled period of sixty minutes per week is allocated to SPHE
- Within the SPHE programme, six timetabled periods will be assigned to RSE
- Junior Cycle: Circular 0043/2018 states that schools have an obligation to implement RSE at Junior.

- Transition Year: An in-depth RSE module is to be included in the Transition Year Programme
- Senior Cycle: Circular 0043/2018 states that schools have an obligation to implement RSE at Junior and Senior Cycle even in the absence of a timetabled SPHE class at Senior Cycle. RSE will be an integral part of the Senior Cycle Programme and adequate planning will take place for this
- RSE teachers should make themselves aware of all relevant documentation and best practice guidelines, such as “Being LGBT in school” and department circulars pertaining to relevant topics.

6. Management and Organisation of RSE

- A. Informing Parents/Guardians/Carers
- B. Management of Information and Classroom Confidentiality
- C. Offering Advice
- D. Explicit Questions
- E. Outside Speakers
- F. Sexual Activity
- G. Contraception
- H. LGBTQ+
- I. Sexually Transmitted Infections
- J. Students with Additional Support Needs
- K. Pornography and Consent

A. Informing Parents/Guardians/Carers

Parents/guardians/carers will be sent a letter with the details of the modules covered as part of RSE. We recognise the right of any parent/guardian/carer to withdraw their child from RSE lessons. If a parent/guardian/carer wishes to withdraw their child from RSE lessons, they should contact the SPHE co-ordinator. Parents/guardians/carers are not obliged to provide explanation for such a withdrawal, but we would respectfully invite them to do so during a meeting with the SPHE co-ordinator and principal so that concerns and queries can be aired and potentially resolved. If, after meeting with the SPHE co-ordinator and principal, the parent/guardian/carer still wishes to withdraw their child from RSE, then this request must be made in writing and the withdrawal will be facilitated.

B. Management of Information and Classroom Confidentiality

All personnel have been informed of their legal obligations under the Children First Legislation (2015). All staff have completed an up-to-date e-learning Tusla training course and a Child Safe-Guarding statement is in place.

Teachers will reiterate in every RSE lesson that absolute confidentiality cannot be guaranteed. Learners are made aware of the fact that if it is revealed to the RSE teacher that a learner has been at risk, is currently at risk, or is currently experiencing any type of abuse, that teacher must report said information to the Designated Liaison Person (as per the Child Protection Legislation 2015). (See Appendix 1) The same applies if a learner is or has been in breach of the law.

If there is any concern that a child has been, is being, or is at risk of being abused or neglected, this must be brought without delay to the attention of the DLP. Mandated personnel have a legal obligation to report to the DLP and Tusla. All registered teachers are mandated persons. All school personnel also have a legal obligation to report a concern to the DLP. Teachers must indicate clearly to pupils when the content of a conversation can no longer be kept confidential. If such content is revealed to a mandated person, the school should continue to support the student as procedures involved in reporting to the DLP/Tusla are followed.

In the case that a teacher receives an allegation or has a suspicion of abuse (as defined in Children First: national Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children) the teacher should in the first instance report the matter to the Designated Liaison Person (DLP). A written record of the report should be made and placed in a secure location by the Designated Liaison Person (DLP). The need for confidentiality always (as referred to in Chapter 1 Paragraph 1.2 of the Child Protection Guidelines) should be kept in mind. If the Designated Liaison Person (DLP) is satisfied that there are reasonable grounds for the suspicion or allegation, he/she with the staff member should report the matter to Tusla immediately.

If the DLP finds that there are not reasonable grounds for the suspicion or allegation and does not report the matter to Tusla, the teacher who brought the information to the attention of the DLP should use their professional discretion and make contact with Tusla themselves.

If a student becomes aware of abuse of a peer, or becomes concerned for the welfare of a peer for any reason, they should report to a trusted member of staff or a parent/guardian/carer so that the correct care can be offered to the at-risk child.

C. Offering Advice

It is the function of the school to provide learners with a general education on a wide range of issues related to sexuality. It is not the function of the school to offer individual advice or counsel on sexual behaviour, contraception and/or other issues of a sexual nature.

That said, there may be times when it is appropriate for teachers to identify sources of professional information and advice. Any and all advice from teachers should be of a referral nature only. It should never be directive and should be age appropriate. There may be scenarios where it is appropriate for teachers to provide pupils with information about where they can receive confidential sexual advice and treatment.

Not all RSE teachers are required to have expert knowledge on issues that might come up in an RSE context. They are required, however, to deal with questions openly and honestly, in a sensitive manner that is attuned to the needs of a given group of learners. Teachers are education professionals and must be conscious of the boundaries of such, accepting the limits of their knowledge in specific medical or sexual areas.

D. Creating a Safe Environment

It is important to create a safe environment in SPHE/RSE lessons where students are comfortable to contribute and ask questions. Teachers may not be able to answer all questions or issues raised. Appropriate limits should be outlined. In these cases, teachers should use their professional judgement and be guided by the context of the lesson and maturity of the class.

E. Outside speakers:

The delivery of the RSE programme is the responsibility of the SPHE teacher. It is recommended that visitors be used to support the SPHE teacher and to enhance the quality of the RSE programme. The teacher should provide the visitor, well in advance of the visit, with a copy of the RSE policy. The class teacher will remain in the class during the visit.

Procedures to be followed in preparation for a visiting speaker:

- As per circular 0043/2018, the Principal and Board of Management will be informed
- The degree of explicitness of the content of the class should be discussed and agreed before the visit.
- The visitor will be accompanied by the class teacher
- The teacher must consider how the visit will be prepared for and followed up on

- The visitor should be informed of the level (i.e. Junior/Senior Cycle) and ability of the students
- Parents/guardians/carers will be informed of the content to be covered by a visitor before any such visit takes place through the app. It is the responsibility of the teacher organising the event to liaise with the office on this.
- *Links to the school safety policy:* Visitors must report to the school office. Principal must be informed of the date and arrangements of the visit.

F. Sexual Activity

While dealing with the topic of sexual activity, teachers should use their professional judgement and be guided by the age and emotional maturity of the students, the RSE Curriculum and school's RSE policy. It is advisable that teachers give young people information on the age of consent, which, following the passage of the Criminal Law (Sexual Offences) Act 2003 is 17 years for males and females.

G. Contraception

As above (F), the topic of contraception will be handled in an age-appropriate manner, presenting information factually and in a non-directive way.

Senior Cycle: The post-primary RSE Curriculum Guidelines state that Family Planning should be covered within the Senior Cycle RSE Programme.

Junior Cycle: The teacher should be guided by the emotional maturity of a given group of learners, as well as the possible necessity for education on contraception, when deciding whether this topic should be taught at Junior Cycle.

H. LGBTQ+

Under the post primary RSE Curriculum Guidelines, sexual orientation must be covered as part of a school's RSE programme. The Equal Status Act 2004 prohibits discrimination across nine grounds, including homosexuality. In addressing homosexuality as part of RSE, teachers may also wish to incorporate into their lessons homophobic bullying, misconceptions, assumptions and prejudices faced by members of the LGBTQ+ community. Teachers must never promote any one lifestyle and need to be aware and respect all family forms. Acknowledging and respecting the family background of every student is important to their wellbeing. The language used by a school in relation to sexual diversity is critical to their sense of belonging.

Useful Resources: Lesbian Gay and Bisexual Students in Post Primary Schools, Guidance for Principals and School Leaders.

I. Sexually Transmitted Diseases/Infections

The RSE programme aims to create an awareness of Sexually Transmitted Infections/Diseases (STIs/STDs). STIs/STDs are addressed at Junior Cycle level. The area of STIs/STDs is addressed in further depth at Senior Cycle level. While dealing with the topic of STIs/STDs, teachers should use their professional judgement and be guided by the age and emotional maturity of the learners, the RSE Curriculum and RSE policy for the school.

J. Students with additional needs

Students with additional support needs may require more support than others in learning about issues related to sexuality. They may also need more support than others when coping with the physical and emotional aspects and changes involved in growing up. Furthermore, some learners with additional support needs might require more help and guidance than others in identifying acceptable and unacceptable behaviours, as well as in being warned against and being prepared for potential abuse by others.

The class teacher may make the judgement that specific learners within their class require further support/guidance on such. In this case, provision will be provided. In this case, the RSE teacher will work closely with the Autism Support class teacher, the ASN Co-ordinator or the Learning Support Teacher, depending on the specific needs of the learner, to support the learning of students with additional support needs.

K. Pornography and Consent

Teaching and learning will be guided by the new SPHE curriculum, due to be published in time for the start of the next academic year (September 2023) and will facilitate education related to the areas of Porn Literacy and Consent in line with guidance provided by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA), following closely the details of the updated SPHE curriculum, currently only in draft form.

7. The division between biological and non-biological aspects of Sexual Education

The Science Department teaches learners about the biological aspects of reproduction. The male and female reproductive systems are part of the content covered as part of RSE. Where possible, lessons on the male and female reproductive systems should be delivered concurrently in Science and SPHE to provide learners with a holistic and meaningful learning experience.

Appendix 1: Disclosures and reporting

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| Designated Liaison Person | Principal |
| Deputy Designated Liaison Person (DDLDP) | Deputy Principal |

Useful resources:

<https://www.curriculumonline.ie/Junior-cycle/Short-Courses/SPHE/SPHE-RSE-toolkit/>

Circulars to note:

Circular 27/08: [ec1725fc3de34528b1915a1698bb2f74.doc \(live.com\)](#)

Circular 37/10: [Circular-Letter-RSE-0037-2010.pdf \(teachdontpreach.ie\)](#)

Signed: 

Ben Murray

Chairperson, Board of Management

Signed: 

Jonathan Browner

Principal

Date: May 17th 2023

Next review: May 2024.