



Relationships and Sexuality Policy

(A) Introductory Statement

Sancta Maria College is a voluntary second-level, single sex school with a Catholic ethos under the trusteeship of CEIST. The Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) Policy has been developed following consultation between staff, parents, students, Principal and the Board of Management. In this policy document the term 'parent' is taken to include 'guardian'.

(B) Policy Context and Rationale

This policy is informed by:

- The Mission Statement of Sancta Maria College
- The SPHE Policy
- The Code of Behaviour
- The Child Protection Policy / Child Safeguarding Statement
- The Internet Acceptable Use Policy
- The Special Educational Needs Policy
- The Guidance Plan
- 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. At Junior Cycle the RSE programme is part of Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) and at Senior Cycle, part of Health Education.
- 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 school adopts and adheres to the DES Child Protection Procedures, Children First Legislation (2017) and has a Child Protection Policy / Child Safeguarding Statement, with the Principal as Designated Liaison Person (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 students.

(C) Relationship to Characteristic Spirit of the School

The RSE policy acknowledges the importance of RSE being taught in the context of Wellbeing / SPHE / Health Education and a whole-school climate that is inclusive and respectful.

- The RSE policy reflects the educational philosophy of the Mercy Sisters, CEIST and the core values and ethos of the school, as outlined in the school's Mission Statement below:

Mission Statement

Sancta Maria College aims to prepare all of our students for the challenges, responsibilities and experiences of adult life. All members of the school community – pupils, parents, teachers and other staff – are held in very high regard and their dignity, worth and individuality is respected. We strive to build a sense of community based on Christian values. The school's Code of Positive Behaviour acknowledges this and aims to promote a culture of respect throughout the school. It recognises that good discipline enables good teaching and allows good learning to take place.

The school, through its academic, pastoral and spiritual undertakings strives to provide for the holistic development and welfare of each of the students in its care.

Spiritual, moral and ethical issues will arise when teaching RSE. The school's RSE policy guides teachers in the treatment of such issues in accordance with the ethos of the school. It is important that teachers of RSE understand that their role is to express the views of the whole school community on these sensitive issues, and not their own personal views. In this regard, it should be noted that:

1. Schools are required to deliver all aspects of the RSE curriculum, including those in relation to sexual orientation, contraception, sexually transmitted infections etc. This can be done within the context in which the teaching of the programme is informed by the school ethos.
2. A school can express its ethos while at the same time facilitating students in discussing a range of views in relation to topics within the RSE programme.

(D) Scope

The policy will apply to all aspects of teaching and learning about friendships and sexuality. Discussion about relationships and sexuality also takes place in classes other than RSE / SPHE / Health Education. It is therefore important that all teachers are familiar with the RSE policy.

The policy will apply to school staff, students, Board of Management, parents, visiting speakers and external facilitators.

(E) Aims of the RSE programme

- 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 of 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, caring and responsible decisions about themselves and the way they live their lives, while also respecting the dignity of others. The school recognises that parents are the primary educators and home is the natural and primary environment in which RSE should take place.

(F) Goals / 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.

(G)The Relationship of RSE to SPHE / Wellbeing

- SPHE / Wellbeing provide opportunities for students to develop 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 divisions in relation to their sexuality and relationships with others.

- Currently, SPHE is part of the Junior Cycle timetable. RSE is provided as part of Health Education module in Transition Year and RSE lessons are delivered to Fifth and Sixth year students.
- The RSE module is taught to all Junior Cycle classes for six to ten class periods after the Christmas Holidays in January – February. At Senior Cycle, the Transition, Fifth and Sixth Year classes participate in the RSE module, which is usually scheduled between October and Christmas.
- There is continued emphasis on health and well-being, responsibility and decision-making throughout

Junior Cycle topics covered include:

- The Circle of Life
- Communication and Respect
- Feelings and Adolescence
- Saying How I Feel
- Body Awareness-Body Care
- Hygiene Hints!
- Common Senses
- The Image of Me
- The Words we Use
- Puberty
- Human Reproduction
- The Miracle of New Life
- Pregnancy and Birth
- How I Relate
- Family Ties
- You've Got a Friend
- Boy/Girl Relationships
- Consent
- Don't Box Me In!
- Self-Esteem
- Peer Pressure
- Take Care!
- Time to Reflect
- Teenage Pregnancy
- Respect and Tolerance for Difference

Senior Cycle Topics include:

Human Growth and Development:

- Understanding the structure and function of sex organs
- Awareness of fertility

- Awareness of the importance and method of family planning
- Understanding of pregnancy and development of the foetus
- Appreciation of the importance of healthcare during pregnancy
- Recognising the range of human emotions and ways to deal with these
- An understanding of the relationship between safe sexual practice and sexually transmitted infections.

Human Sexuality:

- Understanding of what it means to be male, female, gender fluid, LGBT+ etc.
- Consideration of male and female roles in relationships and in society
- Exploration of some of the issues pertaining to equality
- Understanding the concept of sexual harassment and its different forms
- Awareness of sexual abuse, consent and rape, including legal issues and the identification of help agencies in these areas
- The programme delivered to students in Transition Year, has an emphasis on issues such as consent, sexual violence and mature, responsible decision-making
- Skills for making choices about sexual activity
- Exploration of the range of attitudes, values and beliefs regarding sexual behaviour in modern society

Human Relationships

- Understanding the nature of peer pressure
- Developing skills for resolving conflict
- Development of an awareness of the complex nature of love and loving relationships
- Understanding of marriage as a loving commitment
- Deeper awareness of the importance of family life

The teaching of the RSE programme is age-appropriate as directed by the DES-NCCA RSE Programme and Guidelines.

Some resources used may include:

DVDs: 'Busy Bodies.' produced by the Health Promotion Department, Southern Health Service Executive.

TRUST programme.

'Growing Up Gay and Bisexual in Ireland' programme (SPHE-PDST).

Lockers – (SPHE-PDST).

This list is not exhaustive.

(I) Guidelines for the Management and Organisation of RSE in Sancta Maria College

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 daughters for the information they will acquire around the sensitive areas covered in RSE.
- Parents of First Year students are notified by letter at least one week in advance of the RSE module commencement
- The RSE policy is available to download from www.sanctamariacollege.com or a copy maybe 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 daughter should not participate in the programme.

(J) Withdrawing students from the RSE programme

I. 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 daughter from all or any aspect of RSE. Parents must notify the Principal in advance of their wish to have their child 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 RE. 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 child.

The student may be accommodated in another teacher's classroom in the school.

What we do if a request for withdrawal from the RSE programme is made by a parent:

I. We discuss the nature of the concerns with the student's parent and, if appropriate, attempt to reassure them (initially such discussion takes place at a meeting with the RSE teacher but the Principal may become involved if necessary).

II. 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 RSE programme and the entitlement of the other students.

III. We attempt to ensure that where a student is withdrawn from RSE there is no disruption to other parts of their education.

IV. We point out that students who have been withdrawn may be vulnerable to teasing - we therefore attempt to cause minimal embarrassment to the student and minimal disruption to the programme.

V. We also point out that students may sometimes receive inaccurate information from their peers.

VI. We offer parents access to appropriate information and resources.

(K) Ethical / Moral Considerations – Guidelines for Teachers

1. Answering Explicit Questions

It is natural that students should wish to ask questions in the area of RSE. While it is important to create an environment in RSE in which students can discuss issues openly, teachers may not be able to answer all questions asked by students and can set appropriate limits. If any questions asked by students are deemed to be inappropriate, the teacher will refer the student to their parents or state that this information may be available at a later stage of the curriculum. 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 Principal. 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 of the school, the RSE policy and use their professional judgment. With regard to matters of a confidential nature, the school cannot take any responsibility for what is discussed among students outside of the RSE lesson.

2. Confidentiality

Teachers strive to create a safe learning environment for all students. While students should not be encouraged to disclose personal or private information in RSE classes, there may be times when they talk about their own lives. It is important that students are made aware of

the limits of confidentiality and that teachers do not give unconditional guarantees of confidentiality. Confidentiality should be respected unless the teacher feels that the child is at risk or where there are reasonable grounds to believe that a law may be broken. In such a case, the appropriate action should be taken in accordance with the procedures set down in the Child Protection Procedures for Post-Primary Schools, the school's Child Protection Policy / Child Safeguarding Statement and the Children First legislation (2017) or the school's Substance Abuse Policy, i.e. the teacher must inform the Designated Liaison Person, and ensure that that all reporting procedures are complied with.

3. Sexual Activity

Teachers should give young people information on the age of consent which, following the passage of Criminal Law (Sexual Offences) Act 2006, is seventeen years of age for both males and females. In all cases where the school becomes aware of underage sexual activity the school will take appropriate steps to inform the child's parents, in accordance with Children First legislation.

4. Out-of-School Factors

The school also recognises the many out-of-school factors which affect the development of a positive attitude to sexuality during adolescence - the social lives of students, the relationships they form, their behaviour within these relationships, the peer expectations of relationships, the reading material of students, their exposure to sexually explicit material / pornography on video / smart phones, television and through music. The RSE programme will attempt to heighten the students' awareness of the influences of these forces on the development of their values and attitudes and empower them to make informed decisions and choices.

5. Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Identities, Sexual Orientations and Related Issues

Teachers do not promote any one life-style as the only acceptable one for society and therefore it is inevitable and natural that sexual orientation, sexual identity and gender identity will be discussed during a programme of sex education. One of the advantages of exploring LGBT+ identities and issues is the opportunity to correct false ideas, assumptions and address prejudice. Discussion of sexual and gender identity and sexual orientation should be appropriate to the age of the students.

6. Sensitive Issues e.g. Sexual Activity, Abortion and Contraception

Sensitive topics will be dealt with in an age-appropriate, open manner, looking at all sides of the issues in a non-directive way, within the context of the school's ethos and DES-NCCA guidelines. The post-primary RSE Curriculum Guidelines state that the subject of family planning should be covered within the Senior Cycle RSE programme. The RSE programme requires that young people are provided with information about methods of contraception, and this is done within the values and moral framework of the ethos of Sancta Maria College.

(L) Practical Issues

- SPHE is an integral part of the Wellbeing / SPHE programme and is timetabled in all Junior Cycle classes. Health Education is timetabled in Transition Year.
- RSE is taught to Fifth Year and Sixth Year students.
- Students with Additional Needs: Students who have additional educational needs 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.

(M) Guest Speakers

Outside speakers are sometimes invited into the RSE class to facilitate learning on specific aspects of the programme e.g. Rape Crisis Centre.

a) It is school policy that most of the RSE programme is best discussed openly with teachers who are known and trusted by the students. However, visitors can enhance the quality of the provision as long as they are

used in addition to, not instead of, a planned programme of RSE.

b) The SPHE Co-ordinator / RSE teacher will inform the visitor, well in advance of the visit, of this RSE policy on the school website, and request that they familiarise themselves with its content. After gaining approval from the Principal for the visit the organiser makes the visitor aware of the ethos of the school and the manner of delivery of the RSE programme.

Issues to consider include:

i) The degree of explicitness of the content and presentation.

ii) Will the visitor be accompanied by teaching staff?

iii) Will the teaching staff take an active role in the visitor's activities?

iv) How will the visitor be prepared for the visit?

v) How will the visit be built upon and followed up?

c) 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.

d) In order to inform the visitor of the precise requirements of a group and to make better use of the time of the visitor it is advisable, though not mandatory, for the group to draw up questions in advance and these should be forwarded to the visitor. This will involve the students in the visit and will make the experience more relevant for them - it also facilitates planning.

e) The Principal, Deputy Principal and the Administration Office staff should be informed of the date and name of the visitor.

f) Where applicable, refreshments should be arranged.

g) The visitor should be welcomed at the main door.

h) At the end of the session a note of thanks should be given by a student and the visitor escorted to the main door after refreshments.

i) A written acknowledgement of their contribution should be sent to the visitor

(N) Implementation Arrangements, Roles and Responsibilities

The Board of Management has assigned the role of co-ordinating the implementation of this policy.

SPHE Co-ordinator, 2018-2019: Sinead Watson

(O) Implementing, Monitoring, Reviewing and Evaluating the Policy

Effective policy requires constant monitoring and evaluation to ensure successful implementation and to review what adjustments may be necessary from time to time.

This policy is ratified by the Board of Management and is the agreed policy of Sancta Maria 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. The policy will be reviewed and evaluated at least every two years under the direction of the Board of Management. On-going review and evaluation will take cognisance of changing information, guidelines, legislation and feedback from parents, students, teachers and others. The policy will be revised as necessary in the light of such review and evaluation and within the framework of school self-evaluation and policy planning.

To review and evaluate the policy, it will be necessary to gauge the impact and effectiveness of the policy by examining the extent to which:

- RSE is being successfully taught through SPHE and Health Education for all relevant students.
- Resource materials are available to teachers in designated area in workroom.
- The timetable facilitates the implementation of the RSE programme e.g. at Senior Cycle, that all classes at Senior Cycle are taught RSE.

- Appropriate professional development for teachers is available and relevant teachers are availing of it.
- Staff are aware of the policy.
- Students are aware of the policy.
- Parents are aware of the policy.
- Feedback is received from teachers, other school staff, students, parents, members of Board of Management etc.

Specifically important to the review and evaluation of the RSE Policy and Programme are:

- a) Student feedback: Feedback is sought from the Student Council.
- b) Staff review and feedback.
- c) Parental feedback, including at parent-teacher meetings and Parents' Council meetings.
- d) Feedback is sought as part of our School Self-Evaluation process and helps to inform future planning.

Ratified by the Board of Management on: 28th June 2019

Date of next review: 2021

Signed: PJ Gannon

(Chairperson of Board of Management)

Signed: Gerardine Kennedy

(Principal)

Date: June 28th 2019

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