



Scoil Mhuire, Trim

Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) Policy

Introduction:

An 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.

This policy was developed with reference to the following documentation and consultation with relevant personnel:

- ✚ Relationships and Sexuality Education Policy Guidelines 1997
- ✚ Template for developing and revising/updating the RSE policy.
- ✚ Circulars M04/95, M20/96, M22/00, M11/03, 0037/2010, 0027/2008, 0023/2010
- ✚ SPHE teachers
- ✚ Senior Management team
- ✚ Student Council
- ✚ Parents Council

Our School:

Scoil Mhuire is an all-girls Voluntary Catholic Secondary School under the trusteeship of Catholic Education, an Irish Schools Trust (CEIST). It was founded by the Sisters of Mercy in 1936 and currently has a student enrolment of approximately 825, a teaching staff of approximately 60 and an ancillary staff of 10.

Our Mission Statement:

Scoil Mhuire seeks to provide a quality education for all its students in a challenging and positive environment. We are committed to holistic development and to the achievement of the full potential of each student, particularly those who are disadvantaged or marginalised.

Our Ethos:

Upholding our Mercy ethos, Scoil Mhuire promotes the core values of respect, courtesy, responsibility, and accountability, while ensuring that a holistic approach to the education of our students prevails. We are committed to promoting inclusion with a spirit of respect and welcome for diversity. We also acknowledge the unprecedented challenges in education, as we anticipate, define, and meet the evolving needs of today's young people.

Scope:

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

Rationale:

- Sexuality is a key element of healthy social and personal development. Young people are exposed to a bewildering variety of messages about sexuality and sexual activity. Schools, in consultation with parents/guardians, need to reflect on how to provide for the needs of their students.
- 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).
- Circulars [M4/95](#) and [M20/96](#) request schools to commence a process of RSE policy development.
- The effectiveness of an RSE programme is dependent on a collaborative policy process involving teachers, parents/guardians, members of the board of management and students.

Relationship to characteristic spirit of the school:

- The policy relates to the school's mission/vision/aims. It acknowledges the importance of SPHE/RSE being taught in the context of a whole school climate that is inclusive and respectful.
- The policy reflects the educational philosophy of the trustees and the core values and ethos of the school, as outlined in the school's mission statement above.
- Spiritual, moral, and ethical issues will arise when teaching RSE. The RSE policy guides teachers in the treatment of such issues in accordance with the ethos of the school. 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:
 - ✓ 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 a context in which teaching of the programme is informed by the school's ethos.
 - ✓ 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.

Defining Relationships and Sexuality Education:

Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) is a lifelong process of acquiring knowledge and understanding and of developing attitudes, beliefs and values about sexual identity, relationships, and intimacy. In the school setting, it is an integral part of general education provision, which seeks to promote the overall development of the person, and which includes the integration of sexuality into personal understanding, growth, and development. Through RSE, formal opportunities are provided for young people to evaluate the wide range of information, opinions, attitudes, and values which they receive. In this way they can be helped to form values and establish behaviours within a moral framework. While parents are the primary educators in this area, schools have a key role to play. Ideally, parents/guardians and schools work in partnership to provide comprehensive relationships and sexuality education for young people.

The Objectives of Relationships and Sexuality Education programme:

RSE is part of the Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) programme. RSE should enable students to:

- acquire the understanding and skills necessary to form healthy friendships and relationships.
- develop a positive sense of self-awareness and the skills for building and maintaining self-esteem.
- become aware of the variety of ways in which individuals grow and change, especially during adolescence and to develop respect for difference between individuals.
- understand human physiology with particular reference to the reproductive cycle, human fertility, and sexually transmitted infections.
- understand sexual development and identity.
- explore aspects of sexuality including stereotyping and gender issues.
- examine cultural influences on sexuality.
- appreciate the responsibilities of parenthood.
- develop strategies for decisions and actions consistent with personal moral integrity and respectful of the rights and dignity of others.
- develop skills for coping with peer pressure, conflict, and threats to personal safety.

KEY MEASURES OF THE RSE POLICY:

A) The Provision of Training / Staff Development:

- Arrangements regarding the teaching of Relationships and Sexuality Education will be made by the Principal.
- Teachers are consulted prior to being timetabled to teach SPHE/RSE
- All teachers of SPHE/RSE will receive a minimum of two days training.

- The Principal and/or the SPHE coordinator will be responsible for informing relevant staff members of continual professional development training.
- The Board of Management must inform all members of staff of any amendments to this policy should they arise.

B) The Inclusion of Parents / Guardians:

- Parent/guardians of incoming first year students will be given a brief outline of the Junior Cycle RSE programme at a parents' information night.
- Parent/guardians will be given an outline of the Senior Cycle RSE programme when students enter Senior Cycle.
- Both staff, parent/guardian and student representatives were consulted in the making of the RSE policy.
- The RSE policy is available to view on the official Scoil Mhuire website www.scoilmhuiretrim.ie
- The RSE programme outline is available on the official Scoil Mhuire website.
- The [Education Act, 1998](#) provides that a student is not required to attend instruction in any subject which is contrary to the conscience of the parent/guardian or in the case of a student who has reached the age of 18 years, the student. Hence, parents/guardians have a right to opt their child out of the sensitive issues in RSE if they wish to do so. In such circumstances, the parents/guardians are asked to consult with, and make arrangements with the Principal about this withdrawal. Any requests for withdrawal must be made in writing.

C) Ethical / Moral Considerations:

The following is a list of guidelines on the moral and ethical considerations which may arise:

➤ **Answering Questions**

It is important to create an environment in RSE in which students feel comfortable to ask questions openly. However, teachers may not be able to answer all questions asked by the students and therefore, boundaries should be set appropriately. Teachers should use their professional judgement guided by the age, gender and needs of the students presented to them. The Child Protection Policy and the Ethos of the school must be upheld.

➤ **Confidentiality**

Students are not encouraged to disclose personal or private information in RSE classes but there may be times when they discuss their own lives. Confidentiality should be respected, unless the student is considered at risk, in which case the appropriate action should be taken e.g., follow the procedures set down in the Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post Primary schools 2017, notifying the Principal (Designated Liaison Person-DLP) or Deputy Principal (Deputy Designated Liaison Person-DDLP) immediately and/or refer to any of the school policies such as substance abuse, notify parents/guardians etc.

Teachers must not promise absolute confidentiality. Teachers indicate clearly to students when the content of the conversation can no longer be kept confidential. This is in line with Child Protection Procedures.

➤ **Sexual Activity**

Parents/Guardians and teachers should give students information on the age of consent, which is seventeen years of age for both males and females as legislated in The Criminal Law (Sexual Offenses Act) 2006.

➤ **Aspects of Sexual Education that arise in school curriculum**

The curricula of other subject's deal with sensitive content in regard to relationships and sexuality. It is the discretion of the teacher to decide what information is appropriate to give in the context of the class. The subsequent discussion should be limited and set within the context of the subject curriculum.

➤ **Contraception/ Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs)**

The post-primary RSE Curriculum Guidelines state that the subject of Family Planning should be covered within the Senior Cycle RSE programme. It is also covered in Junior Cycle Science, Home Economics and Leaving Certificate. Biology. The RSE programme requires that young people are provided with information on methods of contraception and an overview of the transmission and prevention of STIs. Both topics will be dealt with in a factual, open but age-appropriate manner.

➤ **Sexual Identity**

The subject of sexual orientation and gender identity is covered as part of the RSE programme at Senior Cycle, and with the discretion of the teacher at Junior Cycle. Under the Equal Status Act, 2000, and the Equality Act, 2004, associated discrimination is prohibited. Teachers must not promote any one gender identity or sexual orientation.

➤ **Visiting Speakers**

It is recommended that trained RSE teachers facilitate the programme. All visiting speakers must be approved by the Principal and provided with a copy of the RSE policy which they must adhere to. The Office should be informed of the date and name of the visitor and a record kept. All visitors must be welcomed at the door and accompanied by a teaching member of staff for the duration of the visit. Any issues arising from appropriateness of the content delivered must be brought to the attention of the Principal.

➤ **Special Needs**

Teachers of RSE should be aware of students with special educational or/and emotional needs and liaise with parents/guardian.

D. Practical Issues:

- All Junior Cycle students are timetabled for approximately 100 hours of SPHE over three years. The classes are in form groups of all girls, which range between 28 and 30 students. RSE is taught as part of SPHE.
- Aspects of RSE are taught through Science, Biology, Home Economics and may arise in other subjects.
- Parents/guardians are consulted in relation to RSE for Special Needs students by subject teachers.

- Where there is a request from parents/guardians to withdraw a student from RSE, arrangements are made in consultation with the Principal, teacher, parent/guardian, and student. In such circumstances, the principal should be satisfied that the parents/guardians provide the appropriate information to the student.
- SPHE/RSE teachers meet at the beginning of the school year. A co-ordinator is appointed, and a Scheme of Work is agreed for the year.

Links to Other Policies:

Other School Policies which reference RSE are:

- Child Safeguarding Statement
- School Policy concerning the use of mobile phones and other electronic devices.
- Policy on Substance Abuse.
- Anti-bullying Policy.
- Acceptable Use Policy for Students.
- The School Guidance Plan.
- Code of Behaviour.

Implementation Arrangements, Roles, and Responsibilities:

Board of Management

The Board of Management supports the development of the RSE policy ensuring that the school ethos is reflected in the policy.

Principal and Deputy Principals

The Principal and Deputy Principals are committed to supporting all staff involved in the RSE programme. They will facilitate and support continuous professional development in this area.

SPHE Co-ordinator

The SPHE coordinator will work with the SPHE teachers to coordinate the delivery of the RSE programme effectively during the academic year.

SPHE Teachers

The teachers of SPHE will deliver the RSE programme to students in the school. They will attend SPHE subject department meetings and participate in continuous professional development related to RSE.

RSE Policy ratified: 1st June 2023