

Relationships and Sexuality Education Policy



St. Kevin's College, Ballygall Road East, Dublin 11

Roll Number: 60581M

Patron: Edmund Rice Schools Trust

Ratified: 13th January 2025

Our School

St Kevin's College is an all-boys secondary school under the trusteeship of the Edmund Rice School's Trust. In keeping with the College's religious and educational philosophy, it seeks to foster the spiritual, moral, intellectual, social, cultural and physical education of all its students in a safe, secure, and caring environment. St. Kevin's College offers a broad holistic education through a wide range of subjects approved by the Department of Education, together with sport and extra-curricular activities.

Rationale

- The Department of Education circulars M4/95, M20/96, M22/00, M11/03, M27/2008 and C37/2010, all of which are available at www.education.ie, require schools to develop a Relationships and Sexuality Education (R.S.E.) policy and programme, and to implement them for all students from First Year to Sixth Year.
- The Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools 2017 state that the Social, Personal and Health Education (S.P.H.E.) programme, including the relationships and sexuality module, is a "mandatory part of the curriculum for all students in the junior cycle of post-primary schools and must be fully implemented".
- R.S.E. addresses a range of issues that affect the lives of young people (e.g. puberty, emotional issues, romantic relationships and so on).
- Young people need accurate knowledge about sex and relationships, and without school-based R.S.E. there is a risk that they will depend on friends or other unreliable knowledge sources.
- Relationships and sexuality are not openly discussed in the homes of all children.
- Young people need skills to enable them to make informed choices and to help them cope with peer pressure.
- The Education Act, 1998 requires that schools should promote the social and personal development of students and provide health education for them.

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 in S.P.H.E./R.S.E., therefore, it is

important that all teachers are familiar with the R.S.E. Policy. The policy will apply to college staff, students, Board of Management, parents/guardians, visiting speakers and external facilitators (see circular 0023/2010 – Visiting Speakers Best Practice).

Definition of R.S.E.

R.S.E. is a lifelong process of acquiring knowledge and understanding and of developing attitudes, belief and values about sexual identity, relationships and intimacy. “This education is delivered consciously and unconsciously by parents, teachers, peers, adults and the media” DES Guidelines for developing a R.S.E. policy 1997. In addition, the *Draft Guidelines for R.S.E.* (NCCA, June 1995, 1.2) state that Social, Personal and Health Education is “spiral, developmental in nature and age appropriate in content and methodology”.

Aims of R.S.E.

- To help young people understand and develop friendships and relationships
- To promote an understanding of sexuality and relationships
- To promote a positive attitude to one’s own sexuality and in one’s relationships with others.
- To promote knowledge of and respect for reproduction.
- To enable young people to develop attitudes and values concerning their sexuality in a moral, spiritual and social framework
- To provide opportunities for students to learn about relationships and sexuality in ways that help them think and act in a moral, caring and responsible way

It is acknowledged that these aims are aspirational as the course is of limited duration and Relationship and Sexuality Education is a lifelong process.

Objectives of R.S.E.

R.S.E. should help students to:

- develop responsible attitudes, values and beliefs about sexuality, identity, personal relationships and intimacy.
- acquire the understanding and skills necessary to form healthy friendships and relationships
- develop an understanding of sexuality and a positive attitude to one's own sexuality and the sexuality of others
- become aware of the variety of ways in which individuals grow and change, especially during adolescence, and to develop respect for the differences between individuals
- learn about reproduction, sexually transmitted diseases and human fertility.
- better understand sexual development and identity and explore aspects of sexuality including sex roles, stereotyping, gender issues and cultural influences on sexuality
- value family life and 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

Some of the objectives will be supported by other elements of the S.P.H.E. programme and the broader college curriculum and by the ethos of the college.

Relationship of R.S.E. and S.P.H.E.

The S.P.H.E. Specification for Junior Cycle (2023) has the following overall aim:

to build students' self-awareness and positive self-worth; to develop the knowledge, understanding, skills, dispositions and values that will support them to lead fulfilling and healthy lives; empower them to create, nurture and maintain respectful and loving relationships with self and others; and enhance their capacity to contribute positively to society. (p.5).

The S.P.H.E. Specification for Junior Cycle (2023) states that teaching and learning in R.S.E. is 'vitaly important'

Relationships and Sexuality Education (R.S.E.) is an integral part of, and connects with, aspects of S.P.H.E. It is of particular importance for young people at this stage of their lives as they reflect on questions such as 'what kind of person am I?' and 'what matters for me in relationships?' As they continue to form their identity, they are making sense of life experiences, information, images and messages about relationships and sexuality from a range of

informal sources such as their peers, family, the media, and the online world. Having the opportunity to think about and discuss relationships, sexuality and healthy sexual expression within a safe classroom setting and with a skilled teacher is vitally important. (p.8).

R.S.E. Provision

- S.P.H.E. is timetabled, one class per week at Junior Cycle, R.S.E. is completed as part of the S.P.H.E. programme
- 6 lessons of R.S.E. are delivered during Religion classes in Transition Year
- 6 lessons of R.S.E. are delivered to 5th and 6th year students during Religion classes.

It is recognised that aspects of the S.P.H.E. programme and more specifically R.S.E. are currently formally addressed and supported in other subject areas, such as Physical Education; Religious Education; Civic, Social and Political Education; Science at Junior Cycle level and Biology at Senior Cycle level. This programme is also supported less formally through the Pastoral Care system as well as the College's feature _____ days _____ and _____ weeks.

Provision of Training and Staff Development

Professional development is seen as an essential element in delivering the programme. The objectives of such training are to enhance the personal growth of the teacher and to enable the teacher to acquire the knowledge, understanding and skills necessary to facilitate R.S.E. Teaching staff will be encouraged to attend in-service in S.P.H.E. & R.S.E. Teachers are released to attend training as needed and requested.

Parents

/

Guardians

Parents are the primary educators of their children and their role in education concerning relationships and sexuality is seen by the college as being very important.

- A copy of the R.S.E. policy will be posted on the college website
- Parents/Guardians will be encouraged to look at the policy on the college website to familiarise themselves with the curriculum for the relevant year groups
- If parents wish to withdraw their child from the R.S.E. programme, visiting speakers or sensitive issues, they must notify the college in writing and alternative arrangements can be made

- Arrangements regarding the teaching of the programme and the deployment of staff will be made by the principal

Withdrawing Students from R.S.E.

Parents will be encouraged to support the R.S.E. programme for the reasons identified above, however, if they request to remove their child the college may:

- Discuss the nature of the concerns with the child's parent and if appropriate attempt to reassure them. Such discussions should take place with the students form tutor and the S.P.H.E. co-ordinator
- Consider whether the course can be amended in a way that will assure the parents – care must be taken not to undermine the integrity of the R.S.E. programme and the entitlements of the other students
- Advise parents that students withdrawn from the programme are vulnerable to teasing and may receive inaccurate information from their peers
- Offer parents access to appropriate information and resources, along with the R.S.E. policy

If students are withdrawn from all or part of the R.S.E. programme, arrangements will be made where possible between parents and management for the students' care while the programme is in progress. Once withdrawn, the request by the parent must be complied with until revoked. Issues such as over population 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 R.S.E. programme.

Visiting Speakers

It is college policy that the R.S.E. programme is best discussed openly with teachers who are known and trusted by the students. 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.

Visitors of this nature will be provided with a copy of the College's R.S.E. policy, in advance of their visit. In accordance with Circular 0023/2010 *S.P.H.E./R.S.E. – Best Practice Guidelines for Post-Primary Schools*,

a member of the teaching staff will be present with the visitor during the talk to safeguard adherence to the R.S.E. policy and the dissemination of information which is age appropriate.

- c) R.S.E. teachers will remain in the room with their class while there is a visiting speaker in
- c) The visitor will be accompanied by the class teacher
- c) Upon approval from college management, the R.S.E. teacher will provide the visitor, well in advance of the visit, with a copy of this R.S.E. policy. After gaining approval from the principal for the visit the organiser makes the visitor aware of the ethos of the college and the manner of delivery of the R.S.E. programme

Issues to consider are:

- I. the age appropriateness of the content and presentation
- II. the visitor will be accompanied by teaching staff
- III. will the 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?

Additional Educational Needs

Students with additional education needs may need more assistance than others in coping with the physical and emotional aspects of growing up. They may also need help in learning what behaviours are and are not acceptable in some cases. It is important that teachers and parents/guardians are mindful of this and use professional judgement to guide the teaching of R.S.E. in a way that is appropriate to the ability, understanding of and composition of the student group.

To ensure learning activities are meaningful, relevant and achievable for all students, the R.S.E. teacher will respond to students' diversity by using differentiated approaches and methodologies.

Ethical/Moral/Considerations

Answering Questions:

While it is important to create an environment in S.P.H.E./R.S.E. in which students can discuss topics openly, teachers may not be able to answer all questions asked by students and can set appropriate limits. Students may ask questions about issues which are not included in the curriculum. On these, and on all questions, teachers should use their professional judgement, guided by the age of the students, the R.S.E. curriculum and the R.S.E. policy of the College. If a teacher becomes concerned about a matter that has been raised, he/she should seek advice from the S.P.H.E. Head of Department or college management.

Offering Advice

The College'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 may be identified when appropriate. Teachers may provide students with education and information about where and from whom they can receive confidential sexual advice and treatment, e.g. their doctor or suitable agency. Any advice offered should not be directive and should be appropriate to the age of the student.

Sensitive Issues

It is natural that students may ask questions about sensitive issues in R.S.E., but it may not be appropriate to deal with some questions in class, including explicit questions. Teachers may choose to say that it is not appropriate to deal with that question at this time. The teacher has the responsibility to set clear boundaries to ensure the classroom is a safe place for everyone, including themselves. While there are no definitive guidelines, the teacher should bear the following in mind when making decisions about where to set limits:

- Age and readiness of the students
- College ethos
- This R.S.E. policy
- R.S.E. Curriculum Guidelines

If a teacher becomes concerned about a matter that has been raised, they should seek advice from college management.

Confidentiality

While students should not be encouraged to disclose personal or private information in S.P.H.E./R.S.E. classes, there may be times when they do talk about their own lives. Ground rules regarding group discussion should be outlined and discussed at the beginning of the class. The confidentiality of all our students will be respected unless a teacher becomes aware that a child is at risk of any type of abuse or in breach of the law. The teacher must refer this immediately to the D.L.P. (Designated Liaison Person). The D.L.P., in accordance with Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools 2017. It is important that students are made aware of the limits of confidentiality and that teachers do not give unconditional guarantees of confidentiality. Students should be made aware that any incident may be conveyed to the D.L.P. and possibly to the parents if the D.L.P. decides that it is in the best interest of the student to notify parents. Teachers should use their professional judgement to decide whether confidence can be maintained after having heard information. Teachers must indicate clearly to students when the content of a conversation can no longer be kept confidential – the student can then decide whether to proceed or not.

Sexual Activity

It is advisable for teachers to give young people information on the age of consent which, following the passage of the Criminal Law (Sexual Offences) Act 2006, is 17 years of age for both males and females. In cases of under-age sexual activity teachers should familiarise themselves with the procedures as outlined in the Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools 2017.

Family Planning

The post-primary R.S.E. Curriculum Guidelines state that the subject of family planning should be covered within the Senior Cycle R.S.E. programme. The R.S.E. programme requires that young people are provided with information about methods of contraception, but consideration needs to be given to the moral and values framework within which it is taught. This topic will be dealt with in an age appropriate, open manner, looking at all sides in a non-directive way.

Sexual Orientation

The post-primary R.S.E. Curriculum Guidelines include the subject of sexual orientation. It is inevitable and natural that homosexuality and identity issues will be discussed during a programme of sex education. One of the advantages of exploring these issues is the opportunity to correct false ideas, assumptions and address prejudice. Discussions should be appropriate to the age of the students.

Sexually Transmitted Infections (S.T.I.'s)

While awareness of S.T.I.'s is one of the objectives of the second year S.P.H.E./R.S.E. subject specifications, S.T.I.'s are mainly addressed in Senior Cycle.

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:

- Student feedback (through surveys and interactions with Year Heads/Counsellor)
- Staff review and feedback (subject department meetings)

This Policy was ratified by the Board of Management

Date: _____

Signed: _____

Date: _____

Chair, Board

of Management

Signed: _____

Date: _____

Principal