

Columba College



Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) Policy 2023-2025

Date Ratified: _____

Signature: _____ Chairperson of the Board

Signature: _____ Principal

Date of Review: _____

Relationship and Sexuality Education Policy

Introduction

The 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.

Scope:

This policy governs all aspects of teaching and learning pertaining to relationships and sexuality. It applies to all staff, students, parents, visiting speakers and external facilitators.

Definition of Relationship and Sexuality Education.

RSE is a lifelong process of acquiring knowledge, understanding and skills, which enable us to develop attitudes, beliefs and values about sexual identity, relationships and intimacy. RSE is a developmental process through experiential learning in which pupils participate to cultivate a healthy attitude towards themselves and others, particularly in the area of sexuality and relationships. We at Columba College aim to support parents/guardians in this important aspect of the student's education and preparation for life.

Relationship to the Mission Statement of the School

Columba College, as a Post Primary School, aims to provide a learning environment which will allow all students to achieve their full potential and enable them to develop into caring and responsible adults/citizens capable of contributing to and fulfilling their roles in the Community/Society.

The school endeavours to provide a caring and supportive learning environment where the potential and uniqueness of each student are recognised and celebrated. In this context the RSE programme helps the students to acquire knowledge and understanding as well as attitudes and values about sexual identity in addition to developing personal and social skills.

Relationship of RSE to SPHE

The Draft Guidelines for RSE state that SPHE is 'spiritual, developmental in nature and age appropriate in content and methodology'. The RSE programme is designed to follow this principle and pattern. Apart from the specific lessons of RSE, SPHE covers other areas which would be pertinent to the development of a healthy attitude to sexuality in oneself and ones relationship with others. SPHE deals with many issues such as self-esteem, assertiveness, communication and decision making skills – all of which can contribute to the effectiveness of the RSE programme.

The Aims of our RSE programme

- To help young people understand and develop friendships and relationships
- To promote an understanding of sexuality
- To promote a positive attitude to one's own sexuality and in ones relationship with others
- To promote knowledge of and respect for reproduction
- To enable pupils to develop attitudes and values toward their sexuality in a moral, spiritual, and social framework in keeping with the policy of the school.
- To provide opportunities for pupils to learn about relationships and sexuality in ways that may help them think and act in a moral, caring and responsible way.

To whom does this policy apply?

This policy will apply to all aspects of teaching and learning about relationships and sexuality. Discussion about relationships and sexuality also takes place in other classrooms other than SPHE/RSE; it is therefore important that all teacher are familiar with the RSE Policy. This policy will apply to school staff, students, Board of Management, Parents/Guardians, Visiting Speakers and External Facilitators and will be available to all personnel.

Roles and Responsibilities

RSE is a whole school responsibility and all members of the school community have rights and responsibilities

Senior Management:

- To ensure RSE is embedded in the school curriculum.
- Oversee the development of an RSE policy and ensure it reflects the views of all members of the school community

- Provide resources and support for the teaching of the programme
- Ensure that teachers involved in delivering the programme receive appropriate training.

SPHE/Pastoral Care

- Be well versed in all aspects of the programme and keep up to date with new developments and methodologies
- Meet with the RSE teachers to discuss teaching strategies, assessment and evaluation
- Identify suitable training for staff
- Liaise with outside agencies and speakers
- Maintain records of all training and visitors
- Liaise with management with respect to resources and training

Staff

All staff in the school plays an important pastoral role in the overall RSE programme through monitoring and supporting students. Teachers directly involved in the programme should:

- Be knowledgeable about the content of the programme
- Use a variety of teaching strategies in the delivery of the programme
- Keep up to date with new developments and resources
- Prepare and Plan for lessons
- Assess student knowledge and understanding of RSE content
- Be well briefed in Child Protection Guidelines and confidentiality matter

Parents/Guardians

- Parents are the primary educators of their children and they have a very important role concerning relationships and sexuality education
- All parents should be fully familiar with RSE programme offered in the school
- They reserve the right to withdraw their child from some or all aspects of the programme following consultation with the school and by signing the withdrawal form.

Key Measures in RSE

Provision of training and staff development

A number of staff members have attended training in SPHE and RSE and management will continue to support staff training in this area.

Sexual Activity

Students should be made aware that, following the passage of the *Criminal Law (Sexual Offences) Act 2006* the age of consent for sexual activity for both males and females is 17 years of age in the Republic of Ireland. In circumstances where a teacher becomes aware that a pupil is engaging in underage sexual activity, the teacher must refer this immediately to the designated liaison person (DPL)

Offering Advice

The schools function is to provide a general education about sexual matters and not to offer individual advice or counselling in aspects of sexual behaviour. However, 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. Advice offered should not be directive and should be age appropriate to the student.

Family Planning/Contraception

The subject of family planning is covered within the senior cycle RSE programme. However, the topic may need to be addressed before senior cycle. Students will be provided with information about methods of 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.

Homosexuality

The subject of sexual orientation is included in the RSE curriculum at senior cycle. The topic may need to be addressed before senior cycle. Discretion will be used with regard to the age at which students discuss homosexuality and it should be discussed in a clear and open manner and in a non- directive way.

Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs)

While awareness of STIs is one of the objectives of the second years SPHE/RSE syllabus. STIs are mainly addressed in senior cycle. This topic will be dealt with in an age appropriate manner.

Practical Issues relating to RSE

SPHE is timetabled once a week for all students. RSE is taught as a module over six class periods within the SPHE programme.

RSE/SPHE class groups may be as many as 30 students. Boys and Girls will be taught together in their class groups. It may be appropriate and desirable to have single sex classes for some sections of the RSE programme. If there is a student who may be pregnant in a class, then relevant topics e.g. family planning will be dealt with sensitively and with the student in mind.

Withdrawing pupils from RSE

The school recognises that the parent/guardian has the right to withdraw their child from the RSE class if they wish to do so after consultation with the Principal.

Special Needs:

Students with Special Needs may need more help 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 they may be withdrawn from an RSE lesson if the material is deemed inappropriate for the individual student. Each individual student will be considered separately depending on their needs.

Visiting Speakers

The RSE programme will be delivered openly by teachers who are known and trusted by pupils. However visitors may enhance the quality of the provision as long as they are used in addition to, not instead of a planned programme of RSE. The visitor will be provided with a copy of the RSE policy. A member of the teaching staff will be present with the students at all times during the presentation.

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 a question at a certain time. If a teacher becomes concerned about a matter that has been raised they 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 content, the ethos of the school and the RSE policy.

Confidentiality

It is school policy that in circumstances where a student 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 or DPL. They 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
- Students must be made aware that any incident may be conveyed to the Principal and possibly 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 students when the content of a conversation can no longer be kept confidential – pupils can then decide to proceed or not.
- Child protection procedures for Post primary schools states if a member of staff receives an allegation or has a suspicion that a child may have been abused or neglected, or is being abused or neglected, or is at risk of abuse or neglect he/she shall without delay report the matter to the DPL.

Links to other school policies:

- SPHE Policy
- Guidance Policy
- Child Protection Guidelines
- Anti-Bullying
- Substance misuse
- Religious Education Policy
- Home Economics Policy
- Science Policy

Implementation and Review

All partners, board of management, parents/guardians, management, and staff have roles ensuring the implementation of this policy.

We at Columba College are committed to monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of this policy. A review of the RSE policy will take place on a regular basis.

Signature _____ Chairperson of Board of Management

Signature _____ School Principal

Date of next review:

