

Coachford College Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) Policy



1. General

1.1 Scope

This policy applies to all aspects of teaching and learning about relationships and sexuality. It also applies to all school staff, students, parents /guardians, visiting speakers, invited guests, volunteers and members of the Board of Management.

1.2 Context

This RSE policy was developed in consultation with all members of the school community, under the guidance of the school's SPHE and RSE departments, and in accordance with:

- a) The school's mission which states that we are a community in which mutual respect is shared in a positive environment. Individual potential is developed in all fields, and student wellbeing is at the core of that is pursued.
- b) Guidelines as set out in Circular M4/95, M20/96, C23/10 *Social and Personal Health Education (SPHE) and Relationships and Sexuality Education-Best Practice Guidelines for Post Primary Schools* and C37/2010.
- c) The school's Wellbeing programme, which was introduced in 2016 as a mandatory core-curricular area of learning at Junior Cycle, in keeping with the requirements of Circular 0015/2016, and informed by the NCCA's Wellbeing Guidelines for Post-Primary Schools (2016).

1.3 Aims

This policy aims to:

- Promote knowledge and respect for reproduction.
- Provide an opportunity to learn about relationships and sexuality.
- Encourage students to think and act in a moral, caring and responsible way.
- Help students understand and develop friendships.
- Help students' understanding of sexuality.

- Develop a positive attitude towards one's own sexuality and that of others.
- Highlight the importance of inclusion in the school's mission statement, and will organise appropriate co-curricular and extra-curricular events to support learning in RSE.

1.4 Objectives

This policy aims to ensure clarity and consensus on how RSE is taught in the College.

- It will articulate the relationship of RSE to SPHE and the aims of the RSE programme.
- It will clarify the rights, roles and responsibilities of all within the college community in relation to the RSE programme with particular reference to college staff, students, parents/guardians and the board of management/patron.
- It will provide information with regard to the practicalities of delivering the programme.

1.5 Rationale

It is necessary to have an RSE policy as RSE is a key element of healthy social and personal development as:

- Young people are exposed to a wide variety of messages about sexuality and sexual activity.
- 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 the Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE).
- Circulars M4/95, M20/96, C23/2010 and C37/2010 request schools to commence a process of RSE policy development.
- RSE in Coachford College is a facts-based programme. It is important that teachers of RSE understand that their role is to express the views of the whole school community on sensitive issues and not their own personal views.
- Schools are required to deliver all aspects of the RSE curriculum, including those in relation to sexual orientation, contraception, sexually transmitted infections etc.

2. KEY MEASURES

2.1 Provision of training and staff development

Arrangements regarding the deployment of staff will be made by the Principal. Teachers of RSE require sensitivity to the needs of the group, an ability to deal with questions openly/honestly and preparedness to refer to more expert advice if necessary. The skills acquired in general teaching apply also to RSE.

In-service training for the teaching of RSE will be provided by the SPHE support service.

2.2 Inclusion of Parents/Guardians

The policy has been developed in consultation with parents' representatives, whose views will be taken into account when the policy is being reviewed. The policy is available to all members of the school community, and a copy of this policy will be issued to any parent/guardian on request to the school office.

2.3 Ethical/Moral Considerations

RSE is a complex area of the curriculum. A school's RSE policy will provide guidance for teachers on the moral and ethical framework within which the programme will be taught. Issues include the following:

a) Answering Questions

While it is important to create an environment in SPHE/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. Students may ask questions about issues which are not included in the curriculum. On these, and on all questions, teachers will use their professional judgment, guided by the age of the students, the RSE curriculum and the RSE policy for the school. Students should be made aware at the beginning of the RSE programme that asking personal questions of staff and peers is inappropriate and unacceptable. If a teacher becomes concerned about a matter that has been raised they should inform/seek advice from the Principal/Deputy Principal.

b) Confidentiality

While students should not be encouraged to disclose personal or private information in SPHE/RSE classes, there may be times when they talk about their own lives. Confidentiality should be respected unless a teacher becomes aware that a student is at risk, in which case the appropriate action should be taken e.g. follow the procedures set down in the Child Protection Policy/Child Safety Statement.

It is important that the students must be made aware of the limits of confidentiality and that teachers do not give unconditional guarantees of confidentiality. Teachers may refer back to the ground rules agreed at the start of their SPHE programme. Students must be aware that any incident may be conveyed to the Principal/Deputy Principal/Year Head and possibly the parents /guardian if the Principal decides that it is in the best interests of the child.

c) 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.

d) Contraception

The post-primary RSE Curriculum Guidelines state that the subject of contraception should be covered within the Senior Cycle RSE programme. The RSE programme requires that young people are provided with information about methods of contraception as a mean to

prevent STD/STIs and to prevent pregnancy. Age appropriate information is already taught as part of the Junior Certificate Science specification.

e) Sexual Orientation

The post-primary RSE Curriculum Guidelines include the subject of sexual orientation. Coachford College operates a policy that sexuality is a dynamic and fluid process in which all sexualities are treated equally. RSE classes at senior cycle discuss openly various ideas including the Kinsey Scale.

Teachers do not promote any one lifestyle as the only acceptable one for society.

One of the many advantages of exploring issues concerning various sexualities is the opportunity to correct false ideas, assumptions and address prejudice. Discussion of sexuality should be appropriate to the age of the pupils.

The *Equal Status Act 2000* and the *Equality Act 2004* prohibit discrimination across nine grounds, including sexual orientation.

f) Abortion:

This topic will be dealt with in an age appropriate, open manner, looking at all aspects of the issues in a non-directive way.

g) Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs):

While awareness of STIs is one of the objectives of the Second Year SPHE/RSE syllabus, STIs are mainly addressed in Senior Cycle. Given that rates of STI transmission are increasing, it is important that the subject is addressed in schools.

2.4 Practical Issues

- All students pursue the NCCA's SPHE specification as part of their obligatory requirement for Wellbeing at Junior Cycle. RSE is included as a module in the second term of school as part of their SPHE programme.
- Students in Senior Cycle take RSE in modular form.
- Boys and girls will be taught all aspects of RSE together.
- The boundaries of the RSE programme will be delivered with due deference to :
 - (a) The age of the student;
 - (b) **Ensuring that the RSE classroom is a safe place for all, including students and teachers;**
 - (c) RSE curriculum guidelines.

- Visiting speakers must be made aware of the schools RSE policy, mission statement and the SPHE visitor guidelines as laid down for post-primary schools by the Department of Education and Skills in Circular 0023/2010. The Student Support Team?? are advised when visiting speakers are in the College. Classroom teachers remain in the classroom with students for the duration of such visits. All programmes and events delivered by visitors and external agencies must use appropriate evidence-based methodologies with clear educational outcomes. Such programmes are best delivered by those specifically qualified to work with young people for whom the programmes are designed.
- At Senior Cycle, the RSE programme requires students to participate in the classes. Topics including
 - sexuality, the Kinsey scale, fluid and dynamic sexuality, labelling, sexual activity, reproductive system, contraception, STI/STDs, Consent including age of consent are topics which are actively discussed.

3. Implementation, Arrangements, Roles and Responsibilities

An RSE committee may be assigned the role of coordinating the implementation of the policy.

Teaching staff will have direct responsibility for delivering the RSE programme at Junior Cycle and Senior Cycle.

This policy was adopted by the Board of Management on March 20th 2018.

It is available to all members of the school community, and is posted on the school's website.

The policy will be reviewed on an annual basis, and/or as deemed necessary.