

Coachford College Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) Policy



1. General

1.1 Scope of Policy

This policy applies 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 school staff, students, parents /guardians, visiting speakers, invited guests, volunteers, external facilitators and members of the Board of Management are familiar with the policy.

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, C43/2018 Social and Personal Health Education (SPHE) and Relationships and Sexuality Education-Best Practice Guidelines for Post Primary Schools and C37/2010 and DEY Senior Cycle RSE/SPHE Guidelines.
- 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 PostPrimary Schools (2016 and 2021 - Revised).
- d)** ETB Ethos: The five core values of the Ethos framework are the foundation of this policy. Equality, Care, Community, Respect and Excellence in Education are fundamental to our implementation of the Wellbeing curriculum and considered in all areas of the programme.



1.3 Aims

This policy aims to:

- Promote knowledge and respect for reproduction.
- Promote an understanding and respect towards sexuality.
- Develop a positive attitude and acceptance towards one's own sexuality and that of others.
- Encourage students to think and act in a moral, caring and responsible way.
- Help students understand, develop and respect friendships and relationships.
- 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 ensure that teachers, parents/guardians and students understand how the teaching of RSE is linked to the college ethos.
- 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. 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 the Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE).

Circulars M4/95, M20/96, C23/2010, C43/2018 and C37/2010 requested that schools 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.

- Spiritual, moral and religious issues will arise when teaching RSE. RSE in Coachford College is a facts-based programme. The RSE policy will guide 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:
 - 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.

2. Key Measures:

2.1 Provision of training and staff development

Arrangements regarding the deployment of staff will be made by the Principal. Consideration will be given to the gender balance, interest, timetable considerations, etc. All teachers involved in this work do not have to be 'experts' on the issues concerned. However they do 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 also apply to RSE.

Inservice training for the teaching of RSE will be provided by the SPHE support service. Staff will be encouraged to attend by the Principal and the SPHE Coordinator.

2.2 Inclusion of Parents/Guardians

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

Parents and guardians are informed of the topics covered and guided to contact the school if there are any questions or issues.

The policy has been developed in consultation with the Parents' Council, 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.

Note: 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 parents or in the case of a student who has reached the age of 18, the students. Hence parents/guardians have a right to opt their child out of the sensitive issues of RSE if they so wish. Parents and guardians do not have to give a reason for withdrawal, but a meeting with the school leadership team must take place and written communication must be provided. Once a parent/guardian's request to withdraw is made, that

request must be complied with until revoked by the parent or guardian. Parents/ guardians must sign students out, supervise them at this time, and then sign them back into school.

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, teachers will use their professional judgement, 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.

It is suggested that teachers might make available a 'questions box' in the classroom, into which students may place questions of an embarrassing nature to be dealt with anonymously and in the strictest of confidence. If the teacher becomes concerned about a matter that has been raised they should inform/seek help from the Principal (DLP)/ Deputy Principal (DDL).P).

b) Confidentiality

While students should not be encouraged to disclose personal or private information in SPHE/RSE classes, there may be times when they choose to 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 procedures set down in the **Child Protection Procedures and Guidelines for Post Primary Schools 2025.**

The Child Protection Procedures for Schools states:

4.2.2 Any member of school personnel including a registered teacher who receives an allegation or has a suspicion that a child may have been, is being, or is at risk of being abused or neglected, is required to report the matter, without delay, to the DLP in the school. (2025)

In cases of under-age sexual activity, the school will be guided by the Child Protection Procedures for Schools 2025.

In Coachford College, the Designated Liaison Person (DLP) is Principal Ms. Áine-Máire Ní Fhaoláin and Deputy Designated Liaison Person (DDL) is Deputy Principal Mr. Edward Williamson.

It is important that students must be made aware of the limits of confidentiality and that teachers do not give unconditional guarantees of confidentiality. Students must be aware that any incident may be conveyed to the Principal/Deputy Principal/Year Head and possibly the parent/guardian if the Principal decides that it is in the best interests of the child. Teachers will inform students when the content of a conversation can no longer be kept confidential.

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 programme requires that young people are provided with information about methods of contraception as a means to prevent STD/STIs and to prevent pregnancy. Age appropriate information is already taught as part of the Junior Cycle Science specification.

e) Sexual Orientation

The post-primary RSE Curriculum Guidelines include the subject of sexual orientation, recognising that sexuality is a dynamic and fluid process in which all sexualities are treated equally. RSE classes at senior cycle openly discuss 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.

The school may decide if the topic needs to be addressed before Senior Cycle, especially if homophobic bullying or gender identity is an issue. It is inevitable and natural that homosexuality and gender identity will be discussed during the RSE programme. Discussion of sexuality should be appropriate to the age of the students. The Equal Status Act 2000 and the Equality Act 2004 prohibit discrimination across nine grounds, including sexual orientation.

Sexual orientation is part of the RSE Senior Cycle Resource Materials. RSE training courses delivered by the Oide provide teachers with further materials.

It is important that any student who is coming to terms with their sexual identity/gender identity should not experience any harassment, embarrassment or isolation which may impact on their mental and emotional health and they should be offered support from the Student Support Team if required.

f) Abortion

This topic will be discussed within an age appropriate, open manner, looking at all aspects of the issue in a non-directive way and in accordance with Irish legislation.

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 the Senior Cycle. Given that rates of STI transmission are increasing, it is important that the subject is addressed in schools. This is covered in the Senior Cycle curriculum in the RSE Senior Cycle Resource Material.

h) Consent

As part of the RSE programme at both Junior and Senior Cycle the topic of consent will be addressed in an age appropriate manner. Resources used will reflect this.

i) Online Safety

Online Safety is a key component of the SPHE and RSE programme in the school.

The relevant topics for RSE are - Online pornography, Coercive behaviour, Coco#s Law and inappropriate image sharing. The resources used for these topics will be age appropriate and DES approved.

2.4 Practical Issues

a) Time Allocation:

Junior Cycle SPHE

All first, second and third years have 1/2 40 minute period/s of SPHE per week.

A minimum 6 class periods per year are allocated to RSE.

Senior Cycle

RSE is incorporated into Transition Year in the SPHE course. Students receive one 40 minute period of SPHE per week.

RSE is delivered to Senior cycle students using their two weekly 40 minute SPHE classes.

A minimum of 15 class periods per year are allocated to RSE.

Delivery outlined above is subject to review in accordance with DES guidelines. Teacher inservice will continue to ensure we are equipped to deliver the up to date programme.

Structure of Class Groups:

Classes remain mixed for all aspects of SPHE and RSE.

The Role of Outside Speakers

While visitors to the classroom can be immensely valuable as part of SPHE, the delivery of the programme remains the responsibility of the teacher. In light of this, where visitors/outside agencies are used in supporting SPHE/RSE, they will be required to familiarise themselves with the school's RSE Policy and SPHE visitors guidelines in the SPHE Handbook available on the SPHE website. Evaluation of speakers is compulsory. See 0042/2018 .

Teachers will be involved in the planning of the above and have a presence during presentations.

Students with AEN:

The National Council for Curriculum and Assessment 'Guidelines for Teachers of Students with General Learning Disabilities' contains comprehensive guidelines on teaching SPHE to students with mild general learning disabilities at primary and post-primary level, and to students with moderate and severe and profound general learning disabilities. These guidelines are available on www.ncca.ie. Our school is cognizant of these guidelines when delivering our RSE programmes.

Students with additional needs may need more support in coping with the physical and emotional aspects of the RSE programme. A resource list for students with learning difficulties is made available to all teachers of SPHE and RSE.

An individual SPHE/RSE programme will be used when appropriate with students who may have more complex learning needs and may benefit from additional support during the teaching of RSE.

Students who may be pregnant:

If a teacher is aware that a student is pregnant they will inform the student in advance of teaching the RSE module so the student can decide whether to participate.

Supporting Parents/Guardians through RSE:

Coachford College plays a vital role in supporting parents and guardians through Relationship and Sexuality Education (RSE) for the young people in their lives. Many families want to guide their children but may feel uncertain about what to say, when to say it, or how to handle sensitive issues.

Supports school can offer include:

- Take-Home Resources: we can provide 'Making the 'Big Talk' many small talks' to parents/guardians if requested.
- RSE trained teachers are available to contact parents/guardians and chat about any questions or concerns

Cross - Curricular Links

Aspects of RSE are delivered across the curriculum particularly in the following areas:

- Religious Education
- Science - Junior Cycle
- Biology at Senior Cycle
- Home Economics
- The topic may come in other subjects from time to time

Child Safeguarding

The revised Child Protection Guidelines for Post-Primary Schools (2025) will be addressed as part of the RSE Wellbeing/RSE Specification.

Monitoring the Implementation of the Policy:

- The Principal is responsible for the implementation of the policy but may assign the monitoring to the RSE staff.
- When the programme will be delivered during the school year will be decided at department meetings in August, at which resources, outside speakers, teaching methodologies and TPL will also be discussed.

Reviewing and Evaluating the policy:

- This policy is constantly under review due to the nature of implementation, changing information, guidelines, legislation and feedback from parents/guardians, students and teachers.
- The policy will be revised as necessary in the light of such reviews and evaluation and within the framework of school planning.
- The policy will be reviewed on an annual basis, and/or as deemed necessary.

Some practical indicators will be used to gauge the impact and effectiveness of the policy. They include:

- A student/teacher evaluation form may be given to some classes at the end of the RSE Module.
- The range of resource material available to teachers.
- In-service availed by teachers.
- Student awareness of this policy.
- Parents/Guardians awareness of this policy.

- Positive feedback is received from teachers, students, parents/guardians and members of the Board of Management.

The following may support the process of review and evaluation:

- A confidential survey of staff and students
- Feedback from student council or student body
- Parent/guardian feedback

3. Implementation, Arrangements, Roles and Responsibilities

An RSE Working Group 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 drawn up in consultation with all school partners. It will be reviewed as deemed necessary. It will be made available to all school partners on request.

The Plan was reviewed by the Board of Management of Coachford College on May 6th 2026, having been signed by the Chairperson and the Principal.



Chairperson of the Board

Date: 06.05.2026

Principal 

Date: 06.05.2026