



Ringsend College Relationship and Sexual Education Policy

Scope

This policy relates to every aspect of teaching and learning regarding relationships and sexuality. This policy relates to the staff of the school, students, parents/guardians, the Board of Management and guest speakers.

Relationship with the Mission Statement and the Ethos of the School

There is a close connection between this policy and the school ethos/mission statement as has been adopted by the Ringsend College Community.

Our mission statement:

Ringsend College is a multi-service College within the CDETБ which strives to give every student every opportunity to realise their full potential.

We are committed to creating a positive and caring learning environment which motivates and challenges our students in all aspects of their personal, social, moral, sporting and academic development.

We believe that this will foster a life-long love of learning and encourage an on-going engagement with their personal development. This will enable students to leave Ringsend College as happy, socially aware, hard-working members of society with a resilient and positive mind-set.

Rationale

Sexuality is an aspect of a person's social and personal development. Certain messages regarding sexuality and sexual activity are communicated to young people. It is the school's responsibility, with the support of the parents, to decide how best to appropriately educate the students.

According to the Education Act 1998 schools must help develop the moral, spiritual, social and personal aspects of the student and make health education available to them.

According to Section 4 of the Rules and Programmes for Secondary Schools, schools must have a Relationship and Sexual Education (RSE) Policy and an appropriate RSE programme from first to sixth year. RSE is part of the SPHE programme in the Junior Cycle.

It is the duty of the school to put in place the following circulars: M4/95, M20/96, M22/00, M11/03, M27/08, M23/10, and M37/10.

Aims of our Relationships and Sexual Education Programme:

- To help students understand and develop friendships and relationships
- To develop understanding of sexuality
- To create a positive attitude in relation to their own sexuality and in their relationships with others
- To inform and nurture(create/foster) respect in relation to reproduction
- To allow students to develop attitudes and values about sexuality in a moral, spiritual and social environment that supports the school ethos policy
- To give students the opportunity to learn about relationships and sexuality in ways that help them think and act in a moral, caring and responsible way

It must be recognized that these are aspirational aims in a course that has limited time.

Roles and Responsibilities

The Board of Management is responsible for ratifying the policy and the school staff are responsible for implementing it.

Parents

The school recognizes the role of the parent in the development and implementing of the policy. The parents are the main educators of the child and the school believes their role in relation to RSE is extremely important.

Parents can access information booklets in relation to RSE from the HSE.

A copy of this policy will be available to parents on the school website. A letter in relation to RSE will be sent to the parents of all new students (*Appendix 1*):

- According to the Education Act 1998 a parent/guardian can withdraw their child from the sensitive part of the RSE programme or in the case of a student is 18, they can withdraw from the programme.
- If a parent/guardian wants to withdraw their child from the programme they must inform the school in writing at the start of the school year.
- The parent/guardian does not have to give a reason to withdraw their child but we welcome them to do this as sometimes we can resolve misunderstandings. When a parent/guardian writes (applies) to withdraw their child, it must be accepted unless

the parent withdraws the application. **However, before finalising the withdrawal we would hold a conversation according to Appendix 3 which ensures clarity on the reason for withdrawal.**

Giving Advice

It is the school's aim to make general information available on sexual matters and questions but not to give personal advice, information or counselling on aspects of sexual behaviour and contraception – but sources of information and advice will be made available when appropriate. The advice should be appropriate to the age of the student.

Outspoken Questions

It might not be appropriate to answer frank questions in the class. The teacher can say it is not appropriate to answer the question at this time. If a teacher is worried about a question that is raised he/she can look for advice from the Principal. When making a decision whether he/she should answer a question, the teacher should take the age and the readiness of the student, the content of the RSE programme, the school ethos and the RSE policy into account.

Privacy/Confidentiality

It is the school policy that a teacher should inform the Principal (DLP) immediately if they believe that a student is at risk of any type of abuse or breaking the law. The principal will make a decision should the parents/guardians and /or relevant authorities be informed and they may(could) organize counselling for the student. *(See also the Child Protection Policy-Ringsend College)*

In the case that sensitive information is shared/revealed it is important that the student is made aware that:

- The teacher cannot promise confidentiality
- Any matter can be brought to the attention of the Principal and maybe the parents if the Principal believes it is in the best interest of the child
- The teacher must use their professional judgment as to whether information can be kept secret after hearing it
- The teacher must make all of this clear to the student so that the student can then decide whether they wish to continue or not.

The difference between the Biology and non-Biology aspects of sexual education

It is the school policy that the Department of Education and Science determines the aspects of reproduction that are taught in the subject Biology.

The use of Guest speakers and others

It is school policy that most of the RSE programme will be openly discussed with teachers who the students are familiar with and that they have confidence in. Visitors/Guest speakers can improve the provision of education as long as they are used in conjunction with and not instead of the planned RSE programme. A copy of this RSE policy and Appendix 2 will be made available to guest speakers.

Homosexuality

Teachers do not put any one way of living before another therefore it is natural that homosexuality would be discussed during the sexuality programme. One of the advantages of this is that it allows for false understandings and ideas to be corrected and prejudice can be tackled. The discussion of homosexuality should be age appropriate.

Contraception

This topic will be dealt with openly and appropriately to the age of the student and every aspect of the questions will be dealt with in a neutral manner.

Special Educational Needs

It could be that students with special educational needs may need extra help to deal with the physical and emotional matters of life: they may need extra help to learn about the behaviour that is and isn't appropriate and to make them aware of potential dangers/risks.

Support, development and continuous assessment

Qualifications: teachers working in this area don't have to be "experts". They do however need to be understanding of the groups' needs and need to be able to handle questions openly.

The school will facilitate teachers to obtain expert training in this field when the opportunity arises and circumstances allow.

PLEASE NOTE

Research findings indicate that the following teaching approaches have limited effect and are counterproductive to the effective implementation of SPHE. In light of this, schools are advised to avoid the following approaches:

Scare tactics

Information that induces fear, and exaggerates negative consequences, is inappropriate and counterproductive.

Sensationalist interventions

Interventions that glamorise or portray risky behaviour in an exciting way are inappropriate and can encourage inappropriate risk taking.

Testimonials

Stories focused on previous dangerous lifestyles can encourage the behaviour they were designed to prevent by creating heroes/heroines of individuals who give testimony.

Information only interventions

Programmes which are based on information alone are very limited in the learning outcomes they can achieve and can in fact be counter-productive in influencing values, attitudes and behaviour.

Information that is not age appropriate

Giving information to students about behaviours they are unlikely to engage in can be counterproductive in influencing values, attitudes and behaviour.

Once off/short term interventions

Short-term interventions, whether planned or in reaction to a crisis, are ineffective.

Normalising young people's risky behaviour

Giving the impression to young people, directly or indirectly, that all their peers will engage/are engaging in risky behaviours could put pressure on them to do things they would not otherwise do.

Didactic approach

Didactic approaches which are solely directive in nature are ineffective in the successful implementation of SPHE/RSE

Appendix 1

Dear Parent /Guardian,

I wish to inform you that we are now obliged to cover the Relationships & Sexuality Education Programme as part of the Social Personal and Health Education Programme at Junior Cycle level and as a Relationships & Sexuality Education Programme at Leaving Certificate level. (Ref Circular 0027/ 2008 Department of Education and Science)

If you **do not wish** your son/daughter to attend this class please fill out the enclosed form and return to the school. *(There is no need to return this form if you give her permission to attend)*

I **do not give** my son/daughter _____ permission to attend the Relationship and Sexuality classes

Signed: _____

Date: _____

Appendix 2

VISITORS TO POST-PRIMARY SCHOOLS: GUIDELINES

If schools wish to enhance or supplement SPHE/RSE by inviting visitors to the classroom, precise criteria must apply. Outside facilitators who contribute to the SPHE/RSE programme can play a valuable role in supplementing, complementing and supporting a planned, comprehensive and established SPHE/RSE programme. Any such visitor or visiting group should adhere to the guidelines of good practice as set out in the SPHE Handbook Section 7 and which are condensed herewith:

- Visitors to the classroom or school, particularly those engaging directly with students, should be aware of relevant school policies including the school's child protection policy, RSE policy and substance misuse policy. Any such visit must be carefully planned in advance in line with the relevant whole-school SPHE/RSE programme(s) and policies.
- Talks/programmes delivered by outside agencies or speakers must be consistent with and complementary to the school's ethos and SPHE/RSE programme. Visits should be planned, researched and implemented in partnership with school personnel.
- Relevant teachers need to liaise with and be involved in all visitors and external agencies working with the school and the whole staff needs to be made aware of same.
- It is strongly recommended that parents should be consulted and made aware of any such visiting people or agencies to classrooms / schools.
- The school's SPHE/RSE coordinator may also help in the process of whole-school planning and coordination to support the effective implementation of SPHE/RSE.
- It is of the utmost importance that classroom teachers remain in the classroom with the students and retain a central role in the delivery of the core subject matter of SPHE/RSE programme. The presence of the classroom teacher should ensure that the school follows appropriate procedures for dealing with any issues that may arise as a result of the external input(s).
- 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 the young people for whom the programmes are designed.

Appendix 3

If a parent requests a withdrawal of their son/daughter from RSE.

1. We discuss the nature of the concerns with the child's parent and if appropriate attempt to reassure them (initially such discussion takes place at a meeting with the Year Head and SPHE Co-ordinator, the Principal or Deputy Principal may become involved if necessary).
2. We consider whether the programme can be amended or improved in a way that will reassure parents - care is taken not to undermine the integrity of the RSE programme and the entitlement of the other pupils, e.g. it may be appropriate and desirable to have single sex classes for some sections of the RSE programme.
3. We attempt to ensure that where a pupil is withdrawn there is no disruption to other parts of their education.
4. We point out that pupils who have been withdrawn are vulnerable to teasing - we therefore attempt to cause minimal embarrassment to the pupil and minimal disruption to the programme.
5. We also point out that pupils may receive inaccurate information from their peers.
6. We offer the parents access to appropriate information and resources.

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