



Relationships & Sexuality Education (RSE) Policy

Introduction

This policy is enacted after consultation between staff, parents, Principal and Board of Management.

In this policy document all references to gender are taken to be inclusive and the term “parent” is taken to include “guardian”.

RSE is considered to be a ‘lifelong process’ of acquiring knowledge and understanding and of developing attitudes, beliefs and values about sexual identity, relationships and intimacy. Parents, teachers, peers, adults and the media deliver this education both consciously and unconsciously.

Our School

Coláiste Muire is a co-educational, academically non-selective day school, with an enrolment varying between 300 and 350 pupils.

Our School Philosophy/Mission Statement

Coláiste Muire seeks to foster the personal development and pastoral care of each individual and:

- Maintain a balance between academic, technical and artistic achievement
- Value each individual, recognising each person’s uniqueness and dignity
- Affirm the Catholic ethos and develop an appreciation and pride in our cultural heritage and environment
- Develop a co-operative caring environment between parents, teachers and home
- Maintain a policy of openness to all, regardless of class, creed or culture.

Definition of Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE)

RSE is a developmental process through experiential learning in which pupils participate to help cultivate a healthy attitude towards themselves and others, particularly in the area of sexuality and relationships.

RSE within a whole school context

A whole school approach is necessary to support the delivery of RSE in the school. While delivery of such subjects as SPHE, Science, Biology etc. can support the overall programme, all staff play a role in supporting the objectives of the programme and creating a positive and inclusive environment for students. We are careful to

ensure that the hidden curriculum is underpinned by, and reflective of our school philosophy.

RSE within Social Personal and Health Education (SPHE)

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 one's 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

Relationships and sexuality education which is located in the overall framework of SPHE, has as its specific aims:

- a) To help students understand and develop friendships and relationships.
- b) To promote an understanding of sexuality.
- c) To promote a positive attitude towards one's own sexuality and one's relationships with others.
- d) To promote knowledge of and respect for reproduction.
- e) To support students to develop healthy attitudes and values towards their sexuality and to recognise the attitudes and values of others in a moral, spiritual and social framework in keeping with the policy of the school.
- f) To provide opportunities for pupils to learn about relationships and sexuality in ways that help them think and act in a moral, caring and responsible way.
- g) To understand the legal context for making decisions around ones sexual expression.
- h) To have a clear understanding of consent
- i) To support students in setting boundaries and being assertive in line with their personal values.
- j) To provide clear, accurate and objective information.
- k) To promote an understanding of the importance of sexual health.

It is acknowledged that in a course of limited duration these aims are aspirational. Third parties, e.g. HSE may be employed to deliver some content.

Guidelines for the management and organisation of RSE in Coláiste Muire

Staffing & Delivery:

Arrangements regarding the teaching of the program and deployment of the staff will be made by the Principal. Teachers will follow content supported by the SPHE curriculum and as agreed with management. The teaching of the RSE programme is age-appropriate as directed by the DES-NCCA RSE Programme and Guidelines.

Informing and Involving Parents:

Parents are the primary educators of their children and their role in education concerning relationships and sexuality is seen by the school as very important. This policy has been designed in consultation with all parents and the views expressed by parents will be taken into account when reviewing the policy. A copy of this is available on the school's website at <https://www.cmbm.ie>.

Offering Advice:

The school'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 will be identified when appropriate. 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 or other suitable agency. Advice offered should not be directive and should be appropriate to the age of the pupil.

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 that question at this time. If a teacher becomes concerned about a matter that has been raised he/she should seek advice from the Deputy Principal or the Principal. When deciding whether or not to answer questions the teacher should consider the age and readiness of the students, the RSE programme content, the ethos of the school and the RSE policy.

Confidentiality:

It is school policy that in circumstances where a pupil 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. The Principal will decide whether to inform the parents and/or appropriate authorities and may arrange for school supports to be put in place, e.g. Guidance Counsellor, Home Youth Liaison Officer.

The following is also school policy:

- a) teachers must not promise absolute confidentiality;
- b) pupils 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;
- c) teachers must use their professional judgement to decide whether confidence can be maintained having heard the information;
- d) teachers must indicate clearly to pupils when the content of a conversation can no longer be kept confidential - the pupil can then decide whether to proceed or not.

The Child Protection Guidelines for Post Primary schools state in 4.1.1. and 4.2.1.

4.1.1. If a member of staff receives an allegation or has a suspicion that a child may have been abused, or is being abused, or is at risk of abuse he/she should, without delay, report the matter to the Designated Liaison Person in that school. A written record of the report should be made and placed in a secure location by the Designated Liaison Person. The need for confidentiality at all times, as previously referred to in Chapter 1 Paragraph 1.2 of these guidelines, should be borne in mind. The supports of the school should continue to be made available to the child.

4.2.1 If the Designated Liaison Person is satisfied that there are reasonable grounds for the suspicion or allegation he/she should report the matter to the relevant health board immediately.

The division between biological and non-biological aspects of sex education:

The school policy is that the Science Department deals primarily with the biological aspects of reproduction.

Withdrawing pupils from the RSE programme:

Parents have a right to withdraw their child from sensitive aspects of RSE and will have the opportunity to do so via a consent form which issues to all students in advance of commencement of the programme.

Parents do not have to give reasons for withdrawal, but we respectfully invite them to do so - sometimes we can then resolve misunderstandings.

Once a parent's request to withdraw is made, that request must be complied with until revoked by the parent (see appendix 1)

Using visiting speakers and others

It is school policy that most of the RSE programme is best discussed openly with teachers who are known and trusted by the pupils. However visitors can enhance the quality of the provision as long as they are used in addition to, not instead of a planned programme of RSE.

Outside speakers will only be permitted where the information they present is in line with the overall aims and objectives of our RSE policy and programme. A teacher from Coláiste Muire will be present at all times.

The SPHE Team will provide the visitor, well in advance of the visit, with a copy of this RSE policy. After gaining approval from the Principal for the visit the organiser makes the visitor aware of the ethos of the school and the manner of delivery of the RSE programme.

Visitors should be given advance notice of the composition of the class and an idea of how their contribution fits into the scheme of work.

In order to inform the visitor of the precise requirements of a group and to make better use of the time of the visitor it is advisable for the group to draw up questions in advance and these should be forwarded to the visitor. This will involve the pupils in the visit and will make the experience more relevant for them - it also facilitates planning.

The Office should be informed of the date and name of the visitor.

Sexual Orientation or Sexual identity

In line with our Mission Statement, school philosophy and equality legislation the RSE programme will be delivered in a context of supporting students regardless of gender identity or sexual orientation.

Contraception, Fertility & Sexually Transmitted Infections

These topics will be addressed so as to ensure that students are well informed and capable of making decisions which are appropriate, healthy and safe for them in the context of life long development.

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

Consent

Teachers need to be familiar with the legalities of consent and should frame delivery of this topic around The Criminal Law (Sexual Offences) Act 2017, which amended The Criminal Law (Sexual Offences) Act 2006. These two Acts deal with the legal definition of consent, circumstances under which consent cannot be given, the right

to revoke consent and many other aspects of law in this area. Providing this fact based information should then facilitate discussion among students on the different elements of consent, including avoiding assumptions relating to consent, the right to withdraw consent, the capacity to consent (including the impact of alcohol on consent) and challenging myths relating to consent.

Additional Educational Needs

Students with additional educational needs may need more help than others in coping with the physical and emotional aspects of growing up; they may also need more help in learning what sorts of behaviour are and are not acceptable, and in being warned and prepared against abuse by others.

Links to curriculum

SPHE: <https://www.curriculumonline.ie/Junior-cycle/Short-Courses/SPHE/Rationale-and-Aim/>

Senior Cycle: [https://www.curriculumonline.ie/Senior-cycle/SPHE-\(1\)/](https://www.curriculumonline.ie/Senior-cycle/SPHE-(1)/)

The Management and organisation of RSE in our school

The aim is to provide a whole-school approach to the development and the delivery of the RSE school programme. The delivery of RSE will be co-educational within the context of the class group.

Provision for ongoing support, development and review

Training/Support

All teachers involved in this work do not necessarily 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 a preparedness to refer to more expert advice if necessary. The skills acquired in general teaching apply also to health education. Furthermore, many teachers have training in related areas such as counselling. Some teachers have expert training in the specific areas of health, relationships and sexuality education and will be encouraged to train other teachers.

The school will facilitate teachers to obtain expert training in this field, bearing in mind the overall budgetary framework and the need for the ongoing teaching and learning programme of the school to continue with as little disturbance as possible.

Resources

The school will purchase appropriate RSE teaching materials which have been identified by staff as useful and which have been approved by the Principal, within the normal budgetary framework and as general school resources allow.

Monitoring, evaluating and reviewing the RSE programme

We are committed to monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of this programme. Specifically important to the RSE Programme are:

- a) pupil feedback;
- b) staff review and feedback;
- c) parental feedback.

This policy will be reviewed in accordance with the school's policy review schedule and principles - by parents through the Parents Association or directly to parents themselves, by students through the Student Council, by staff through consultation and by the Board of Management. Reviews will seek to examine the effectiveness of the policy and to ensure legal compliance and the maintenance of best practice.

The RSE programme in Coláiste Muire will be based on this policy document and the materials and resources used will be reviewed by SPHE and RSE teachers and Co-ordinators as necessary. Development of the policy will be subject to the approval of all parties and the ratification by the Board of Management.

This policy was reviewed in September 2022 and presented to the Board of Management for ratification on 27th September 2022.

Chairperson Signature: *M. Molloy*

Date: 27th September 2022

Appendix I

What we do if a request for withdrawal from the RSE programme is made by a parent/guardian or student:

- a) 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, the Principal/Deputy Principal may become involved if necessary)
- b) 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;
- c) we attempt to ensure that where a pupil is withdrawn there is no disruption to other parts of their education,
- d) 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;
- e) we also point out that pupils may receive inaccurate information from their peers;
- f) we offer the parents access to appropriate information and resources.