

Relationships and Sexuality Education Policy

Enacted 5th December 2014 after a process of consultation between staff, Board of Management, parent representatives and student representatives

School: Coláiste Pobail Bheantraí, Seskin, Bantry, Co. Cork. 027 56434

Our School Ethos

Coláiste Pobail Bheantraí is a co-educational Community College under the co-trusteeship of the Diocese of Cork and Ross and County Cork ETB.

While academic excellence is important to us, we stress that total development of the student is our goal. To this end, we feel that the general aim of education is to contribute towards the development of all aspects of the individual, including the creative, critical, cultural, emotional, intellectual, moral, physical, political, social and spiritual development for personal and family life, for working life, for living in the community and for leisure. We will ensure that the characteristic spirit of the school is maintained, reflecting the founding intention of the school and the schools mission statement.

The College's code of discipline states 'It is the responsibility of everyone in the school to model good behaviour and encourage positive relationships'. RSE is clearly part of this general aim. We encourage participation in school life, so that individual talents are nurtured and each student reaches his/her full potential. The values inherent in the programme are consistent with the core values of the College. The Board of Management, College and its staff value partnership with parents, the primary educators, to ensure a safe, caring and happy environment for students and staff alike. As is evident in our mission statement:

'In partnership, through a comprehensive curriculum, we aim to provide quality teaching and learning in the pursuit of excellence, to promote intellectual, spiritual and personal development in an atmosphere of respect thus enabling students to contribute positively to their community'

Definition of Relationships and Sexuality Education

RSE is a life-long developmental process of acquiring knowledge and an understanding of human relationships and sexuality. It is primarily the responsibility of the parents and family. The RSE class gives pupils formal opportunities, through experiential learning, to cultivate healthy attitudes and values towards themselves and others, promoting the overall development of the person, and the integration of sexuality into personal life.

Relationships and Sexuality Education as part of Social, Personal and Health Education (S.P.H.E.)

At Coláiste Pobail Bheanntaí, RSE is taught as an integral part of the SPHE programme which is a required part of the Junior Certificate curriculum for all students. (Section 4 of the Rules and Programme for Secondary Schools.

The general aim of SPHE is the development of healthy attitudes, values, skills and understanding in relation to oneself and others. It deals with areas such as self-esteem, assertiveness, communication and decision making skills.

What the school currently provides

RSE is delivered in a co-educational setting with 5-6 lessons per year for both Junior and Senior cycle students.

Where the timetable permits the school supports small class sizes for delivering the RSE programme. It is recognised that cross-curricular links occur with all other subjects taught in the school and all members of the school community respect and recognise this. The school recognises that SHPE also takes place in all the interactions in the school community, thereby supporting the values of SPHE and supporting the values of respect and caring.

Aims of our Relationships and Sexuality Education Programme

RSE as part of a wide programme of Social, Personal and Health Education, has as its specific aims:

- To build on the primary school RSE programme and provide our students with information and skills regarding forming and maintaining healthy relationships in ways that encourages them to think and act in a moral, caring and responsible manner.
- To promote an understanding of sexuality which includes all aspects of the human person that relate to being male or female, and with an awareness that one changes and develops throughout life.
- To encourage a positive attitude to one's own sexuality, and to one's relationship with others. This will contribute to the development of personal well being, and enhance ones relationships with others.
- To create opportunities for pupils to learn about the biological aspects of sex, and to develop respect for the human body.
- To enable students to establish healthy attitudes and values towards their sexuality, in a moral, spiritual and social context in keeping with our school ethos.

Why do we need a RSE programme?

According to the 1998 Education Act the aim of education is to contribute towards the development of all aspects of the individual and RSE is a required part of this aim. While parents have the primary responsibility for RSE, schools also have a role to play in this process through our structure programme.

Young people are involved in many different relationships with family, friends and others. They live in a world where they are influenced by many conflicting value systems. Our students need to be enabled to critically evaluate the range of information, opinions, attitudes and values they encounter in everyday life in matters concerning relationships and sexuality. Values concerning relationships and sexuality in particular are no longer as clear as they once were.

The following are some reasons why RSE needs to be formally taught:

- Young people receive informal and unsupervised information about relationships and sexuality which may be inadequate, inappropriate and often misleading.
- Young people are exposed to a variety of sexual practices and attitudes through the media, particularly TV, film, magazines and the internet.
- Young people are maturing physically at a younger age and are becoming sexually active at an earlier age than in the past.
- The roles of men and women in society are changing.
- The nature of family life is changing in a way that places many pressures on children and young people.

Student's ability to relate to others depends on a personal sense of self-worth and having the attitudes and skills to negotiate their way respectfully in their relationships with others. Parallel to this, young people are maturing sexually and are growing in awareness of their sexuality. RSE emphasises the importance of self-awareness and self-esteem in understanding these changes. It emphasises the development of ones' ability to interact respectfully with others. It provides students with an opportunity to understand the different types of relationships and attitudes, values and life skills that support the healthy development of these relationships. Students can develop an understanding of familial, cultural and religious values and consider how these values support healthy informed choices in relation to relationships, sexuality and sexual health.

At Coláiste Pobail Bheanntaí we are aware that for various reasons and at different times young people may need extra support and sensitivity in coping with the physical and emotional aspect of growing up. Some students may require more help in learning what sorts of behaviour are/are not acceptable, and being warned and prepared against abuse by others. In order to provide the appropriate support, the school expects parents to make us aware where these circumstances exist. Parents are invited to speak to the Principal, who in collaboration with the Guidance Counsellor, the Chaplain, the Year Head, the class tutor, and/or SPHE teacher will offer the support needed. Each case will be dealt with sensitively and where appropriate on-going referral will be made to outside agencies.

Guidelines for the management and organising of Relationships and Sexuality Education in our school

1. Role of Parents and Guardians

The school recognises that the primary responsibility for relationships and sexuality education of children rests with the parents/guardians, and there is no substitute. Communication between parents and school is therefore essential. Prior to classwork on any RSE module information explaining the aims and content of the course will be given to each parent/guardian and their consent will be required. As RSE is a collaborative process between home and school we encourage parents to discuss their children's progress in all areas of RSE/SPHE at parent-teacher meetings.

2. Withdrawal from class

Parents have a right to withdraw their child from the RSE programme in school. The school will respect this decision. Parents do not have to give reasons for withdrawal, but we respectfully invite them to do so – sometimes we can then resolve misunderstandings. The collaborative and supportive role of parents and school is emphasised. Once a parent's request to withdraw is made, that request must be complied with until revoked by the parent.

3. Class Groupings

Respect for difference and inclusivity are key principles of RSE and SPHE. This allows for a wide range of experiences and perspectives to be shared. For this reason our classes are generally mixed so that students can explore together all aspects of RSE and SPHE.

4. Methodologies

The methodologies used are child-centred and appropriate to the age and stage of development of the students. Active learning methods are favoured in SPHE and RSE to encourage engagement and learning. Teaching methods include:

- Group Discussions
- Case Studies
- Brainstorming
- Role-Play
- Art Work
- Narrative Expression
- Games; Ice Breakers
- Debates
- Project Work
- Visitors

5. Visiting Speakers

It is school policy that the RSE programme is best taught by teachers who are known and trusted by the students. However, the school may wish to make use of the expertise and skills of education and health professionals from statutory or voluntary organisations or individuals from the local community. Visitors can enhance the quality of the course..

The visitor will be provided well in advance with a copy of this RSE policy. After gaining approval from the Principal the visitor will be made aware of the ethos of the school and the manner of delivery of the RSE programme. Visitors are expected to conform to the ethos of the school.

Issues to consider are:

1. Ensuring visitors are compliant with the legal requirements of the Child Protection Guidelines.
2. The degree of explicitness and appropriateness of the content and presentation e.g. in the use of DVD's and other aids. It is important that all aspects of a presentation are respectful of and sensitive to the student's emotional health and safety.
3. Ensuring visitors will be accompanied by teaching staff in the classroom.

A letter will be sent to parents/guardians informing them of the visitor presentation/seminar/date etc. and they will be required to sign the consent form.

6. Confidentiality

Both the teacher and the other pupils in the class must always respect the dignity and privacy of each individual student. A key rule to agree in advance of any discussion is that "no one will be expected to ask or answer any personal questions". It is equally important that the teacher shares this right, and does not feel obliged to impart information about his/her own personal life.

Pupils should be made aware of the limits of confidentiality within Child Protection Guidelines and the law and that any incident may be conveyed to the Principal, and/or parents as appropriate, if it is deemed in the best interest of the child. If a pupil confides in a member of staff, and requests that the information is kept secret, teachers cannot guarantee total confidentiality. Teachers may use their professional judgement to decide whether confidentiality can be maintained, but must indicate clearly to students when the content of the conversation can no longer be kept confidential. The pupil can then decide whether to proceed or not. In circumstances where a pupil is considered at some risk, or that any type of abuse is suspected, or if a child is in breach of the law, the teacher cannot promise absolute confidentiality. **The Children First: National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children** states the following:

Responsibilities of school staff

4.8.5 If a child discloses to a teacher or to other school staff that he or she is being harmed by a parent/carer or any other person, including another child, the person who receives that information should listen carefully and supportively. This applies equally where the child implies that he or she is at risk of being harmed by a parent/carer or any other person. It also applies equally if a parent/carer or any other person discloses that he or she has harmed, or is at risk of harming, a child. The child

*should not be interviewed formally; the teacher or other staff member should obtain only necessary relevant facts if and when clarification is needed. **Confidentiality must never be promised to a person making a disclosure** subject to the provisions of the Data Protection Acts and the requirement to report to the HSE Children and Family Services must be explained in a supportive manner. The discussion should be recorded accurately and the record retained securely. The teacher or other staff member should then inform the designated liaison person who is responsible for reporting the matter to the HSE Children and Family Services, or in the event of an emergency and the unavailability of the HSE, to An Garda Síochána.*

7. Further Development and Evaluation

The College/Board of Management will facilitate participating teachers in taking part in ongoing In-Service Education so as to provide the proper delivery of the RSE programme. It will also ensure that appropriate teaching materials which have been identified by staff as useful, and approved by the Principal, are available for the delivery of the programme.

The teachers involved in the delivery of the programme will evaluate the RSE programme each year, and modifications may be made if this is considered desirable for an effective delivery of a relevant programme within the provisions of this policy statement.

The RSE is a living policy, which will be reviewed on a regular basis.