

# **Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) policy**

## **St. Munchin's College**

### **Introductory Statement:**

**This RSE policy was developed in accordance with:**

1. Our Educational Philosophy
2. 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.
3. Guidance from RE & SPHE Department
4. Consultation with the Pastoral Care Team

All members of the College community are consulted during its development.

This RSE policy is a written statement of the aims of the RSE programme within St. Munchin's College. The policy reflects the relationship of RSE to SPHE and other subjects e.g. Religious Education, Science, Biology and the organization and management of RSE within the college.

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

## **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 and C37/2010 request schools to 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. The RSE policy will guide teachers in the treatment of such issues in accordance with the ethos of the college. 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.

## **Aims and Objectives:**

This RSE policy intends to achieve the following:

### **Aims:**

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

- Help students understanding of sexuality.
- Develop a positive attitude in one's own sexuality.

**Objectives:**

- The policy will ensure clarity and consensus on how RSE is taught in the College.
- It will articulate the relationship of RSE to SPHE.
- It will articulate 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 on the practicalities of delivering the programme.

**KEY MEASURES:**

**A. Provision of training and staff development:**

- The Principal will make arrangements regarding the deployment of staff. Consideration will be given to gender balance. However, it would be preferable to consult with and timetable teachers who express an interest in teaching SPHE/RSE. 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 apply also to RSE.
- In service, 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.
- The appropriate teaching resources will be made available to staff subject to budget constraints.

**B. 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 college as very important. In Senior Cycle, a letter will be sent home at the beginning of the Module.

- The policy has been designed in consultation with the Parents' Association representatives and the views expressed by parents will be taken into account when the policy is being reviewed. A copy of this policy will be made available to any parent/guardian on request to the general 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 student. Hence, parents /guardians have a right to opt their child out of the sensitive issues in RSE if they wish to do so. Parents do not have to give reasons for withdrawal. Once a parent's/guardian's request to withdraw is made, that request must be complied with until revoked by the parent. Parents/Guardians must collect and supervise students at this time.

### **C. 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:

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

#### **Confidentiality:**

- While students should not be encouraged to disclose personal or private information in SPHE/RSE classes, there may be times when they do 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 Procedures and Guidelines for Post-Primary Schools (2011).

In cases of under-age sexual activity, the Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools (2011) state: *'In all cases where a school becomes aware of underage sexual intercourse the school shall take appropriate steps to inform the child's parents. (2.1.6)'*

**It is important that the students 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 and possibly the parents /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 cannot remain confidential.

### **Consent:**

Students will be informed of what consent is and the aspects associated with giving consent. Understanding what is consent from others and the consequences of issues associated where consent has not been given.

### **Being health literate**

Students will be given the opportunity to discuss the law as it relates to the age of consent for sexual activity. The teacher will describe and students will investigate the statutory and voluntary agencies, which offer support to those experiencing relationship difficulties.

### **Personal rights and personal safety**

Areas of rights and personal safety will be explain including what sexual harassment is, including issues of power and control. A short presentation explaining sexual harassment and the law as it applies to it will be discussed.

### **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.

### **Family Planning/ Contraception:**

- The post-primary RSE Curriculum Guidelines state that the subject of family planning should be covered within the Senior Cycle RSE programme. There is a

lesson on family planning in the RSE Senior Cycle Resource Materials on P77 and in the “*TRUST*” pack. The RSE programme requires that young people be provided with information about methods of contraception, including Natural Family Planning. Age appropriate information is already taught as part of the Junior Certificate science curriculum. Schools can use their discretion with regard to the age at which students receive any aspect of the RSE programme.

### **Sexual Identity & Orientation:**

- The following topics will be discussed, presented and the teacher will endeavour to distinguish between sexual activity, sexuality and sexual orientation.
- The post-primary RSE Curriculum Guidelines include the subject of sexual orientation. There is a lesson on sexual orientation in the RSE Senior Cycle Resource Materials on P151. RSE training courses delivered by the SPHE Support Service provide teachers with further materials.
- A school may decide the topic needs to be addressed before Senior Cycle, especially if homophobic bullying is an issue. Teachers do not promote any one lifestyle as the only acceptable one for society therefore it is inevitable and natural that homosexuality will be discussed during a programme of sex education.
- One of the many advantages of exploring issues concerning homosexuality is the opportunity to correct false ideas, assumptions and address prejudice. Discussion of homosexuality 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. Consideration needs to be given to the messages that are conveyed if the subject of homosexuality is not discussed in schools.
- It is important that any student who is coming to terms with their sexual 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 Pastoral Care Team.

### **Abortion:**

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

### **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. There is a lesson on STIs in the RSE Senior Cycle Resource Materials on P103 and also in the “TRUST” pack. Given that rates of STI transmission are increasing, it is important that the subject is addressed in schools. Visiting Nurses are available from the Limerick Regional Hospital.

### **Sexual Health:**

Students will be informed and provided with resources to positively engage in care of self from a sexual health context.

### **Resources of support & safety**

Students will explore and investigate age appropriate support services and personal safety sites related to the areas of RSE. The teacher will inform the students of all aspects of online activity to support their personal safety, care and support in relation to RSE.

### **D. Practical Issues**

- All students in the junior cycle have one period of SPHE per week.
- Students in senior cycle will receive a minimum of 6 weeks tuition in RSE as part of their Religious Education programme.
- The size of the class groups will be determined by the school class lists for the timetable.
- The boundaries of the RSE programme will be delivered with due deference to :
  - (a) The age of the students
  - (b) The school ethos
  - (c) Limits of confidentiality, limits to discussions and questions.
  - (d) **Ensuring that the RSE classroom is a safe place for all, including student and teachers.**
  - (e) RSE curriculum guidelines
- Outside speakers must be made aware of the schools RSE policy, Mission statement and the SPHE visitor guidelines as laid down by the Department of Education in circular 0023/2010 to secondary schools. The Care Team are advised when visiting speakers are in the College. Thus, classroom teachers must remain in the classroom with the students; parents should be consulted and made aware of visiting people and agencies. 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. Evaluation of the speakers is compulsory.

- Provision will be made for those with special needs as laid down by the NCCA guidelines. To comply with these guidelines it will be necessary for the class teacher to consult with the special needs co-ordinator, at the beginning of the programme, to discuss any students with special needs and to ascertain how they can be supported throughout the programme.
- Consideration and sensitivity must be given to the needs of students with special circumstances.

### **Links to other Policies and to Curriculum Delivery:**

School policies need to be consistent with one another, within the framework of the overall School Plan. Relevant college policies already in place, being developed or reviewed, will be examined with reference to the RSE Policy and any implications that it has for them will be addressed. Similarly, the implications of other college policies and guidelines/plans for the RSE policy also need to be considered.

### **Identify any links to curriculum delivery:**

- Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) is a Junior Cycle core subject. SPHE provides students with opportunities to develop the skills and competencies to care for themselves and others and to make informed decisions about their health, personal lives and social development. This includes providing information on relationships and sexuality.
- Aspects of RSE are delivered across the curriculum, through subjects such as Religious Education, Science and Biology. In St. Munchin's College, our aim is to ensure that all students receive a full and balanced RSE programme from First Year through to Sixth Year.

### **Implementation, Arrangements, Roles and Responsibilities:**

- An RSE policy 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.
- Year Heads have a Pastoral care role in liaising with students, parents/guardians, Chaplain, Guidance Dept. and Special Education Needs Co-ordinator.



### **Ratification & Communication:**

When the finalised draft policy is ratified by the Board of Management, it becomes the College's agreed RSE Policy. It will then be circulated within the college community. A copy of the RSE policy will be available to staff in their handbook. The entire teaching staff will familiarise themselves with the policy and make themselves aware of any changes implied in curriculum delivery.

Parents/guardians will be informed of the RSE Policy from the time of acceptance of the student.

A copy of the RSE policy will be available at all times in the General Office.

### **Monitor the Implementation of the policy:**

The Principal is responsible for the implementation of the policy but may assign the monitoring to the RSE staff.

### **Reviewing and evaluating the policy:**

Ongoing review and evaluation will take place cognisance of changing information, guidelines, legislation and feedback from parents/guardians, students, teachers and others.

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 at 3 year intervals and sooner if necessary. Some practical indicators will be used to gauge the impact and effectiveness of the policy. Such indicators include the following:

- 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.
- The in-service availed of by teachers.
- Students are aware of the policy

- Parents and Guardians are aware of the policy.
- Positive feedback is received from teachers, students, parents/guardians and members of the Board of Management.

Policy Completed: December 2019

Policy Reviewed: January 2022

Policy ratified by Board of Management on January 2020

Policy agreed by staff on \_\_\_\_\_

Policy agreed by Parent's Association on \_\_\_\_\_

Policy explained to Student's Council \_\_\_\_\_

Policy Explained to Care Team \_\_\_\_\_

Date of Implementation:

Signed \_\_\_\_\_

