Relationships & Sexuality (RSE) Policy

Version	v1
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Introductory Statement

Ennis Community College and Gaelcholáiste an Chláir operate under the auspices of the Limerick and Clare Education and Training Board. The Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) Policy has been developed by school management and the RSE team following consultation between staff, parents / guardians, students and the Board of Management.

Scope

This policy will apply to all teaching and learning about friendships, relationships and sexuality. Teaching, learning and discussions about relationships, sexuality, and reproduction also takes place in other lessons other than SPHE / RSE. It is imperative that all teachers familiarise themselves with the school's RSE policy. The policy will apply to school staff, students, parents, Board of Management, visiting speakers and external facilitators.

Policy context and Rationale

This Policy is informed by:

- The Mission Statement of Ennis Community College and Gaelcholáiste an Chláir
- The SPHE Policy
- The Code of Behaviour
- The Child Protection Policy / Child Safeguarding Statement
- The Internet Acceptable Use Policy
- The Special Educational Needs Policy
- The Guidance Plan
- 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 its RSE programme in place for all students at both junior and senior cycle.
- Circular M4/95, M20/96, 0043/2018.
- Circular 15/2017 'Arrangements for the Implementation of the Framework for Junior Cycle with particular reference to school years 2017 /18 and 2018 / 19'
- The school adopts and adheres to the Department of Educations Child Protection Procedures, Children First Legislation (2017) and has a Child Protection Policy / Child Safeguarding Statement. The RSE policy is cognisant of all aspects of our current Child Protection Policy / Child Safeguarding Statement. Where a child protection concern is raised, the procedures outlined in the School's Child Protection Policy / Child Safeguarding Statement are followed.

Mission Statement

Ennis Community College with the cooperation of its Educational partners, will continue to provide an environment where each student is cherished equally and is nurtured to a personal, intellectual and moral maturity.

The school is committed to creating an atmosphere of excellence in learning by challenging the pupils to reach their full potential.

We will foster an appreciation of the arts, our National and European culture while encouraging respect for all other cultures and ethnicities in response to an ever changing society.

The college is non - denominational and provides equality of access to children of all social, cultural and religious backgrounds. The characteristic spirit of the school is one of care and attention to all students, irrespective of economic circumstances, gender, sexual orientation, religious or philosophical outlook, race or social situation. It aspires to provide a holistic education encompassing, as far as practicable, all dimensions of the student's being.

Definition of Relationships & Sexuality Education

Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) is a lifelong process of acquiring knowledge and understanding and of developing attitudes, beliefs and values about sexual identity, relationships and intimacy. This education is delivered consciously and unconsciously by parents, teachers, peers, adults and the media.

In schools, RSE will provide structured opportunities for pupils to acquire a knowledge and understanding of human relationships and sexuality through processes which will enable them to form values and establish behaviours within a moral, spiritual and social framework.

This approach gives opportunities to children and young people to learn about relationships and sexuality in ways that help them think and act in a moral, caring and responsible manner.

Relationship of RSE to SPHE

The draft guidelines for RSE (NCCA, June 1995, 1.2) state that Social, Personal and Health Education is "spiral, developmental in nature and age appropriate in content and methodology". The RSE programme is designed to follow this principle and pattern. Apart from the specific lessons of RSE, SPHE covers other areas which would be appropriate to the development of a healthy attitude to sexuality in oneself and one's relationship with others. SPHE adds the dimension to education of empowering people to manage their own lives. The SPHE programme focuses on many aspects of the development of the person such as

self esteem, assertiveness, communication and decision making skills. Young people are provided with information and skills so they can make informed decisions regarding their sexuality and relationships with others.

The Aims of Our Relationships and Sexuality Education Programme (RSE):

- To build on the primary RSE programme and provide young people with information and skills to critically evaluate the wide range of information, opinions, attitudes and values offered today, so as they make positive, responsible choices about themselves and the way they live their lives.
- To develop a positive sense of self awareness and the skills for building and maintaining self esteem and self efficacy.
- To help students acquire the understanding and skills necessary to develop healthy friendships and relationships.
- To promote an understanding of sexuality.
- To promote and develop positive attitudes and values in a moral, spiritual and social framework towards one's own sexuality and one's relationship with others.
- To develop an awareness of the variety of ways individuals grow and change especially during adolescence and to develop respect for differences between individuals.
- To promote knowledge of and respect for reproduction, value family life and understand the responsibilities of parenthood.
- To enable young people to develop attitudes and values towards their sexuality in a moral, spiritual and social framework.

The teaching of the RSE programme.

At Junior Cycle the RSE programme is part of Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) and at Senior Cycle, part of Life Skills and Leisure and Recreation in Leaving Certificate Applied.

Opportunities for the teaching of personal and social development of students can be taught informally using a cross curricular approach. Aspects of the RSE programme can be supported at both Junior and Senior cycle through subjects such as home economics, science / biology, physical education and CSPE.

Topics for RSE at Junior Cycle

Year 1

- "ME" as unique and different
- Friendship
- Changes at adolescence
- The reproductive system
- Images of male and female
- Respecting myself and others

Year 2

- From conception to birth
- Recognising and expressing feelings and emotions
- Peer pressure and other influences
- Managing relationships
- Making responsible decisions
- Health and personal safety

Year 3

- Body image
- Where am I now?
- Relationships - what is important?
- The three Rs - Respect, Rights and Responsibilities

Topics for RSE at Senior Cycle

Topics for Relationships and Sexuality Education will build on elements covered in Junior Cycle and will treat issues in ways suitable for the young adult. Topics will include;

Human and Health Development

- Fertility and Family Planning
- A deeper understanding of pregnancy and the developing foetus

Human Sexuality

- Treating women and men with equal respect
- Sexual harassment
- Sexual abuse, rape, legal rights: Voluntary and Statutory agencies
- Making moral and healthy choices regarding sexual activity

Human relationships

- An awareness of what constitutes a loving relationship
- Parenting and family life

Areas such as consent etc. are covered in an age appropriate fashion throughout the programme.

Some Resources & Programmes used to support the Teaching and Learning of RSE.

The school will purchase appropriate RSE teaching materials which have been identified by the RSE team as useful and which have been approved by the Principal. Teachers on occasion may use other materials deemed suitable and appropriate for student needs and in accordance with the school ethos.

- https://www.pdst.ie/pp/healthwellbeing/sphe
- https://b4udecide.ie/
- https://www.sexualwellbeing.ie/
- https://www.webwise.ie/
- https://www.bodywhys.ie/
- https://www.pdst.ie/sites/default/files/Consequences_1.pdf
- https://www.pdst.ie/sites/default/files/TRUST-Main_0.pdf
- https://www.pdst.ie/sites/default/files/Lockers_feb-2018_web.pdf
- https://www.hse.ie/eng/about/who/healthwellbeing/hse-education-programme/junior-cycle-sphe-training-resources/
- Friends for Life Programme

The Management and Organisation of RSE

Teaching the Programme

Arrangements for the teaching of the RSE programme at Junior and Senior Cycle and the development of staff is the decision of Senior Management. Students are taught RSE with their assigned base class and all classes are of mixed gender and ability.

The team is currently made up of Lisa Farrell (Coordinator) Hilda O'Connell, Caroline O'Rorke, Jason Comerford, Rob Guerin and Eoin Collins.

Provision is provided for the upskilling / development of staff.

Informing and Involving Parents / Guardians.

The school views the role of the parent / guardian as extremely important in the teaching of relationships and sexuality. They are the primary educators of their children. The RSE programme is designed to be supportive of the efforts of parents / guardians and their concerns for the health, safety, security and well being of their children. This policy is available to all members of the school community. Annually a letter is sent to parents / guardians outlining the RSE programme, curricular content and when it will be taught.

Ethical and Moral Considerations

Confidentiality

While students will 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. If a teacher has cause for concern that a student is at risk then the teacher must refer this immediately to the Designated Liaison Person (Principal, Mr Brian O'Donoghue) or in his absence the Deputy Designated Liaison Person (Deputy Principal, Yvonne Walsh). The appropriate course of action to be taken will then be decided.

Offering Advice

The School's RSE programme will provide a general education about sexual matters and issues. Individual advice, information or counselling on aspects of sexual behaviour and contraception will not be offered, however sources of professional information and advice will be identified when appropriate. Teachers may provide students with education and information about where and from whom they can receive confidential sexual advice and treatment, eg. their doctor or other suitable agency.

Explicit Questions

Teachers will be careful to create a safe environment, setting appropriate boundaries, discouraging oversharing of information, encouraging students to ask questions using respectful language and avoiding asking personal questions. Should explicit questions be put to a teacher, the teacher may decide to exercise their own professional judgement in deciding whether to answer the question privately at the end of the lesson. If a teacher becomes concerned about a matter that has been raised, they will seek advice from the Designated Liaison Person (Principal, Mr Brian O'Donoghue) or in his absence the Deputy Designated Liaison Person (Deputy Principal, Yvonne Walsh). The appropriate course of action to be taken will then be decided.

Sexual Activity

As part of the school's RSE programme, teachers will give young people information on the age of consent which, following the passage of Criminal Law (Sexual Offences) Act 2006, is

seventeen years of age for both males and females. In all cases where the school becomes aware of underage sexual activity the school will take appropriate steps to inform the child's parents, in accordance with Children First legislation.

The Wider School Community

The school recognises the outer school factors which affect the development of a positive attitude to sexuality during adolescence. The school is cognisant of the many different cultures of the students within the school. It recognises out of school factors such as students social lives, the relationships they form, their behaviour within their relationships, the peer expectations of relationships, the reading material of students, their exposure to sexually explicit material / pornography on video / smart phones, television and through music. The RSE programme will direct students' awareness of the influences of these factors on the development of their values and attitudes and empower them to make informed decisions and choices.

Sexual Orientation

Teachers do not promote any one lifestyle as the only acceptable one for society and therefore it is inevitable and natural that sexual orientation, sexual identity and gender identity will be discussed during a programme of sex education. One of the advantages of exploring issues concerning sexual orientation is the opportunity to correct false ideas, assumptions and address prejudice. Discussion will be appropriate to the age of the pupils.

Sensitive Issues

Sensitive topics will be dealt with in an age appropriate, open manner, looking at all sides of the issue in a non - directive way, within the context of the school's ethos and the DES - NCCA guidelines. Sensitive topics will include sexual activity, contraception and abortion.

Withdrawing students from the RSE programme.

The Education Act (1998; section 30, subsection (2) (e)) provides that a student is not required to attend instruction in any subject which is contrary to the conscience of the parent or in that case of a student who has reached the age of eighteen years. Parents have a right therefore to withdraw their child from all or aspects of the RSE programme. A parent must make a written request to withdraw their child from the programme, they do not have to give reasons for withdrawal, but we respectfully invite them to do so, so any misunderstandings can be resolved.

Guest Speakers

It is school policy that the RSE programme is best delivered by teachers that are upskilled on this programme and who are also known and trusted by the students. Visitors can enhance

the quality of the provision as long as they are used in addition to, rather than instead of a planned programme of RSE.

After gaining approval from the Principal and the Board of Management in accordance to the circular 0043 / 2018 Appendix 2 for the visit, the organiser will make the visitor aware of the ethos of the school and the manner of delivery of the RSE programme along with other relevant information that may be required. The RSE coordinator will provide all visiting speakers with a copy of the RSE policy.

Implementing, Monitoring, Reviewing & Evaluating the Policy

This policy is ratified by the Board of Management and is the agreed policy of Ennis Community College and Gaelcholáiste an Chláir.

Development of Staff

The Board of Management and Senior Management are committed to ensuring access to CPD opportunities for all teachers involved in RSE and providing necessary relevant school RSE resources for the delivery of the programme. Teachers are facilitated to participate in professional development opportunities, with due regard to supervision / substitution rota, and the need for the teaching and learning programme of the school to continue with as little disturbance as possible.

The policy will be reviewed and evaluated every two years under the direction of the Board of Management. Ongoing review and evaluation will take into consideration changing information, guidelines, legislation and feedback from parents, students, teachers and others.

A number of factors will be taken into consideration during the review and evaluation phase:

- How successful is RSE being taught through SPHE and other relevant curricular areas.
- Availability of resource materials to teachers.
- Timetabling factors.
- Availability of appropriate personal and professional development for teachers.
- Staff, Students and Parents are aware of and familiar with the RSE policy.

Specifically important to the review and evaluation of the RSE Policy is the Student, Teacher and Parent Voice.

Ann Norton

Cllr Ann Norton
Chairperson

Brian O Donoghue
Principal