

Relationships and Sexuality Education Policy 2021



Scoil Phobail Bhéara opened in 1980 as a result of an amalgamation between Mean Scoil Naomh Iosaf run by the Mercy Sisters and Castletownbere Vocational School run by Cork VEC, now Cork Education and Training Board.

Scope

The policy will apply to all aspects of teaching and learning about relationships and sexuality. Discussion about relationships and sexuality also takes place in classes other than SPHE/RSE; it is therefore important that all teachers are familiar with the RSE policy. Furthermore, the policy will apply to school staff, students, board of management, parents/guardians, visiting speakers and external facilitators.

Policy Context and Rationale

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 Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) and at Senior Cycle, part of Health Education.

The school adopts and adheres to the DES Child Protection Procedures, Children First and has a Child Protection Policy / Child Safeguarding Statement, with the Principal as Designated Liaison Person (DLP) and the Deputy Principals as the Deputy DLPs. 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.

Sexuality is a key element of healthy social and personal development. Young people are exposed to a wide variety of messages about sexuality and sexual activity. Schools, in consultation with parents, need to reflect on how to provide for the needs of the students.

The effectiveness of an RSE programme is dependent on a collaborative policy process involving teachers, parents, members of the Board of Management and students.

Relationship to Characteristic Spirit of the School

The RSE policy acknowledges the importance of RSE being taught in the context of Wellbeing / SPHE / Health Education and a whole-school climate that is inclusive and respectful.

The RSE policy reflects the core values and ethos of the school, as outlined in the school's Mission Statement below.

Our School Mission Statement

We in Scoil Phobail Bhéara have a vision of the type of school we would like. It is a school guided by Christian values where students are happy and where everyone

is treated with courtesy and respect. Our school encourages supports and challenges all students to reach their full potential.

While parents are the primary educators of their children, our staff members, who act in loco parentis, are our most valuable resource and every effort is made to ensure that we have a dedicated and committed staff and good student relationships.

Our school is an integral part of our local community and in addition to providing the best possible education for our young people and preparing them for later life, our school serves as a resource for and enriches our community.

We do everything possible to assist our students to take responsibility for themselves and their actions and we help them to appreciate and care for the world in which we live.

In Scoil Phobail Bhéara we seek to foster mutual respect and an atmosphere of trust. We promote a healthy work ethic and a love of learning in a spirit of collegiality and co-operation so that all may reach their full potential.

The ethos of the Community School is one of equality and inclusiveness, welcoming and nurturing all of the diverse abilities and talents of the various communities we serve.

We value each other, celebrate our achievements and support any challenges.

What is R.S.E.?

Relationships & Sexuality Education Programme (R.S.E.) includes all aspects of the human person and is subject to change and development throughout life. It is a complex dimension of human life and relationships

Relationships and sexuality is a life long 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 all media.

Relationships and Sexuality Education Programme seeks to provide young people with formal opportunities to acquire knowledge and understanding of human sexuality and relationships through the process that will enable them to form values and establish behaviours within a moral, spiritual and social framework.

Relationships & Sexuality Education within Social, Personal & Health Education.

The Relationships and Sexuality Education policy guidelines 1997 state that Social Personal & Health Education is *“spiral, developmental in nature and age appropriate in content and methodology”*. The R.S.E. programme is designed to follow this principle and pattern.

Apart from the specific lessons of R.S.E., S.P.H.E. covers other areas which would be pertinent to the development of a healthy attitude to sexuality in oneself and one’s relationship with others. S.P.H.E. deals with many issues such as self esteem, assertiveness, communication and decision making skills – all of which can contribute to the effectiveness of the R.S.E. programme.

The aims of our Relationships and Sexuality Education programme

The R.S.E. programme will specifically aim to promote the overall development of the person and the integration of sexuality into personal life in order to:

- support parents in their desire for a comprehensive education for their children

- enable young people to develop responsible attitudes and values towards their sexuality in a moral, spiritual and social framework in keeping with the policy and mission statement of the school
- help young people understand and develop friendships and relationships
- promote an understanding of sexuality
- 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.
- To promote knowledge of and respect for human reproduction.
- To promote a positive attitude towards one's own sexuality and one's relationships with others.
- To enable students to develop attitudes and values towards their sexuality in a moral, spiritual and social framework.
- To provide young people with information and skills to evaluate critically the wide range of information, opinions, attitudes and values offered today, in order that they will make positive, responsible, moral, caring and responsible decisions about themselves and the way they live their lives, while also respecting the dignity of others. The school recognises that parents are the primary educators and home is the natural and primary environment in which RSE should take place.
- To build on the primary school programme which strives to help young people learn at home and at school about their own development and about their friendships and relationships with others.

It is acknowledged that in a course of limited duration, these aims are aspirational.

(F) Goals and objectives

RSE should enable students to;

- Acquire the understanding and skills necessary to form healthy friendships and relationships

- Develop a positive sense of self- awareness, and the skills for building and maintaining self- esteem
- Become aware of the variety of ways in which individuals grow and change especially during adolescence and to develop respect for the difference between individuals
- Understand human physiology with particular reference to the reproductive cycle, human fertility and sexually transmitted diseases.
- Understand sexual development and identify and explore aspects of sexuality including sex roles, stereotyping, gender issues and cultural influences in sexuality
- Value family life and appreciate the responsibilities of parenthood
- Develop strategies for decisions and actions consistent with personal moral integrity and respectful of the rights and dignity of others.
- Develop skills for coping with peer pressure, conflict and threats to personal safety including online safety.

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 on social media.
- 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 people in society are changing.
- The nature of family life is changing in a way that may place many pressures on children and young people.

Students' 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 Scoil Phobail Bhéara, 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.

Current Provision

For 1st, 2nd and 3rd year students, RSE constitutes one strand within the SPHE programme. In addition, South West Counselling provide workshops on sexual health to all year groups /students. Some aspects of RSE may also be taught in other subject curricula eg. Home economics, Biology and PE. TY students partake in the Real U programme . RSE is provided to 5th and 6th year students in RE timetabled classes.

Access to in-career development in RSE and SPHE in general has been and will be made available to all teachers. SPHE teachers are strongly encouraged to participate in all SPHE in-service and other relevant training available.

The teaching methodology is facilitative and participative. A structured experimental method is widely recognised as being the most appropriate method to use in all forms of SPHE and RSE. The major work takes place between the students themselves, the teacher acting as facilitator.

Group work allows for the creation of an atmosphere that respects privacy and treats all students with due sensitivity and care. Confidentiality, ground rules and codes of behaviour are discussed and agreed by both students and teacher. Some methods used include case studies, brainstorming, debates and videos. Students with special needs will be facilitated according to their needs.

Parents have the right to withdraw their children from RSE classes but it is hoped that sensitive dealing with issues will delete the necessity for this.

All issues will be dealt with an age appropriate approach and sensitively.

This policy and programme will be reviewed by Teachers, Parents and Board of Management. Amendments, if necessary, will be undertaken on completion of this review.

GUIDELINES FOR THE MANAGEMENT AND ORGANISATION OF RSE IN SCOIL PHOBAIL BHÉARA

Staff development, training and resource issues:

School management encourages and facilitates teachers to attend relevant in-service training for the continued development of the R.S.E. programme. School management is very supportive of any requests made to update the resources and equipment for R.S.E. Resources are allocated on the basis of teacher/co-ordinator requisition.

- 1. Arrangements regarding the teaching of the programme and the deployment of staff will be made by the Principal.**

The RSE component will take place over each school year.

Those involved in teaching it will draw up the RSE Programme.

The programme will be in line with the NCCA Curriculum and Guidelines. The curriculum and the guidelines, along with the year-by-year programme, are available in the school for parents who wish to see them.

In delivering the programme teachers will show sensitivity to the needs of the group and the school.

The school's management will provide a commitment to the programme by facilitating its implementation through teacher recruitment and training, ongoing in-service, timetabling and consultation.

The approach to teaching of topics within RSE will involve giving students clear information, building up their self-esteem and helping them to learn to communicate, to make decisions and to express feelings in an appropriate way.

2. **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. Relevant sections of this RSE policy will be included in the school's *Information for Parents* sheet. A copy of this policy will be made available to any parent on request to the school Office. If parents choose to provide RSE at home their rights as parents with regards their children's participation will be respected.

Parents who require further information may contact the S.P.H.E. co-ordinator in the school.

2. **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.

3. **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

3. **Withdrawing pupils from the RSE programme**

Relevant sections of this policy are made available to parents in the school publication entitled *Information for Parents* together with details about the parent's right to withdraw their child from sensitive aspects of RSE – parents will always be provided with a full copy of this policy following a request to do so.

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.

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, and where necessary we would refer on to the chaplain and outside agencies, i.e. doctor, Kerry Adolescent Services, etc., in consultation with parents.

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 and may direct the student to seek information from their parent/guardian.

If a teacher becomes concerned about a matter that has been raised he/she should consider the age and readiness of the students, the R.S.E. programme content, the ethos of the school and the R.S.E. 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 Designated Liaison Person (the Principal) or the Deputy Designated Liaison Person (the Deputy Principal) . The Principal will decide whether to inform the parents and/or appropriate authorities and may arrange for counselling.

The following is also school policy:

- teachers must not promise absolute confidentiality.

- students 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.
- teachers must use their professional judgement to decide whether confidence can be maintained having heard the information.
- teachers must indicate clearly to pupils when the content of a conversation can no longer be kept confidential – the student can then decide whether to proceed or not.

The Child Protection Guidelines for Post Primary schools state

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 our school. A written record of the report should be made and placed in a secure location by the Principal. The need for confidentiality should be borne in mind at all times. The supports of the school should continue to be made available to the child.

- 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.

Cross Curricular:

The team recognise the importance of linking with other subjects in planning and delivering the R.S.E. module. Most effective to date has been the link with R.E. when covering the R.S.E. module. The science department deals with the biological aspects of reproduction. Aspects are also taught in Home Economics, and P.E.

Withdrawing pupils from the R.S.E. Programme:

Our policy is made known to parents on our website and an opportunity to withdraw the child if offered. 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 parents request to withdraw is made, that request must be complied with until revoked by the parent.

(See also Appendix 1.)

Using visiting speakers and others

a) It is school policy that most of the RSE programme is best discussed openly with teachers who are known and trusted by the students. 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.

b) The SPHE Co-ordinator 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. Issues to consider are:

- i) the degree of explicitness of the content and presentation;
- ii) will the visitor be accompanied by teaching staff?
- iii) will the staff take an active role in the visitor's activities?
- iv) how will the visitor be prepared for the visit?
- v) how will the visit be built upon and followed up?

c) 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.

d) 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 students in the visit and will make the experience more relevant for them - it also facilitates planning.

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

f) Where applicable, refreshments should be arranged with the school canteen staff.

g) The visitor should be welcomed at the main door.

h) At the end of the session a vote of thanks should be given by a student and the visitor escorted to the main door after refreshments.

i) A written acknowledgement of their contribution should be sent to the visitor and could appear in the School Newsletter or on the digital noticeboards in the school.

Sexual Orientation:

Teachers do not promote any one life-style as the only acceptable one for society and therefore it is inevitable and natural that homosexuality including Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) will be discussed during a programme of sex education. One of the 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.

Contraception:

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

Additional needs:

Students with additional needs may need more help than others in coping with the physical and emotional aspects of growing up; and in being warned and prepared against abuse by others. R.S.E. teachers where necessary liaise with support services within the school.

Ongoing support:**Training;**

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 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 R.S.E. teaching team includes the senior RE teachers, Guidance Counsellor and several class teachers. The school will facilitate any training made available to teachers.

Monitoring, evaluating and reviewing the R.S.E. programme:

We are committed to monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of this programme. Specifically important to the R.S.E. programme are:

- student feedback;
- staff review and feedback;
- parental feedback;

The SPHE Co-ordinator will monitor policy implementation. Any teachers using this policy should discuss any reactions, concerns, suggestions that may arise during the course of implementation. The SPHE Co-ordinator will in turn discuss these with management. Any reviews will be made available to all parties.

Reviewing and Evaluating the Policy

The policy will be reviewed in 2024. Ongoing review and evaluation will take cognizance of changing information, guidelines, legislation and feedback from parents/guardians, students, teachers and others.

Ratified by Board of Management on:

Date: **13th October 2021**

Chairperson:

Ted Owens

Appendix 1

What we do if a request for withdrawal from the R.S.E. programme is made by a parent:

- 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 S.P.H.E. co-ordinator, the Principal may become involved if necessary).
- 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 R.S.E. programme.
- We attempt to ensure that where a pupil is withdrawn there is no disruption to other parts of their education.
- 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.
- We also point out that pupils may receive inaccurate information from their peers.
- We offer the parents access to appropriate information and resources.
- Parents of any student opting out of R.S.E. must make suitable arrangements with school management for the welfare of their child at these times.

Ethical / Moral Considerations – Guidelines for Teachers

1. Answering Explicit Questions

It is natural that students should wish to ask questions in the area of RSE. While it is important to create an environment in 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. If any questions asked by students are deemed to be inappropriate, the teacher will refer the student to their parents or state that this information may be available at a later stage of the curriculum. 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 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, the RSE policy and use their professional judgment. With regard to matters of a confidential nature, the school cannot take any responsibility for what is discussed among students outside of the RSE lesson.

2. Confidentiality

Teachers strive to create a safe learning environment for all students. While students should not be encouraged to disclose personal or private information in RSE classes, there may be times when they talk about their own lives. It is important that students are made aware of the limits of confidentiality and that teachers do not give unconditional guarantees of confidentiality. Confidentiality should be respected unless the teacher feels that the child is at risk or where there are reasonable grounds to believe that a law may be broken. In such a case, the appropriate action should be taken in accordance with the procedures set down in the Child Protection Procedures for Post-Primary Schools, the school's Child Protection Policy / Child Safeguarding Statement and the Children First legislation (2017) or the school's Substance Abuse Policy, i.e. the teacher must inform the Designated Liaison Person, and ensure that that all reporting procedures are complied with.

3. Sexual Activity

Teachers should 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.

4. Out-of-School Factors

The school also recognises the many out-of-school factors which affect the development of a positive attitude to sexuality during adolescence - the social lives of students, the relationships they form, their behaviour within these 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 attempt to heighten the students' awareness of the influences of these forces on the development of their values and attitudes and empower them to make informed decisions and choices.

5. Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Identities, Sexual Orientations and Related Issues

Teachers do not promote any one life-style 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 LGBT+ identities and issues is the opportunity to correct false ideas, assumptions and address prejudice. Discussion of sexual and gender identity and sexual orientation should be appropriate to the age of the students.

6. Sensitive Issues e.g. Sexual Activity, Abortion and Contraception

Sensitive topics will be dealt with in an age-appropriate, open manner, looking at all sides of the issues in a non-directive way, within the context of the school's ethos and DES-NCCA guidelines. RSE teachers give young people information on the age of consent which, following the passage of the Criminal Law (Sexual Offences) Act, 2006, is seventeen years of age for both males and females. The post-primary RSE Curriculum Guidelines state that the subject of family planning should be covered within the Senior Cycle RSE programme.

Practical Issues

- SPHE is an integral part of the Wellbeing / SPHE programme and is timetabled in all Junior Cycle classes. Health Education is timetabled in all Senior Cycle classes.
- RSE is taught to Transition Year, Fifth Year and Sixth Year students within Health Education.
- The programme is delivered in a mixed setting of boys and girls.
- Students with Additional Needs: Students who have 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.

SPHE Resource materials for Relationships and Sexuality Education prepared by the NCCA and approved by the Department of Education and Science

- • Trust (RSE) Senior Cycle
- • On your own two feet
- • B4U Decide
- • Growing up LGBT
- • Cancer Awareness Programme
- • Mental Health Matters
- • Be Safe Be Wise

Web Sites:

- • www.sphe.ie
- • www.ncca.ie
- • www.pdst.ie
- • www.sess.ie
- • www.healthpromotion.ie
- • www.webwise.ie
- • www.thinkcontraception.ie
- • www.tes.ie
- • www.ted.ie
- • www.kahoot.ie
- • www.mentimeter.ie
- • www.teni.ie
- • www.crisispregnancy.ie
- • www.glen.ie
- • www.belongto.org

