

Ardsoil Mhuire



Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) Policy

Introductory Statement:

Ardsoil Mhuire's RSE policy was drawn up in consultation with:

1. Guidelines as set out in Circular M4/95, M20/96, C23/10 *Social and Personal Health Education (SPHE), Short Course: Social, Personal and Health Education for Junior Cycle and Relationships and Sexuality Education-Best Practice Guidelines for Post Primary Schools* and C37/2010.
2. Guidance from the SPHE Department
3. Consultation with the Care Team
4. Consultation with all members of the school community

This policy was also drawn up with reference to:

1. The vision and mission of our Trustees - Catholic Education an Irish School Trust (CEIST)
Vision: *A compassionate and just society inspired by the life and teachings of Jesus Christ.*
Mission: *To provide a holistic education in the Catholic tradition.*
2. The School's Mission Statement
Ardsoil Mhuire aims to provide a Christian environment where all persons are valued and assisted to reach their full potential.

Ardsoil Mhuire is as a community which places the student at the centre and where every effort is made to give practical expression to the core values of CEIST. These values include:

- **Promoting Spiritual and Human Development.**
- **Achieving Quality in Teaching and Learning**
- **Showing Respect for Every Person**
- **Creating Community**
- **Being Just and Responsible.**

Relationships, structures and systems within the school are regularly evaluated against the aforementioned core values.

This RSE policy is a written statement of the aims of Ardsoil Mhuire's RSE programme. The policy reflects:

1. The relationship of RSE to SPHE and other subjects e.g. Religious Education, Science and Biology.
2. The organisation and management of RSE within the school

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

Relationship to characteristic spirit of the school (school's mission/vision/aims)

1. The policy relates to the school's mission/vision/aims. The RSE policy acknowledges the importance of SPHE/RSE being taught in the context of a whole school climate that is inclusive and respectful.
2. The RSE policy reflects the educational philosophy of the trustees and the core values and ethos of the school, as outlined in the school's mission statement.
3. Spiritual, moral and ethical issues will arise when teaching RSE. Teachers of RSE understand that their role is to express the views of the whole school community on these sensitive issues, not their own personal views, and to use their professions judgement. All aspects of the RSE curriculum, including those in relation to sexual orientation, contraception, sexually transmitted infections etc. will be done within a context in which teaching of the programme is informed by the school's ethos. As teachers, we express our ethos while at the same time facilitating students in discussing a range of views in relation to topics within the RSE Programme, within a moral and spiritual framework.

Definition of RSE

RSE is a lifelong process of acquiring knowledge and understanding of and developing attitudes, belief and values about sexual identity, relationships and intimacy.

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 – Biology, Science, Religion etc. It is therefore important that all teachers are familiar with the RSE Policy.

The policy will apply to school staff, students, Board of Management, parents/guardians, visiting speakers and external facilitators (see circular 0023/2010 – Visiting Speakers Best Practice and circular 0043/2018)

Rationale

Sexuality is a key element of healthy social and personal development. Young people are exposed to a 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 Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE). At Senior Cycle the RSE Programme is part of the RE Programme.

Circulars M4/95 and M20/96 request schools to commence a process of RSE Policy development.

0027/2008 – Board of Management Responsibility for RSE teaching.

0023/2010 and 0043/2018 – Best Practice of Visiting Speakers.

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.

Aims of RSE Programme

RSE aims to:

- help pupils understand and develop friendships
- promote an understanding of sexuality
- promote a positive attitude to one's own sexuality and in one's relationships with others
- promote knowledge of and respect for reproduction
- enable pupils to develop attitudes and values toward their sexuality in a moral, spiritual and social framework in keeping with the policy of the school
- 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

Objectives of RSE Programme

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 and self-worth
- Become aware of the variety of ways in which individuals grow and change, especially during adolescence, and to develop respect for difference between individuals
- Understand human physiology with particular reference to the reproductive cycle, human fertility and sexually transmitted infections (STIs)
- Understand sexual development and identity and explore aspects of sexuality including sex roles, stereotyping, gender issues and cultural influences on 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

Relationship of RSE and SPHE at Junior Cycle

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 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.

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). It is the responsibility of the Board of Management to ensure that an RSE programme is made available to all students.

In January 1995 and May 1996 the Department of Education and Science issued Circulars M4/95 and M20/96 respectively to post-primary schools. The circulars requested schools to begin the process of developing their policies to include RSE and wider aspects of SPHE in their curricula for all students from First year to Sixth year.

Circulars M22/00 and M11/03 required schools to introduce the SPHE Junior Cycle Curriculum on a phased basis, with full implementation by September 2003.

In 1997 the Department of Education and Science issued 'Relationships and Sexuality Education Policy Guidelines' to assist schools with the process of developing a policy for RSE.

In Ardscoil Mhuire the RSE Programme in Junior Cycle is delivered within the context of our school’s SPHE Programme. SPHE, which is timetabled one class per week at Junior Cycle, provides students with a unique opportunity to develop skills and competencies, to learn about themselves, to care for themselves and others and to make informed decisions about their health, their personal lives and their social development. SPHE develops the work of the school in promoting the health and well-being of students.

Within this context, RSE aims specifically to provide structured opportunities for students 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.

Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) aims to provide opportunities for children and young people to learn about relationships and sexuality in ways that help them think and act in a moral, caring and responsible way.

Junior Cycle RSE Curriculum

One of the required modules in SPHE is Relationships and Sexuality (RSE). This is covered in Term 2 and/or Term 3 in 1st, 2nd and 3rd Year. It should also be noted that many of the general SPHE topics have links with the RSE programme. There following lessons are taught as part of the school Junior Cycle RSE programme:

First years

- Changes at Adolescence
- The Female and Male Reproductive Systems
- Sexual Intercourse and Conception
- Gender Stereotypes and Discrimination
- Unique and Different Me

Second years

- Being and Adolescent
- From Conception to Birth
- Peer Pressure and Other Influences
- Managing Relationships
- Health and Personal Safety

Third years

- Where Am I Now?
- Relationships: What's Important?
- Healthy vs Unhealthy Relationships
- The Three R's: Respect, Right and Responsibilities
- Conflict and Breaking Up
- Sexually Transmitted Infections
- Consent

Senior Cycle RSE Curriculum

RSE is taught within Religion Education classes at Senior Cycle.

Content Senior Cycle:

Trust Resource Lessons

Relationships

1. What we value in Relationships
2. Healthy Relationships
3. Self-esteem
4. The influence of Self-Esteem
5. When we feel hurt
6. Understanding boundaries
7. Communicating our boundaries
8. Intimacy

Taking Time to Think

9. Sexuality

10. Sexual Orientation
11. Influences and Values
12. Decision-Making
13. Responsible Relationships

Sexual Health

14. Human Reproduction and Fertility
15. Understanding Female Fertility
16. Contraceptive Methods I
17. Contraceptive Methods II
18. Unplanned Pregnancy
19. STIs – What’s What
20. STI Transmission

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

Junior Cycle and at Senior Cycle RSE Coordinators are appointed in the school.

A) Provision of Training and Staff Development

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

The schools RSE Programme is structured with specific involvement and links to subjects such as Religious Education, Home Economics, Science and Biology. The RSE component takes a minimum of six classes over each school year to cover the twenty units of learning. The programme is in line with the NCCA Curriculum and Guidelines. The curriculum and guidelines, along with the year-by-year programme, are available in the school for parents who wish to see them.

In the delivery of the programme teachers always strive to be sensitive to the needs of each Year Group and the wider school community. The Senior Management of Ardscoil Mhuire is committed to the RSE programme and facilitates its implementation through teacher recruitment and training, ongoing in-service, timetabling and consultation.

B) Inclusion of Parents/Guardians

Parents are the primary educators of their children and their role in education concerning relationships and sexuality is seen by the school as of the utmost importance. A copy of this policy, which includes a list of the topics covered, is available to any parent on the schools website or from the school office on request. A parent’s right to withdraw a pupil from RSE classes is accommodated on the understanding that the parent(s) is taking full responsibility for this aspect of the students education themselves. Parents are obliged to inform the school in writing of their decision to withdraw the child from RSE classes. Any parent who wishes to withdraw their child are asked to discuss with the principal how this may be facilitated.

C) Ethical/Moral/Considerations

The content of the RSE curriculum is a complex. The school's RSE policy provides guidance for teachers on the moral and ethical framework within which the programme will be taught. Issues may include the following:

1. Answering Questions:

While it is important in SPHE/RSE classes to create an environment where 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 which are not included in the curriculum. On these, and on all other questions, teachers 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 member and their peers is inappropriate and unacceptable. If a teacher becomes concerned about a matter that has been raised they should inform/seek advice from the Principal/Deputy Principal.

2. 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.

While student confidentiality is respected in the school if the teacher, as a mandated person, feels that the child is at risk in any way he/she will take appropriate action. This may include following the procedures set down in the Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post Primary schools 2017, notifying Designated Liaison Person/Deputy Designated Liaison Person without delay and/or referring to any of the schools policies such as Substance Abuse Policy and bringing these concerns to Senior Management.

It is important that students are made aware of the limits of confidentiality and that teachers do not give unconditional guarantees of confidentiality.

3. 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.

4. Contraception and Family Planning

There is a lesson on family planning in the RSE Senior Cycle Resource Materials. The RSE programme requires that young people are provided with information about methods of contraception, including Natural Family Planning.

5. Sexual Orientation:

The post primary RSE Curriculum Guidelines includes the subject of sexual orientation. There is a lesson on sexual orientation in the RSE Senior Cycle Resource Materials. The school may decide if 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.

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 does not experience any harassment, embarrassment or isolation which may impact on their mental and emotional health. All students are offered support from the Care Team.

6. 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 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 University Hospital Limerick.

7. Special Needs

Children with special needs may require more assistance and guidance than others when learning to cope with the physical and emotional aspects of growing up. Some students may also need a greater amount of support and guidance when they are attempting to understand the types of behaviours that are and are not acceptable. Additionally some student may be at risk of exposing themselves to abusive behaviour by others and hence require greater support in this area.

8. 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.

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:

- a) The degree of explicitness of the content and presentation
- b) Will the staff take an active role in the visitor’s activities?
- c) How will the visitor be prepared for the visit?
- d) How will the visit be built upon and followed up?

It is school policy that teachers must remain in the room with the speaker and the class. Refer to Circular 0023/2010 – Visiting Speaker Best Practice. 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.

9. Ratification & Communication:

Trust pack was ratified

D) Practical Issues

RSE is taught to Transition, Fifth and Sixth year students. This includes LCA groups. It will be taught in January as this gives teachers a chance to get to know students who are new to them. This was a recommendation made by the SPHE Regional manager when she visited our school.

Consideration and sensitivity is always given to the needs of students with special circumstances. These students are identified from the Thread Softly Board and in consultation with the Care Team.

Implementation Arrangements, Roles and Responsibilities

The Principal is assigned the role of co-ordinating the implementation of the RSE policy but delegates the responsibility for the monitoring of the programme to the RSE team.

Reviewing and evaluating the policy:

This policy was initially drafted in 2011.

This policy was reviewed and ratified in April 2016.

This policy was reviewed and ratified in November 2019.

Signed: _____

Date: _____

Sr. Ena Quinlan

Chairperson

Board of Management

Reviewed on: _____

Date of Review _____