

## **RELATIONSHIPS AND SEXUALITY EDUCATION**

### **POLICY STATEMENT**

Every Board of Management is required to approve a school policy and implement a programme in RSE (Relationships and Sexuality Education), to be included (primarily) as an element of SPHE at Junior cycle and as an RSE programme in Senior cycle (Circular 0037/2010). This draft policy was prepared by the teachers involved, consulting with parents' representatives, in response to a WSE indication. This policy is part of the overall Guidance/ Pastoral Care policy of the school.

#### **Scope of policy**

This policy will apply to all aspects of teaching and learning about relationships and sexuality education. Discussion about relationships and sexuality education also takes place in classes other than SPHE or RSE such as Religious Education, Science, Biology, Philosophy.

This policy will apply to all our school staff, students, Board of Management, parents/guardians, visiting speakers and external facilitators. The effectiveness of the RSE programme is dependent on a collaborative policy process involving teachers, parents/guardians, members of the Board of Management and students.

To understand this policy fully one should be mindful of the school's Catholic ethos, the school's particular focus on character education, the school's commitment to involve parents more in their children's education, and the relevant prevailing influences in the wider culture. All these are highlighted in Appendix 1.

#### **Definition of Relationships and Sexuality Education**

RSE is a broad-ranging programme in which students learn to develop as persons, with particular reference to their personal relationships and the development of human sexuality. In its RSE programme the school will pay particular cognisance to

- the primary duty of parents in the education of their children, and the right of the young person to be adequately informed by their own parents on sexual and moral questions
- the school's concentration on an integral approach to education helping each pupil achieve his age-appropriate intellectual, spiritual, emotional, cultural, human and social maturity through an all-round education
- the importance of character education as education in virtue
- the right of young people to be able to exercise the virtue of chastity, and the importance of the school not interfering with this right

#### **The aims of our Relationships and Sexuality Education Programme**

Relationships and Sexuality Education has as its specific aims:

- To help pupils understand and develop friendships and relationships
- To promote a positive understanding of sexuality as part of the whole person
- To promote a positive attitude to one's own sexuality and to one's relationships with others.

- To promote knowledge of and respect for procreation and for new life
- To enable pupils to develop attitudes and values towards their sexuality in a moral, spiritual and social framework in keeping with the ethos of the school.
- To provide opportunities for pupils to learn about relationships and sexuality in ways that helps them think and act in a moral, caring and responsible way towards others.

In carrying out this programme the following principles will apply

1. Human sexuality is a sacred mystery, and this principle, informed by Christian reverence and realism, must guide any programme of education for love. Respect must be maintained for the difference between man and woman which reflects the love and fruitfulness of God himself.
2. Formation of conscience in accord with spiritual values should form part of RSE.
3. Only information appropriate to each phase of spiritual development should be presented to young people.
4. No material of an erotic nature should be presented to young people of any age, individually or in a group.
5. No one should be invited to act in any way that could objectively offend against modesty or which could subjectively offend against his own delicacy or sense of privacy.

It is hoped that on completion of the RSE module every student will:

- Understand how human sexuality is an integral part of their humanity
- Appreciate human sexuality as a gift for love and for life
- Know their body and how it functions
- Appreciate the value of living chastity
- Understand the risks associated with the trivialisation of sex
- Be able to act responsibly in their relationships.

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

1. Arrangements regarding the teaching of the programme and the deployment of staff will be made by the Principal.
2. Informing and Involving the Parents  
Parents are the primary educators of their children and the school sees their role in education concerning relationships and sexuality as very important (see Appendix 7). The school will seek to educate parents with regard to the RSE policy, and where possible provide support to parents seeking to educate their children in RSE within the family.  
A copy of this policy will be made available to parents on request to the school office.

While all partners in the school community –teaching staff, parents and management– are agreed on the programme, we recognise, nevertheless, the right of any parent to request that his/her son should not participate in the programme. The school’s function is to provide a general education about RSE, in keeping with its ethos. It will not offer advice, information or counselling on aspects of sexual behaviour or contraception which are not in keeping with the principles outlined in this document. When advice is offered it will be age-appropriate.

Issues that arise in class will be addressed in a manner that reflects the ethos of the school, the principles outlined here and the Child Protection guidelines of the school. It is not envisaged that mentors would be part of RSE provision in the school, but from time to time they may find themselves in counselling situations. At such times, mentors should ensure they adhere to the principles outlined in this policy, and be ready to explain or communicate this policy to parents on request.

### 3. 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. If a teacher becomes concerned about a matter that has been raised he/she should seek advice from the Principal or the SPHE co-ordinator. When deciding whether or not to answer questions the teacher should consider the age and readiness of the students, the RSE programme content, the CP policy, the ethos of the school and the RSE policy.

### 4. Confidentiality

As is consistent with Rockbrook’s Mentoring Policy, personal student information will be shared only in on a ‘need to know’ basis, amongst teachers/mentors, as laid out in the ‘Child Protection Guidelines’ for Post Primary Schools.

It is school policy that in circumstances where a student is considered at risk of any type of abuse or in breach of the law, the teacher should refer this to the Principal. The Principal will deal with such incidents in accordance with school policies and statutory guidelines.

Teachers should also note that:

- they must not promise absolute confidentiality;
- students should be 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 student to notify parents;
- they should indicate clearly to students when the content of a conversation can no longer be kept confidential, so the student can then decide whether to proceed or not;
- they should use their professional judgement to decide whether confidence can be maintained having heard the information.

### 5. The Division between Biological and Non-Biological aspects of Sex Education

The school policy is that the Science and SPHE programmes deal primarily with the biological aspects of reproduction. These programmes are required to respect the principles outlined in this policy. The non-biological aspects of sex education should

be dealt with wherever appropriate in SPHE, RK, Philosophy and indeed Science, so that the spiritual dimension of the person is never left to the side.

6. Withdrawing students from the RSE programme

This policy will be made available to parents together with details about the parent's right to withdraw their child from aspects of RSE. Parents will always be provided with a full copy of this policy on request. Parents do not have to give reasons for withdrawal, but we invite them to do so, to avoid or resolve misunderstandings. Once a parent's request to withdraw is made, that request will be complied with until revoked by the parent.

7. Using visiting Speakers and Others

It is school policy that most of the RSE programme is best covered by 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. 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.

8. School Ethos

This RSE policy reflects the educational philosophy of the trustees. Spiritual, moral and ethical issues will arise when teaching RSE. Given the paramount nature of a holistic education, and the spiritual nature of the person, these aspects will be discussed across a range of topics within the RSE Programme.

9. Special Needs

Pupils with special 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. Within reason mentors may be able to play a supportive role here, but should discuss such matters first with the Principal.

10. Training

All teachers involved in this work do not necessarily have to be experts on the issues concerned. However, they are required to be sensitive to the needs of the group, to be able to deal with questions openly/honestly and prepared to refer to more expert advice if necessary. The school will facilitate teachers to obtain expert training in this field, bearing in mind the overall budgetary framework and the need of the school's teaching and learning programme and the educational philosophy of the teacher training approaches.

11. Resources

The school will purchase appropriate RSE teaching materials which have been identified by staff as useful and which have been approved by the Principal within the normal budgetary framework and as general school resources allow.

A list of these resources includes: Books including 'On Track', '7 Habits of Highly Effective Teens', 'Values for Thinking', 'Real Love', 'Theology of the Body', DVDs such as 'Romance without Regret', as well as articles and other resources. Visitors include the Pure of Heart team (relationships; commitment; love, sex and marriage) and LifeWorks Education team (development of life, right to life, crisis pregnancies, facing choices).

## 12. Assessment

There will be no student assessment of the RSE programme, apart from the assessment normally required in SPHE, Science or Religious Education. Participating teachers will meet once a term to evaluate and review the programme. These meetings should identify any difficulties arising in the delivery of the programme with a view to effecting changes.

### **Monitoring, evaluating and reviewing this policy**

As with all school policies this RSE policy will be reviewed by the Board of Management over a three year cycle. The next review will take place in spring 2016.

### **Appendices to this policy**

- Appendix 1 Key background ethos documents considered in drawing up this policy
- Appendix 2 Content of the RSE programme
- Appendix 3 Approaches that RSE programme in Rockbrook Park School will avoid
- Appendix 4 Resources available in support of programme
- Appendix 5 Guidelines on invited guests
- Appendix 6 Handling a request for withdrawal
- Appendix 7 Helping parents in their responsibilities
- Appendix 8 SPHE syllabus for 1<sup>st</sup> to 3<sup>rd</sup> year incorporating RSE programme

(Copies of these appendices which are updated from time to time are available on request)