



Ratoath College

Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) Policy

Introduction

This RSE policy was developed in accordance with:

1. Our mission statement
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 C43/2018.
3. Guidance from SPHE Department
4. Consultation with the Care Team
5. Consultation with the Wellbeing Committee

All partners of the School/College community were consulted during its development including all stakeholders and students.

This RSE policy is a written statement of the aims of the RSE programme within Ratoath College. The policy reflects the relationship of RSE to SPHE and other subjects e.g. Religious Education, Science, Biology and Home Economics and the organisation and management of RSE within Ratoath College.

This policy applies to all aspects of teaching and learning about 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.

A. School

Ratoath College is a co-educational school, offering a broad education through a wide curriculum of subjects approved by the Department of Education and Science, together with sport and extra-curricular activities; with an enrolment, increasing yearly. Ratoath College is under the joint trusteeship of County Meath Vocational Educational Committee and the Diocese of Meath.

B. Our School Philosophy

One of the aims of the school is to encourage each pupil to develop to his or her full potential, to mature as an individual and to become a constructive and caring member of society.

“Children and young people learn more effectively and have better academic outcomes if they are happy in their work, believe in themselves and feel acknowledged and supported in their schools” -Wellbeing Policy Statement and Framework for Practice 2018

The school gives its pupils the opportunity to explore the humanities, sciences, arts, business studies and technical subjects. In addition, it provides religious, moral and physical education in order to meet its founding objectives of supporting pupils in achieving their full academic potential and preparing them for participation in civic society and working life.

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Mission Statement:

We in Ratoath College are a partnership of students, staff, parents and the community. We foster personal development and learning through hard work, creativity and commitment. Each individual is given the opportunity to realise their full potential in a community that is inclusive, respectful, caring and positive. In all our pursuits we embrace the spirit of

“Mol an Óige agus tiocfaidh sí”

Our Behaviour Statement

Everybody in Ratoath College is entitled to an education in a safe and healthy environment and in an atmosphere of mutual respect. It is the responsibility of all members of our school community to create this environment.

Ratoath College Anti-Bullying Statement:

We want Ratoath College to be a bully-free school where all of us feel safe and happy.

C. Definition of RSE

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

RSE provides structured opportunities to acquire knowledge and understanding of human relationships and sexuality. They can learn this through processes which enable them to form values and establish behaviours within a moral, spiritual and social framework. Young people are given opportunities to learn about relationships and sexuality in ways that help them to think and act in a moral, caring and responsible manner.

The RSE programme in Ratoath College is consistent with the school philosophy and the core values and ethos of the school. The programme reflects the following value statements:

- every individual is unique and valued in his/her own right;
- we are all sexual beings;
- making decisions about sexual behaviour is not simply a private and personal matter – there are also social, religious, spiritual and community implications;
- sexual intercourse is an expression of intimacy and relationship
- Sex should be something that is enjoyed in a relationship of equals where both parties are consenting, responsible and respectful of each other;
- men and women have equal rights and responsibilities in sexual matters;
- any sexual contact by force or without consent is a violation of the person.

It is the responsibility of the RSE teacher to teach within this moral and values framework

D. Relationship of RSE to SPHE

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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.
- 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. This 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.
- RSE should be taught in the context of a whole school climate that is inclusive and respectful, and ensuring that the RSE classroom is a safe place for all.

E. Aims and objectives of the RSE programme

Aims:

- Promote knowledge and respect for reproduction.
- Provide an opportunity to learn about relationships and sexuality.
- Encourage students to think and act in a moral, caring and responsible way.
- Help students understand and develop friendships.
- Help students understanding of sexuality.
- Develop a positive attitude towards one's own sexuality.

Objectives:

- The policy will ensure clarity and consensus on how RSE is taught in Ratoath 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.



- 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.

What the school currently provides

Ratoath College currently provides the following:

1. RSE is provided at Junior Cycle as part of the SPHE programme. 6 classes of RSE are expected to be delivered throughout each year group.
2. RSE is taught to fifth and sixth year students during Religious and Ethical Education (REE) by the REE teacher

F. Guidelines for the management and organisation of RSE in our school

a) Provision of training and staff development:

- Arrangements regarding the deployment of staff will be made by the Principal. Consideration will be given to gender balance. Teachers will be consulted and where practicable, teachers who express an interest in teaching SPHE/RSE will be timetabled.
- 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 encouraged and facilitated by the school. Available training opportunities will be identified via www.PDST.ie
- 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. Relevant sections of this RSE policy will be included in the Parent’s information pack on enrolment to the college and also in the student’s journal. In Junior Cycle, a letter will be sent home at the beginning of the Module and an opt out clause will be available. Parents handbook, Relationships & Sexuality Education, Going Forward Together, is directly available on the school website.
- 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.
- The *Education Act 1998* section 30 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 in writing, measures will



be implemented to ensure that parents and staff involved converse around why the student is being withdrawn. If a student is withdrawn, provisions will be put in place.

c) Ethical/Moral Considerations:

RSE is a complex area of the curriculum. The school's RSE policy provides guidance for teachers on the moral and ethical framework within which the programme will be taught. The boundaries of the RSE programme will be delivered with due deference to:

- (a) The age, maturity level of the students as well as any additional needs of the student
- (b) The school ethos
- (c) Limits of confidentiality, limits to discussions and questions.
- (d) RSE curriculum guidelines

Issues include the following:

1. 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. 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 and the RSE policy.
- Students will be told at the start of the RSE strand (Team Up) that the class group is not the appropriate environment to make a disclosure and they will be advised about the best way to make a disclosure. Child protection guidelines will be outlined. Students may ask questions about issues which 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. If a teacher becomes concerned about a matter that has been raised they should inform/seek advice from the SPHE Co-ordinator or Principal/Deputy Principal.

2. Offering Advice

The school's function is; through RSE class; 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.

3. 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 PostPrimary Schools (2017).

- **It is important that the students must 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 can no longer be kept confidential.
- The Child Protection Guidelines for Post Primary schools state in 4.1.1. and 4.2.1 state:

4.1.1. - 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 that school. A written record of the report should be made and placed in a secure location by the Designated Liaison Person. The need for confidentiality at all times, as previously referred to in Chapter 1 Paragraph 1.2 of these guidelines should be borne in mind. The supports of the school should continue to be made available to the child.

4.2.1 - 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.

4. Sexual Activity and Consent:

- 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 for heterosexual and homosexual sex. Accordingly, a sexual relationship where one or both parties is under 17 years of age is illegal. The Child Protection requirements in respect of underage sexual activity as detailed in section 4.7.1 of the *Child Protection procedures for Primary and Post-Primary schools 2017* (Department of Education and Skills) apply to all mandated persons in the school.
- The legal definition of consent to a sexual act, as defined in the Criminal Law (Sexual Offences) Act 2017 will also be discussed within the RSE programme. The PDST Personal Safety Handbook will also be used for reference.

5. Family Planning/ Contraception / Unplanned Pregnancy:

- 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 also in the “TRUST” pack. The RSE programme requires that young people are provided with information about methods of contraception. There are lessons in Second year of SPHE during the RSE module dealing with types of contraception. The “TRUST” pack also contains lessons on Unplanned Pregnancy. 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.



6. Sexual Orientation / Genders / Sexuality:

- 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.
- 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. Therefore, it is inevitable and natural that sexual orientation will be discussed during a programme of sex education.
- One of the many advantages of exploring issues concerning sexual orientation is the opportunity to correct false ideas, assumptions and address prejudice.
- Discussion of sexual orientation 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 sexual orientation is not discussed in schools. Inclusivity is of the utmost importance and LGBTI+ is respected at all costs across the entire school environment.
- 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 Care Team.

7. Abortion:

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

8. Physiology /Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs):

- Male and female sex organs will be addressed with associated sexual function and dysfunction.
- While awareness of STIs is one of the objectives of the Third 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 the prevalence of STI transmission, it is important that the subject is addressed in schools.

9. Pornography and Online Safety:

- This topic will comprise of discussion of the dangers associated with viewing pornography including unrealistic expectations, sexual coercion and sexting.

All of the above detailed issues will be dealt with in an open and age appropriate manner. They will be treated in a non-prescriptive way and consistent with the Moral and Values Framework as outlined in the 'Aims and Objectives' section of this policy.

d) Practical Issues

- All students in the Junior cycle have one period of SPHE per week. RSE will be included as a module in the second term of school as part of their SPHE programme.



- Students in senior cycle will receive a minimum of 6 week's tuition in RSE each year.
- The size of the class groups will be determined by the base class.
- Visiting 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 students 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, prior to 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. Children 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. The advice of the Special Education Support Service (SESS) will be used in such circumstances.
- This policy is made available to parents and details about the parent's right to withdraw their child from sensitive aspects of RSE are included in the policy. Parents have the right to withdraw students from RSE but not SPHE. 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 (in writing), that request must be complied with until revoked by the parent. Parents will be informed by letter before the RSE module commences. If parents wish to withdraw from the RSE programme they can inform the school at this time. (See also appendix 1).

G. Ongoing support, development and review

Training and support:

Teachers delivering the RSE curriculum do not have to be experts in this area but they should be sensitive to the needs of the group, answer and respond to questions asked appropriately, in an open and honest manner. Some teachers will have had some CPD training in SPHE, counselling or other areas of health and may offer advice, training, education to the other staff facilitating the programme. CPD is available to teachers who wish to train or develop their skills in the RSE curriculum and the school will endeavour to facilitate such training if the need arises.

Implementation, Arrangements, Roles and Responsibilities:

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- Teaching Staff will have direct responsibility for delivering the RSE programme at Junior Cycle and Senior Cycle.
- Caohmnoirs and Moltoirs have a Pastoral care role in liaising with students, parents/guardians, school Chaplain, the Guidance Department, school counsellors and the Special Education Needs Coordinator.

Ratification & Communication:

- When the finalised draft policy is ratified by the Board of Management, it becomes the agreed RSE Policy of Ratoath College. 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 their son/daughter.
- A copy of the RSE policy will be available at all times in the school's Student Office and on the school's Website.

Reviewing and evaluating the policy:

- The Principal is responsible for the implementation of the policy but may assign the monitoring to the RSE staff.
- 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 or 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 training availed of by teachers.
 - Parents and Guardians awareness of the policy.
 - Feedback received from teachers, students, parents/guardians and members of the Board of Management.

This Policy was reviewed and ratified by the Board of Management in June 2021.



Appendix 1

What we do if a request for withdrawal from the RSE programme is made (in writing) by a parent?

- a) 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 Caomhnóir and SPHE Co-ordinator; the Principal may become involved if necessary).
- b) 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 RSE programme and the entitlement of the other students,
- c) We attempt to ensure that where a student is withdrawn there is no disruption to other parts of their education,
- d) We point out that students who have been withdrawn are vulnerable to being asked about this by their peers or being singled out - we therefore attempt to cause minimal embarrassment to the student and minimal disruption to the programme;
- e) we also point out that students may receive inaccurate information from their peers;
- f) we offer the parents access to appropriate information and resources.