



1 SCOIL MHUIRE, TRIM

Our School:

Scoil Mhuire is an all-girls Voluntary Catholic Secondary School under the trusteeship of Catholic Education, an Irish Schools Trust (CEIST). It was founded by the Sisters of Mercy in 1936 and currently has a student enrolment of approximately 800, a teaching staff of approximately 60 and an ancillary staff of 10.

Our Mission Statement:

Scoil Mhuire seeks to provide a quality education for all its students in a challenging and positive environment. We are committed to holistic development and to the achievement of the full potential of each student, particularly those who are disadvantaged or marginalised.

Our Ethos:

Upholding our Mercy ethos, Scoil Mhuire promotes the core values of respect, courtesy, responsibility and accountability, while ensuring that a holistic approach to the education of our students prevails. We are committed to promoting inclusion with a spirit of respect and welcome for diversity. We also acknowledge the unprecedented challenges in education, as we anticipate, define and meet the evolving needs of today's young people.

2 RELATIONSHIPS AND SEXUALITY EDUCATION

Defining Relationships and 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. In the school setting, it is an integral part of general education provision, which seeks to promote the overall development of the person and which includes the integration of sexuality into personal understanding, growth and development. Through RSE, formal opportunities are provided for young people to evaluate the wide range of information, opinions, attitudes and values which they receive. In this way they can be helped to form values and establish behaviours within a moral framework. While parents are the primary educators in this area, schools have a key role to play. Ideally, parents/guardians and schools work in partnership to provide comprehensive relationships and sexuality education for young people.

The Objectives of Relationships and Sexuality Education programme:

RSE is part of the Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) 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.
- 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.
- understand sexual development and identity.
- explore aspects of sexuality including stereotyping and gender issues.
- examine cultural influences on sexuality.
- 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.

The Relationship of RSE to the Mission Statement and Ethos of Scoil Mhuire:

Our school's ethos informs the teaching of the RSE programme. As spiritual, moral and ethical issues arise when teaching RSE, this policy provides guidance to teachers in the treatment of such issues in accordance with the ethos of the school. 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, gender orientation, fertility, contraception and sexually transmitted infections. This can be done within a context which 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.

The Rationale for the RSE Policy:

- Schools are required, by law, to deliver all aspects of the RSE curriculum, including those in relation to sexual orientation, gender orientation, fertility, contraception and sexually transmitted infections.
- 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 cycles. At Junior Cycle, the RSE programme is part of Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) and is covered in 10 modules. At Senior Cycle it is covered over 5 modules in Religious Education (RE). 5th and 6th year students exempt from RE are expected to attend classes covering RSE.
- Circulars M4/95 and M20/96 and 27 or 37 of 2010 request schools to commence a process of RSE policy development. Circulars are available to view on the department of Education and Skills webpage.
- 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.

The Application of the RSE Policy:

The RSE policy applies to all school staff, students, board of management, parents / guardians, school chaplain, visiting speakers and external facilitators. 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.

KEY MEASURES OF THE RSE POLICY

A) The Provision of Training / Staff Development:

- Arrangements regarding the teaching of Relationships and Sexuality Education will be made by the principal.
- All teachers of RSE will receive a minimum of two days training.

- The principal will be responsible for informing relevant staff members of continual professional development training.
- All teachers of SPHE/RSE will be given teaching materials by the subject co-ordinator.
- The Board of Management must inform all members of staff of any amendments to this policy should they arise.

B) The Inclusion of Parents / Guardians:

- Parent/guardians of incoming first year students will be given a brief outline of the Junior Cycle RSE programme at a parents' information night.
- Both staff, parent/guardian and student representatives were consulted in the making of the RSE policy.
- The RSE policy is available to view on the official Scoil Mhuire website, and also in the teacher handbooks.
- Under The Education Act, 1998, a student is not required to attend instruction in any subject which is contrary to the conscience of the parent/guardian. If this incident should arise, parents/guardians are asked to consult with, and to make alternative arrangements with the principal about this withdrawal. Any requests for withdrawal must be made in writing.

C) Ethical / Moral Considerations:

The following is a list of guidelines on the moral and ethical considerations which may arise:

➤ **Answering Questions**

It is important to create an environment in RSE in which students feel comfortable to ask questions openly. However, teachers may not be able to answer all questions asked by the students and therefore, boundaries should be set appropriately. Teachers should use their professional judgement guided by the age, gender and needs of the students presented to them. The Child Protection Policy and the Ethos of the school must be upheld.

➤ **Confidentiality**

Students are not encouraged to disclose personal or private information in RSE classes but there may be times when they discuss their own lives. Confidentiality should be respected, unless the student is considered at risk of any type of abuse, in breach of the law, or is engaging in any type of sexual activity, as stated in The Criminal Law (Sexual Offences) Act, 2006. The Principal (Designated Liaison Person-DLP) or Deputy Principal (Deputy Designated Liaison Person-DDLP) must be informed immediately. The Principal will decide whether to inform the parents and/or any appropriate authorities. Teachers

must not promise absolute confidentiality. Teachers indicate clearly to students when the content of the conversation can no longer be kept confidential. This is in line with Child Protection Procedures.

➤ **Sexual Activity**

Parents/Guardians and teachers should give students information on the age of consent, which is seventeen years of age for both males and females as legislated in The Criminal Law (Sexual Offenses Act) 2006.

➤ **Aspects of Sexual Education that arise in school curriculum**

The curricula of other subject's deal with sensitive content in regards to relationships and sexuality. It is the discretion of the teacher to decide what information is appropriate to give in the context of the class. The subsequent discussion should be limited and set within the context of the subject curriculum.

➤ **Contraception/ Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs)**

Family Planning should be covered within the Senior Cycle RSE programmes. It is also covered in Junior Cycle Science, Home Economics and Leaving Certificate. Biology. The RSE programme requires that young people are provided with information on methods of contraception and an overview of the transmission and prevention of STIs. Both topics will be dealt with in a factual, open but age-appropriate manner.

➤ **Sexual Identity**

The subject of sexual orientation and gender identity is covered as part of the RSE programme at Senior Cycle, and with the discretion of the teacher at Junior Cycle. Under the Equal Status Act, 2000, and the Equality Act, 2004, associated discrimination is prohibited. Teachers must not promote any one gender identity or sexual orientation.

➤ **Visiting Speakers**

It is recommended that trained RSE teachers facilitate the programme. All visiting speakers must be approved by the Principal and provided with a copy of the RSE policy which they must adhere to. The Office should be informed of the date and name of the visitor and a record kept. All visitors must be welcomed at the door and accompanied by a teaching member of staff for the duration of the visit. Any issues arising from appropriateness of the content delivered must be brought to the attention of the Principal.

➤ **Special Needs**

Teachers of RSE should be aware of students with special educational or/and emotional needs and liaise with parents/guardian.

D. Practical Issues:

- All Junior Cycle students are timetabled for approximately 70 hours of SPHE over three years. The classes are in form groups of all girls, which range between 26 and 30 students. RSE is taught as part of SPHE.
- RSE is taught through Religion in 5th and 6th Year.
- Aspects of RSE are taught through Science, Biology, Home Economics and Religion, and may arise in other subjects.
- Parents/guardians are consulted in relation to RSE for Special Needs students by subject teachers
- Where there is a request from parents/guardians to withdraw a student from RSE, arrangements are made in consultation with the Principal, teacher, parent/guardian and student. In such circumstances, the principal should be satisfied that the parents/guardians provide the appropriate information to the student.
- A teacher may be timetabled for SPHE/RSE after consultation between the School Management and teacher.
- All SPHE teachers are given the opportunity to attend RSE training days.
- The RSE Policy will be given to Parents/Guardians on enrolment of their child in the school and the Policy will be published on the school website.
- An outline of the RSE programme will be presented to Parents/Guardians at the 1st Year Information Evening in September each year.
- SPHE/RSE teachers meet at the beginning of the school year. A co-ordinator is appointed and a Scheme of Work is agreed for the year.
- Other School Policies which reference RSE are:
 - Child Protection Policy.
 - School Policy concerning the use of mobile phones and other electronic devices.
 - Policy on Substance Abuse.
 - Anti-bullying Policy.
 - Acceptable Use Policy for Computer Usage and Internet Access.
 - The School Guidance Plan.

➤ Code of Excellence.

- Respect for every individual is at the core of the Scoil Mhuire RSE Policy.

RSE Policy ratified: 11th April 2018

To be reviewed: April 2019