

Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) Policy

Title

Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) Policy

School Name: Rice College
School Address: New Road, Ennis, Co. Clare
School Details: Rice College is a Voluntary Co-Educational Secondary School, under the Trusteeship of the Edmund Rice Schools

School Management: The Board of Management manages the college within the Regulations and Programmes of the Department of Education and Skills. It respects the Edmund Rice Schools Trust Charter. It operates with the funding and resources available to promote education according to the above philosophy.

Mission Statement

We strive to live up to Christian values and show genuine concern for our school community. Our core aims are to provide a broad and comprehensive education and to recognise the needs and develop the talents of each person. We strive to enrich all those with whom we are privileged to come in contact. We strive to succeed.

Ethos

Rice College is operated according to the Edmund Rice Schools Trust (ERST) Charter. This Charter provides guiding principles against which all schools and communities of learning in the Edmund Rice Network will assess themselves.

These principles are:

- Nurturing faith, Christian spirituality and gospel-based Values
- Promoting partnership
- Excelling in teaching and learning
- Creating a caring school community
- Inspiring transformational leadership

Rice College is a Catholic college. We see our college not only as a centre of academic excellence but a community animated by the spirit of the Gospel, where Roman Catholic values are transmitted and where personal faith is nurtured and developed. The Good News of the Gospel and the celebration of the Sacraments forms and informs how we treat all, believers and non-believers alike, within our school community.

The Edmund Rice Schools Trust Charter values are underpinned by our philosophy of Education that has at its centre the unique dignity of the human person. We expect nothing but excellence from ourselves as educators and demand nothing but excellence from our students. We

see the interaction of people from different backgrounds as a gift that will enrich the community of the school and will promote the growth and learning of all. We value each student and their family. We welcome and are sensitive to each one seeking to respond to their individual needs through the curriculum, pastoral care and faith development. Faith formation and the Religious Education Programme play a key role. Students follow the State programme in Religious Education which is suitable for students of all faiths and those of no faith.

The School celebrates the major Christian Feasts. We hope that the Gospel values inherent in the culture the school will be internalised in the values, attitudes and behaviours of all members of the School Community and will find expression in their respect and care for one another. The School is open to and welcome all who share this vision and wish to benefit from it.

Introductory Statement

The aims of Relationship and Sexuality Education are;

- To help young people develop healthy friendships and relationships.
- To promote an understanding of Sexuality.
- To foster a healthy attitude to sexuality and relationships.
- To promote knowledge of and respect for reproduction while developing sense of wonder and awe at the process of birth and new life.
- To enable young people to develop healthy attitudes and values towards their sexuality in an oral, spiritual and social framework.
- To teach RSE while being mindful of our school ethos.

The RSE policy was revised by school management, teachers of relevant subjects including senior cycle RE teachers and junior cycle SPHE teachers as well as those teaching wellbeing in Rice College in November 2018.

This policy was developed through meetings with relevant personnel from management, senior cycle RE teachers and junior cycle SPHE teachers. Following these meetings sub committees were formed and allocated specific roles in advising and updating policies, resourcing material and best practice in the area of RSE.

This policy was developed in line with the PDST/DES guidelines on RSE specifications for post primary schools.

Management

Mr. Mulqueen

Religious Education

Ms. Molyneaux

Mr. Cleary

Ms. Hanrahan

Ms. Chambers

Mr. Lyons

SPHE

Ms. Hogan

Ms. D-Shannon

Mr. Lyons

Ms. Fitzpatrick

Ms. Killeen

Ms. Hehir

Mr. Prior

Ms. Murray

Mr. Brosnan

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.

The policy will apply to school staff, students, board of management, parents/guardians, visiting speakers and external facilitators.

Rationale

- Sexuality is a key element of healthy social and personal development. Young people are exposed to a bewildering 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).
- Circulars M4/95 and M20/96 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.
- DES Child protection Procedures, Children First Legislation (2017) and has a Child Protection Policy/Child Safe Guarding Statement, with the Principal as Designated Liaison Person (DLP) and the Deputy Principal as the deputy DLP. The RSE Policy is cognisant of all aspects of our current Child Protection Policy/Child Safe Guarding Statement.

Relationship to characteristic spirit of the school

This RSE policy acknowledges the importance of SPHE/RSE being taught in the context of a whole school climate that is inclusive and respectful and in keeping with our school ethos.

Rice College Mission Statement

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This 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.

The teacher will endeavour to create an atmosphere which respects the privacy of each individual student. The teacher treat all students with due sensitivity and care. It is essential to the success of the RSE programme that a supportive atmosphere be created and maintained in the classroom. RSE classes should be relaxed and more informal than in other subject areas to create an atmosphere of openness and trust.

Teacher will deliver all aspects of the RSE curriculum, including those in relation to sexual orientation, contraception, sexually transmitted infections etc. This will be done within a context in which teaching of the programme while being mindful of the school's ethos. 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.

Objectives of this policy

- This policy will ensure clarity and consensus on how RSE is taught in the school.
- 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 school community, in relation to the RSE Programme, with particular reference to school staff, students, parents/guardians and the board of management/trustees.
- It will ensure that teachers, parents/guardians and students understand how the teaching of RSE is linked to the school ethos.
- It will provide information on the practicalities of delivering the programme.

Key Measures

A. Provision of Training and Staff Development

- Teachers are released to attend training and in-service in the area of RSE
- Consideration is given to gender balance in the teaching of RSE
- All teachers of RSE have access to the RSE teaching materials through 'staff drive'

B. Inclusion of Parents/Guardians

- The school will ensure that parents/guardians are kept informed of RSE through access of the RSE policy on the school website

Note: The Education Act, 1998 (section 30, subsection (2)(e)) provides that a student is not required to attend instruction in any subject which is contrary to the conscience of the parent or in the case of a student who has reached the age of 18 years, the student. Hence, parents have a right to opt their child out of the sensitive issues in RSE if they wish to do so. It is the responsibility of the school to make alternative arrangements for the student in this situation. The school may wish to ask the parents to put their request in writing.

C. Ethical/Moral Considerations

As RSE is a complex area of the curriculum, Rice Colleges RSE policy provides guidance for teachers on the moral and ethical framework within which the programme will be taught

- **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. Students may ask questions about issues which are not included in the curriculum, such as masturbation or abortion. In these classes students are provided with opportunities to ask questions anonymously and are aware that teachers are always on-hand to support them should the need arise. On these, and on all questions, teachers will use their professional judgement, guided by the age of the students, the RSE curriculum and the RSE policy for the school.
- **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 child 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 Post-Primary Schools or the school's Substance Use Policy, notify parents etc.

In cases of under-age sexual activity, P10 of the Child Protection Guidelines for Post-Primary Schools (2004) state: *'In all cases where a school becomes aware of underage sexual intercourse the school shall take appropriate steps to inform the child's parents.'*

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

- **Sexual Activity:** Although the religious ethos of the school may seem to be in conflict with the lived experience of the students, the school supports each student to the best of our ability. The pace of social change in Ireland over the last number of years has been rapid. Parents, students and teachers can experience a sense of confusion in relation to sexual mores.
- 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.
- **Homosexuality:** The post-primary RSE Curriculum Guidelines include the subject of sexual orientation. The school may decide the topic needs to be addressed before Senior Cycle, especially if homophobic bullying is an issue.
- **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. Given that rates of STI transmission are increasing, it is important that the subject is addressed in schools.

D. Practical Issues

- SPHE is timetabled in all Junior Cycle classes
- Provision is made for teaching RSE to Fourth, Fifth and Sixth Years through RE classes, three times per week
- RSE/SPHE is delivered to whole class groups
- Boys and girls will be taught together for all aspects of RSE
- Outside speakers will be provided with a copy of our RSE policy and the SPHE Guidelines
- Provision is made for children with special needs through the SET
- Consideration will be given to the needs of students who may be pregnant
- Any parental requests for the withdrawal of students from the RSE programme will be respected

Links to Other Policies and to Curriculum Delivery

The school will identify any links to curriculum delivery where possible.

- SPHE provides students with opportunities to develop the skills and competencies to care for themselves and others and to make informed decisions about their health, personal lives and social development. This includes providing information on relationships and sexuality.
- Aspects of RSE are delivered across the curriculum, through subjects such as Religious Education, Science and Biology. Schools need to ensure that all students receive a full and balanced RSE programme from First Year through to Sixth Year.

Implementation Arrangements, Roles and Responsibilities

Ms. E. Chambers has been assigned the role of co-ordinating implementation of the policy.

Ms. Chambers has shared the RSE programme content with the RE department and agreed on the programme and when it is delivered.

The role of the principal is to administrate and ensure appropriate delivery of the RSE programme for all students in the school.

The class teacher will be responsible for delivery of the RSE content. Where any teacher is uncomfortable with a certain aspect of the programme, consideration will be given if teachers express difficulties with delivery of certain topics, cover will be provided to overcome this matter.

All members of staff will be made aware of the content of the SE policy, including year heads, pastoral care team, SNA's, guidance counsellor and SPHE co-ordinator

Ratification & Communication

When this finalised draft policy has been ratified by the board of management, it will become the school's agreed RSE Policy. It will then be circulated within the school community. The entire teaching staff will be made aware of any changes implied in curriculum delivery before the end of 2018 through staff meetings and principal and staff drive.

Parents/guardians will be informed of the RSE Policy from the time of enrolment of the student from 2019. The final policy will be made available on the schools website.

Reviewing and evaluating the policy

It is planned that the RSE policy be reviewed annually at Rice College. Ongoing review and evaluation will take cognisance of changing information, guidelines, legislation and feedback from parents/guardians, students and teachers. The policy will be revised as necessary in the light of such review and evaluation and within the framework of school planning.

These aspects may include:

- RSE is being successfully taught through religion for all relevant students at senior cycle
 - resource material is available to teachers on the 'staff drive'
 - appropriate in-service for teachers is available and relevant teachers are availing of it
 - parents/guardians are aware of the policy through school website
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- a confidential survey of students and staff in May 2019
 - feedback from student council or student body through student voice May 2019
 - parent/guardian feedback at parent/teacher meetings
 - opportunity at the end of each class to comment or ask questions anonymously
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- Are parents/guardians given information on the content of the SPHE/RSE programme through the Christmas letter 2018 and March 2019 for incoming students
 - distribution of the RSE parent booklet 'Going Forward Together' at Christmas letter and open night for incoming 1st year parents
 - providing parents/guardians with a summary of the SPHE/RSE programme in the school on line and in Christmas letter 2018.