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Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) Policy

School Name: Rice College, Ennis, Co. Clare

Address: New Road, Ennis, Co Clare. V95 FV10

Details: Rice College is a Voluntary Roman Catholic Secondary School under the Trusteeship and the Patronage of the Edmund Rice Schools Trust. The School is grant aided by the Department of Education & Skills and is a co-educational school.

School Management: The Board of Management of Rice College is a statutory Board appointed pursuant to the provisions of the Education Act 1998.

Mission Statement:

Rice College is operated according to the religious and educational philosophy of the Edmund Rice Schools Trust Charter (ERST).

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:

Inspired by the vision of Blessed Edmund Rice, the Christian Brother School gives priority to education in a living faith whereby students grow to appreciate the life and mission of Jesus Christ with a view to being committed to the world as he was. Has a special concern for the



poor and underprivileged. His aim was to develop a curriculum which promotes the harmonious growth of the whole person.

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Introduction

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 January 2022.

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.

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

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.

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

The SPHE and RE departments have agreed that RSE will be delivered in January of each year.

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 RSE policy, including year heads, pastoral care team, SNA's, guidance counsellor and SPHE co-ordinator and it will be shared on the Staff Drive.

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 2022 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 link of the RSE parent booklet 'Going Forward Together' will be included in letter to parents for incoming 1st year parents.

<https://www.sexualwellbeing.ie/for-parents/resources/relationships-and-sexuality-education-%E2%80%93-going-forward-together.pdf>

The final policy will be made available on the school's website.



Policy Evaluation

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
- a confidential survey of students and parents in May 2022 will inform the evaluation process
- feedback from student council or student focus group through student voice in May 2022
- parent/guardian feedback at parent/teacher meetings
- opportunity at the end of each class to comment or ask questions anonymously

Policy Review:

This Relationships and Sexuality Education Policy is reviewed on an ongoing basis. The policy is circulated amongst all staff and can be viewed on the school's website, www.ricecollege.ie.

Approval: This policy has been approved by Rice College Board of Management.

Signed:

Date: 7/12/22

Chairperson, Board of Management.



A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Louis Mulqueen".

Signed: _____ **Date:** 7/12/22

Principal, Rice College.