

RELATIONSHIPS AND SEXUALITY EDUCATION POLICY (RSE)

Ardgillan College

Date for review: December 2022



Gerry McGuire

Chairperson

Board of Management

1-12-2021

Date ratified by the Board of Management

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this policy is to provide a written statement of the aims of the Relationship and Sexuality Education (RSE) programme, the relationship of RSE to SPHE and the organisation and management of RSE in this school.

This 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 so all teachers should be familiar with this policy.

This policy applies to all staff, parents and all users of the school grounds including but not limited to visiting guests, speakers etc.

OUR SCHOOL

Ardgillan College is an Education and Training Board co-educational, multi-denominational school under the patronage of Dublin and Dún Laoghaire Education and Training Board. The College opened in 2009 and has capacity for 1000 students. It delivers a six-year cycle from first to sixth year.

MISSION STATEMENT

Ardgillan-College is a learning community dedicated to the pursuit of excellence in all areas of education.

Its central mission is to promote a happy and caring school climate where students are encouraged and supported to reach their full potential.

The College is committed to providing a person-centred holistic education in which it fosters the personal, social and spiritual development of its students in an atmosphere of mutual respect.

The emphasis is placed on quality teaching and learning, positive behaviour and the recognition and honouring of achievement. Every student is supported to develop and fulfil their own unique potential and equipped with the confidence and self-esteem to meet the demands of society.

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.

Aims of the RSE Programme:

1. To help students understand and develop friendships and relationships.
2. To give them an understanding of sexuality.
3. To promote in them a positive attitude to their own sexuality and the sexuality of others.
4. To help them form a positive attitude to their relationships with others.
5. To promote knowledge and respect for reproduction
6. To enable students to develop attitudes and values towards their own sexuality in a moral, spiritual and social framework.
7. To provide opportunities for students to learn about relationships and sexuality in ways that helps them think and act in a moral, caring and responsible way,

It is acknowledged that in a course of limited duration these aims are aspirational.

RELATIONSHIPS AND SEXUALITY EDUCATION WITHIN SPHE

The SPHE programme promotes the health and well-being of young people by dealing with many issues such as self-esteem, assertiveness, communication and decision-making skills. Throughout all areas of SPHE, students are encouraged to act in a moral, caring and responsible way and are provided with clear information so that, in the context of their own lives they are able to communicate and implement informed decisions. Sexuality is a key area of development in the life of the adolescent so as well as the specific lessons of RSE, SPHE covers areas which would be relevant to the development of a healthy attitude to sexuality in oneself and ones relationship to others

What Our School Provides

Currently RSE is provided at Junior Cycle as part of the SPHE programme allowing 6 classes per year. RSE is timetabled once a week for Transition Year students. In fifth and sixth year, 6 RSE lessons are delivered during Careers / SPHE / Tutorial.

Organisation of RSE in our School:

1. At Junior Cycle, the tutor for a particular class is assigned to teach the SPHE programme. The teacher will incorporate RSE into the SPHE subject plan as per Department of Education guidelines.
Transition Year and Fifth Year students have a specific RSE teacher and in fifth and sixth year 6 RSE lessons are delivered during Careers / SPHE / Tutorial by either the relevant teacher or members of the RSE Core Team. The Subject Co-ordinator collaborate with the RSE Core Team to decide which 6 lessons might be suitable.
2. The teacher will follow the Department of Education guidelines and NCCA teacher guidelines on the content covered and depth of treatment in all areas of the SPHE programme, including the delivery of the RSE lessons.
3. The Ardgillan philosophy of education is underpinned by values seeking to promote respect, tolerance and understanding while appreciating the diversity of our changing world. The delivery of the SPHE programme (including the RSE lessons) will be done so with the schools values, philosophy and ethos at its core.

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4. If controversial issues arise in the delivery of the SPHE/RSE programme, teachers will aim to present the facts and express views of the whole school community while incorporating, where possible, the ethos of the school.
 5. All issues will be dealt with in a factual and balanced manner with emphasis on health, equality and correcting stereotypes.
 6. The Child Protection Guidelines (Children First: National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children 2011) as outlined by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs and adopted by the Board of Management of Ardgillan College, will be adhered to.

Key Measures

Guidelines for the management and organisation of Relationships and Sexuality Education in Ardgillan College

(a) Provision of training and staff development

Eilish McGarrell and Brian Lanigan are the current co-ordinators of SPHE. Various teachers have attended the required training and are released for any relevant in-services. The school aims to have at least two teachers trained in SPHE / RSE each year. The role of SPHE teacher is assigned to the class tutor and all teachers are made aware of this role when commencing their tutor roles. All training materials are shared amongst staff.

(b) Inclusion of parents and guardians

Parents are the primary educators of children and the RSE programme supports parents in this work. Parents are communicated with through parent-teacher meetings, through the school newsletter and a letter informing parents when the RSE module is to take place and what topics are being covered. Parents have the right to withdraw their child from RSE classes if they wish. The process is as follows:

- Parents are informed by letter when RSE is to take place.
- Parents are given a period of time to respond in writing.
- A meeting can be arranged with the teacher and/or principal to answer questions.
- Provisions outlined for student when out of RSE class.

Answering questions

Students are encouraged to make note of any specific questions they may have in relation to the topic being covered. During the 5th period (2nd last lesson of unit) the students write anonymous questions which are collected by the teacher. The teacher then has one week to respond to these questions and to decide which are most appropriate for the class group.

The teacher may exercise his or her own professional judgement in deciding whether to answer questions privately after the class has finished. If a teacher becomes concerned about a matter that has been raised he/she should seek advice from the Principal.

Confidentiality

It is school policy that in circumstances where a student is considered at some risk of any type of abuse or in breach of the law the teacher must refer this immediately to the principal. The Principal will decide whether to inform the parents or appropriate authorities and may arrange for counselling.

The following is also school policy:

- a) Teachers must not promise absolute confidentiality.
- b) Students must be made 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.
- c) Teachers must also notify the class that it is illegal to engage in sexual activities under the age of 17 and if the teacher is made aware that any student is engaged in such activity, it is their responsibility to report it to the Principal, their parents and the Gardaí.

Children First: National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children 2011: Responsibilities of School Staff (Section 4.8.5) state:

If a child discloses to a teacher or to other school staff that he or she is being harmed by a parent/carer or any other person, including another child, the person who receives the information should listen carefully and supportively. The child should not be interviewed formally / obtain only the necessary relevant facts. Confidentiality must never be

promised. The discussion should be recorded accurately and the record retained securely and the staff member should then inform the Designated Liaison Person (DLP) who is responsible for reporting the matter to the HSE Children and Family Services.

Sexual activity

It is advisable for teachers to give young 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 male and female.

Withdrawing students from the RSE programme

Relevant sections of this policy are made available to parents in the publication entitled *Information for Parents* together with details about parent's right to withdraw their child from many aspects of RSE – parents will always be provided with a full copy of this policy following a request do so.

Issues such as over population, birth control and other sexual matters met in a minor way in subjects such as Geography, Science and RE. However, any discussion is limited and set within the context of the other subject concerned, it does not constitute part of the RSE Programme. 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, that request must be complied with until revoked by the parent (See Appendix 1).

Using visiting speakers and others

It is school policy that most of the RSE programme is best discussed openly with teachers who are known and trusted by the students.

Sexualities

Teachers do not promote any one life-style as the only acceptable one for society and therefore it is inevitable and natural that a range of sexualities will be discussed during a programme of sex education. Discussion of sexuality should be appropriate to the age of the students.

Contraception

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

Abortion

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

ONGOING SUPPORT, DEVELOPMENT AND REVIEW

Training

1. All teachers involved in this work do not necessarily 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 a preparedness to refer to more expert advice if necessary. The skills acquired in general teaching apply also to health education.

Furthermore, many teachers have training in related areas such as counselling. Some teachers have expert training in the specific areas of health, relationships and sexuality education and will be encouraged to train other teachers.

2. The school will facilitate teachers to obtain expert training in this field, bearing in mind the overall budgetary framework and the need for the ongoing teaching and learning programme of the school to continue with as little disturbance as possible.

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.

Links to other policies and to curriculum delivery

Teachers with specialist knowledge in particular subject areas can support the work of RSE at different stages in the programme. At Junior Cycle, teachers of Home Economics and Science deal primarily with the biological aspect of reproduction.

Implementation Arrangements, Roles and Responsibilities

The Board of Management is assigned the role of co-ordinating implementation of this policy.

SPHE co-ordinator: Eilish McGarrell and Brian Lanigan and SPHE and SPHE/RSE teachers implement programme to students

Implementation, Ratification and Communication

This policy will be ratified by the Board of Management and becomes the agreed RSE policy of Ardgillan College. All teaching staff will need to be familiar with the policy and aware of any changes implied in curriculum delivery and will receive a copy of said document promptly after it has been ratified. The Parents Council will also receive a copy of the policy.

Monitoring the implementation of the policy

Effective policy requires constant monitoring and evaluation to ensure successful implementation and to review what adjustments may be necessary from time to time.

Reviewing and evaluating the policy

The policy will be reviewed and evaluated at certain pre-determined times under the direction of the Board of Management. Ongoing review and evaluation will take cognisance of changing information, guidelines, legislation and feedback from parents/guardians, students, teachers and others. The SPHE co-ordinators will have the role of monitoring aspects of the policy. The policy will be revised as necessary in the light of such review and evaluation and within the framework of school planning.

To review and evaluate the policy, it will be necessary to gauge the impact and effectiveness of the policy by examining the extent to which:

- RSE is being successfully taught through SPHE for all relevant students
- Where SPHE may not be timetabled, e.g. Sixth Year Students, that these students are receiving RSE.
- Resource materials are available to teachers.
- Appropriate in-service for teachers is available and relevant teachers are availing of it.
- Staff are aware of the policy

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- Students are aware of the policy
 - Parents/guardians are aware of the policy
 - Feedback is received from teachers, other school staff, students, parents/guardians, members of the board of management.

On-going support and development

All RSE lessons are prepared in conjunction with the SPHE co-ordinators who have received training in the SPHE course.

Teachers involved in delivering the programme will do so in the context of these guidelines as set out in the policy. All staff teaching RSE are encouraged to avail of suitable in-career development opportunities, which may arise.

Review Personnel and Timeframe

There will be a review of the policy periodically. The review team will comprise of the Principal, Deputy Principal and RSE teachers. Parents comments will be considered.

Our Relationships and Sexuality Policy has been written by the college and agreed by staff, Parent's Council and the Board of Management. It will be reviewed periodically.

APPENDIX 1

What we do if a request for withdrawal from the RSE programme is made by a parent:

- a) We discuss the nature of the concerns with the child's parent and if appropriate attempts to reassure them (initially such discussion takes place at a meeting with the Year Head and RSE 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, e.g. it may be appropriate and desirable to have single sex classes for some sections of the RSE programme.