

Policy on Relationships and Sexuality Education

A. School:

St. Mary's Holy Faith Secondary School
Old Finglas Road
Glasnevin
Dublin 11

Phone: 01-8372213
Fax: 01-8374034
Email: stmarysglasnevin@eircom.net
Web Address: stmaryshfcglasnevin.com
School Roll No.: 60770P

Category: Girl's Secondary School

Enrolment Numbers: 717 Students

B. School Philosophy (Mission Statement)

St. Mary's follows the Holy Faith philosophy of creating a school community whose central purpose is the religious, moral, intellectual, human, social and physical-recreational education of the student. The education programme of the school is directed to the growth of the whole person. It aims to form integrated and self-reliant Christian people who are eager to build a better world.

C. Definition of RSE

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

In Irish schools, RSE will provide structured opportunities for pupils to acquire a knowledge and understanding of human relationships and sexuality through processes which will enable them to form values and establish behaviours within a moral, caring and responsible manner.

At post-primary level, this means building on the primary programme and providing young people with information and skills to critically evaluate the wide range of information, opinions, attitudes and values offered today, and so make positive, responsible choices about themselves and the way they live their lives.

D. Aims of RSE

The aims of RSE are:

- To help young people understand and develop friendships and relationships.
- To promote an understanding of sexuality.

- To promote a positive attitude to one's own sexuality and in one's relationship with others.
- To promote knowledge and respect for reproduction.
- To enable young people to develop attitudes and values towards their sexuality in a moral, spiritual and social framework.

E. Relationship of RSE to SPHE

In the school setting, RSE will be taught in the context of Social, Personal and Health Education which contributes to the developing the work of the school in promoting the health and well-being of children and young people. This happens in the context of their emotional, moral, social and spiritual growth, as well as their intellectual, physical, political, religious and creative development. A supportive school climate, where the needs and well-being of all members of the school community are considered, is essential to the best possible provision for SPHE.

SPHE looks at issues such as: Relationships at home and in school, building self-esteem and learning skills of communication, decision-making and expressing feelings in an appropriate way. It also includes giving clear information on a range of topics, including healthy eating, alcohol, drugs, human growth and development, safety and social responsibility and environmental issues.

F. What the School Currently Provides

RSE Programme: Junior Level (Formal)

Junior level RSE is taught within the context of the SPHE programme. Six class periods are allocated to RSE in each of the Junior Certificate Years.

First Year

As a result of participating in this module students should:

- Have a knowledge and understanding of puberty.
- Have explored some aspects of gender stereotyping.
- Have a knowledge of the physical, emotional and psychological developments related to adolescence.
- Have a clear understanding of the male and female reproductive systems.
- Be sensitive to the need for respect for one's own sexuality and the sexuality of others.

Second Year

As a result of participating in this module students should:

- Have a knowledge of the developmental stages from conception to birth.
- Should be able to recognise and express feelings and emotions.
- Have an understanding of the dynamics of peer pressure and other influences e.g. Media
- Have developed their skills for managing relationships.
- Be enabled to make responsible decisions.
- Be aware of their health and personal safety and in particular the dangers of sexually transmitted infections and of some help agencies.

Third Year

As a result of participating in this module students should:

- Have practiced communication skills and skills for enhancing self-esteem.
- Have developed a greater degree of self-knowledge and understanding of their current stage of adolescent development.
- Have identified and recognised the importance of respect, rights and responsibility in relationships.
- Be aware of the causes of conflict in relationships.
- Be prepared to deal with such situations of conflict.

RSE Programme: Senior Level (Formal)

Senior level RSE is taught within the context of the Religious Education modular programme at fifth and sixth year level. Each module is approximately of six to seven weeks duration with three class periods being allocated for this each week.

Sixth Year

As a result of participating in this module students should:

- Develop a greater understanding of the structure and function of the male and female reproductive systems and the menstrual cycle.
- Deepen their appreciation of the precious gift of reproduction.
- Be able to explore the nature of human sexuality and the myths surrounding it.
- Be able to reflect on the relationships in their lives and on the qualities that they value in themselves and in other people.
- Increase their awareness of the behaviours that contribute to both positive and negative relationships.
- Have an increased awareness of their own self-esteem and of how to draw on this as a resource for healthy relationships.
- Be aware of how and when conception can take place.
- Deepen their awareness of the importance of, and methods of, family planning.
- Develop a deeper understanding of the link between sexual behaviour and sexually transmitted infections.
- Be able to examine some of the implications of sexual activity and to consider appropriate behaviour in light of these implications (e.g. Pregnancy and STIs)
- Be able to dispel the myths surrounding the reasons why teenagers have sex.
- Have an understanding of responsible parenthood.

Fifth Year

As a result of participating in this module students should gain a greater understanding of self by:

- Acquiring a vocabulary of self-expression.
- Considering different images for personality such as: - bog, prairie, iceberg, desert and onion.

- Realise the difference between roles we play in life and who we are as individuals.
- Exploring characteristics of Extroversion, Introversion.
- Awareness of the world through Intuition and Sensation.
- Appreciating the different styles of decision-making.
- Respecting their own and other people's world-views and perspectives on how they prefer to lead their lives.
- Producing a piece of work which is an expression of their self-understanding and self-esteem.

Specific Programmes

Alcohol and Drug Abuse:

A programme on Alcohol and Drug abuse is delivered to students at fifth year level in the context of the Religious Education module. It involves three classes per week over seven weeks.

As a result of participating in this programme students should gain an understanding of:

- the different types of illegal drugs and their effects.
- sources of information and helplines including support and counselling services.
- Case studies.
- Alcohol and alcohol abuse.
- Binge drinking and the dangers of alcohol poisoning.
- Guest speakers e.g. from AA for fifth year and transition year students.
- Guidelines toward responsible drinking.
- Availability of support services for alcoholics and alcoholic families e.g. AA, Al Anon, Al Ateen and Residential Rehabilitation centres.

The Provision of RSE in Other Subject Departments

Science:

Information to be inserted

Biology:

Information to be inserted

Home Economics:

Information to be inserted

Special Initiatives

Friendship Week

This is a weeklong initiative which takes place every year. It aims to promote a spirit of tolerance, respect and wellbeing throughout the school community. All class groups from first to sixth year engage in this programme. It also includes participation of the staff: teachers and ancillary staff.

Each day a theme of friendship is introduced during tutorial class time. Throughout the day students engage in various activities which highlight and promote a sense of friendship and togetherness. For example: a space is reserved on a wall in the corridor for students to post their acts of kindness and friendship. By participating in this programme it is hoped pupils deepen their understanding of their importance as individuals and members of the school community.

Evaluation of this Programme:

The Care Team meet in the aftermath to evaluate the success of the week and discuss ways in which it could be developed for the following year.

Retreats

Retreats are provided for the fifth year cohort of students. They take place within the first term and are of one day's duration. The chosen venue is the Marino Institute of Education. The theme of the retreat is "Life Paths". It includes exploring themes such as:

- Self-awareness; emotions (positive and negative) and their sources.
- Self-image and hopes for self-development.
- Choices which could change their lives for better or worse.
- Realisation of the possibility for change regardless of the difficulties they may be experiencing.

The retreat concludes with a prayer service.

The whole staff is involved in promoting the wellbeing aspect of RSE. Teachers, Form Tutors, Year Heads, Chaplain, Guidance Teachers and the Care Team including the Principal and Deputy Principal and Secretarial staff are guided by the caring ethos of the school in their interaction with students. In other words students are helped to feel valued, their self-esteem fostered in a climate of respect, tolerance and fairness. Their potential personally and academically is encouraged to the highest degree and standards.

Students efforts are acknowledged and rewarded:

- On a daily basis through the "merit" system in the student journal.
- verbal feedback.
- through an award ceremony which is held at the end of each term.

Also in accordance with the school ethos the staff seeks to promote and practice open communication, valuing uniqueness and difference, the constructive handling of conflict. Initiative and creativity is encouraged as are the social, moral and civic values of the students.

Home-School Involvement

G. Guidelines for the Management and Organisation of RSE in our school

“The NCCA RSE curriculum and guidelines outline the content and methodology to be used in the teaching of RSE programmes. It is the task of your policy committee to discuss, in consultation with the school community, how the NCCA curriculum and guidelines are to be implemented in your school. In this context, issues such as confidentiality, parents’ rights and responsibilities, including the withdrawal of pupils, visiting speakers, sensitive issues, class groupings and multi-class situations may arise. Arrangements regarding the teaching of the programme and the deployments of staff will be made by the Principal. The policy development process allows for issues of concern to each of the participating groups to be raised, discussed and decided upon. In this way, there will be clarity and consensus among all members of your school community and how such issues are to be approached in your school, and the school staff, in particular will be guided in approaching these issues when drawing up the school programme.

By its nature, RSE explores issues which give rise to differing views and sensitivities. School, depending on their characteristic spirit, may differ from each other in the way in which they wish to deal with issues such as describing sexual intercourse, teenage pregnancies, separation and divorce. It will fall to your RSE policy committee, again with the fullest co-operation possible within the school community, to decide how you wish to deal with such issues in RSE”.

Department of Education and Skills – Education Personnel
(RSE Draft Template) P. 4.

To be inserted

H. Provide for Ongoing Support, Development and Review

“It would be important that your policy statement includes provision to support teachers, pupils, parents and Board members involved in RSE at policy and programme level. This could include making a commitment to:

- Ensure access to in career development opportunities for teachers and the policy committee.
- Support efforts of parents to provide educational opportunities for other parents.
- Provide relevant RSE school resources.

The draft policy statement should spell out how the policy and programme will be reviewed by the partners. It could also state in writing that any amendments necessary as a result of such review will be undertaken.

It is understood that evaluation of the Draft RSE Policy Document will be undertaken prior to its implementation”.

Department of Education and Skills – Education Personnel

(RSE Draft Template) P. 4.

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