

# **St. Mary's College Dundalk**



## **Relationships and Sexuality Education Policy**

Approved by The Board of Management on 3<sup>rd</sup> November 2009

## **Introductory Statement**

### **Aims of the RSE programme**

- Our RSE programme aims to build on the primary programme which strives to help young people learn, at home and at school, about their own development and about their friendships and relationships with others.
- We aim to provide young people with information and skills to evaluate critically the wide range of information, opinions, attitudes and values offered today, in order that they will make positive, responsible choices about themselves and the way they live their lives.

### **The relationship of RSE to SPHE**

- Currently, SPHE is part of the Junior and Transition Years timetables.
- One class per week in First and Transition Years is devoted to the subject and it forms part of a 30 minute Form Class in Second and Third Years.
- There is continued emphasis on health and well-being, responsibility and decision-making.
- RSE is mainly taught within the context of RE class from First to Sixth Year.

## **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 the students.
- The Education Act 1988 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 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.

## **Relationship to Characteristic Spirit of the School**

- The RSE policy acknowledges the importance of SPHE/RSE being taught in the context of a whole school climate that is inclusive and respectful.
- The RSE policy reflects the educational philosophy of the trustees, the Marist Fathers, and the core values and ethos of the school, as outlined in the school's mission statement below :

### **Mission Statement**

St. Mary's College is a Catholic Co-educational Secondary School under the patronage of the Marist Fathers. The primary aim of this school, through its spiritual and humanistic endeavours, is to promote and develop a sense of community where those entrusted to its care can be brought to the fullness of their human potential.

The school, through its academic, pastoral and spiritual undertakings strives to provide for the holistic development and welfare of each of the students in its care.

- Spiritual, moral and ethical issues will arise when teaching RSE. The school's RSE policy guides 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, contraception, sexually transmitted infections etc. This can be done within the context in which teaching of the programme is informed by the school 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.

## **Goals/Objectives**

- The policy ensures clarity and consensus on how RSE is taught in the school.
- It articulates the relationship of RSE to SPHE.
- It articulates the aims of the RSE programme.
- It clarifies 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 ensures that teachers, parents/guardians and students understand how the teaching of RSE is linked to the school ethos.
- It provides information on the practicalities of delivering the programme.

## **RSE Policy - Key Measures (content of policy)**

### **A. Provision of Training and Staff Development**

- SPHE co-ordinator has been provided
- Teachers are usually released to attend SPHE and RSE training
- Teachers are not usually consulted prior to teaching RSE/SPHE
- Consideration is given to gender balance prior to teaching RSE to first year students.
- Teachers of RSE and SPHE have access to teaching materials.

### **B. Inclusion of Parents/Guardians**

- Parents/Guardians of 1<sup>st</sup> year students are given information in the form of a letter about RSE.

The Education Act 1998 (section 30, subsection (2)(e)) provided 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 18years, the student. Hence, parents have the 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-Guidelines for Teachers**

- **Answering Questions**

While it is important to create an environment in 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. Teachers should 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. It is important that students are made aware of the limits of confidentiality and that teachers do not give unconditional guarantees of confidentiality. Confidentiality should be respected unless a teacher feels that the child is at risk. In such a case the appropriate action should be taken in accordance with the procedures set down in the Child Protection Procedures and Guidelines for Post Primary Schools or the school's Substance Use Policy. In cases of under-age sexual activity, P10 of the Child Protection Procedures and 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.'

- **Sexual Activity**

Teachers should 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.

## **D. Practical Issues**

- SPHE is timetabled in all Junior Cycle classes.
- RSE is taught to TY, 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> Years within RE.
- Boys and girls...
- Outside speakers

## **Implementation Arrangements, Roles and Responsibilities**

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

SPHE co-ordinator: Andrea Flanagan

SPHE and form teachers: A comprehensive list of all those teaching SPHE (see appendix 1)

## **Implementation, Ratification and Communication**

This policy will be ratified by the Board of Management and becomes the agreed RSE policy of St Mary's 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.

## **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. In order that the tasks of monitoring and evaluation are effective consideration of the following may be helpful:

### **Monitoring**

The SPHE Co-ordinator will monitor policy implementation. The terms of reference are as follows: prepare a short written report for the Board of Management and staff on the implementation of the policy at key stages. At the reporting stage the Board, and in its turn, the staff, should discuss any reactions, concerns, suggestions that may arise during the course of implementation.

## **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-ordinator 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 and R.E. for all relevant students
- Where SPHE may not be timetabled, eg at Senior Cycle, 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 is aware of the policy
- 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 board of management and trustees.