

St. Mary's College Dundalk



Relationships and Sexuality Education Policy

Approved by BOM 24th October 2016

Mission Statement

St Mary's College is a Catholic secondary school under the patronage of the Marist Fathers. The primary aim of the College, 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 in accordance with the teachings of the Gospel.

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

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 / RE; it is therefore important that all teachers are familiar with the RSE policy.

The policy will apply to College 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.
- Circulars M4/95 and M20/96 request schools to commence a process of RSE policy development.
- Section 4 of the Rules and Programme for Secondary Schools requires them to have an agreed policy for RSE and a suitable RSE programme in place for all students at both Junior and Senior Cycle.
- 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.

Aims of the RSE Policy

- Our RSE policy aims to build on the primary programme which strives to help young people learn, at home and in the College, 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.

Objectives of the RSE Policy

- The policy ensures clarity and consensus on how RSE is taught in the College.
- It articulates the relationship of RSE to SPHE.
- It clarifies the rights, roles and responsibilities of all within the College community, in relation to the RSE programme, with particular reference to Staff, Students, Parents / Guardians, Board of Management and Trustees.
- It ensures that Teachers, Parents / Guardians and Students understand how the teaching of RSE is linked to the College ethos.
- It provides information on the practicalities of delivering the programme.

Relationship to Characteristic Spirit of the College

- The RSE policy acknowledges the importance of SPHE / RE being taught in the context of a whole College 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 College, as outlined in the College's mission statement.
- Spiritual, moral and ethical issues will arise when teaching RSE. The College's RSE policy guides teachers in the treatment of such issues in accordance with the ethos of the College. It is important that teachers of RSE understand that their role is to express the views of the whole College 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 College ethos.
- The College 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.

The relationship of RSE to SPHE

- SPHE is part of the Junior Cycle programme. .
- At Junior Cycle, the RSE programme is part of SPHE.
- In SPHE there is continued emphasis on health and wellbeing, responsibility and decision-making.
- At Senior Cycle RSE is part of the RE Programme.

Provision of Training and Staff Development

- Teachers are usually released to attend SPHE and RSE training
- Consideration is given to gender balance prior to teaching RSE to first year students.
- Teachers of RSE and SPHE have access to teaching materials.

Inclusion of Parents / Guardians

- Parents / Guardians of 1st year students are given information in the form of a letter about RSE.
- The Education Act 1998 (Sec 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 Parents / Guardians or in the case of a student who has reached the age of 18 years. They have the right to opt their child out of the sensitive issues in RSE if they wish to do so.
- The College requires Parents / Guardians to put their request in writing.

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 College.

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.

Sexual Activity

- Teachers should inform young people on the legal 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.
- In cases of under-age sexual activity, P10 of the Child Protection Procedures and Guidelines for Post Primary Schools (2011) 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 / Guardians

Child Protection / Designated Liaison Person

In St Mary's College the Designated Liaison Person is the Principal Mr. Con McGinley. The Deputy Designated Liaison Person is Ms. Anita Morgan

Reviewing and evaluating the policy

This Policy will be reviewed and evaluated when deemed necessary 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.

Signed: *Diarmuid Ó Murchú*

Chairperson, Board of Management, St. Mary's College

Dated: 24th October 2016