

St. Mary's College Dundalk



Relationships and Sexuality Education Policy

Approved by BOM December 2021

Introduction

St. Mary's College is a Voluntary Catholic Secondary School for boys and girls, operating under the Trusteeship of the Marist Fathers. As such it supports the religious and educational philosophy of its founder, Fr. Jean-Claude Colin.

St Mary's College was the first foundation of the Society of Mary in Ireland and the first Secondary School for boys in Dundalk. Founded in 1861, 26 students enrolled on the first day. The site for the new College was 'Church Hill House'. The Priest responsible for the initial preparations of the College was Fr. Crouzet, a young French Marist Priest. At one time the College consisted of a Primary School and a Secondary School for boys, which catered for both boarding and day students. Many changes have taken place down through the years. In 1983 the boarding section of the College was closed, followed in 1987 by the closure of the Primary School. In 1989 the first lay Principal was appointed and in 1990 the College opened its doors to girls.

Since opening there have been many extensions to the original Church Hill House and additions to the buildings to meet the changing needs of the student body. The college is set in extensive grounds and boasts a number of specialist rooms and facilities.

At present St Mary's College has an enrolment of 815 pupils.

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, it is therefore important that all teachers are familiar with the RSE policy.

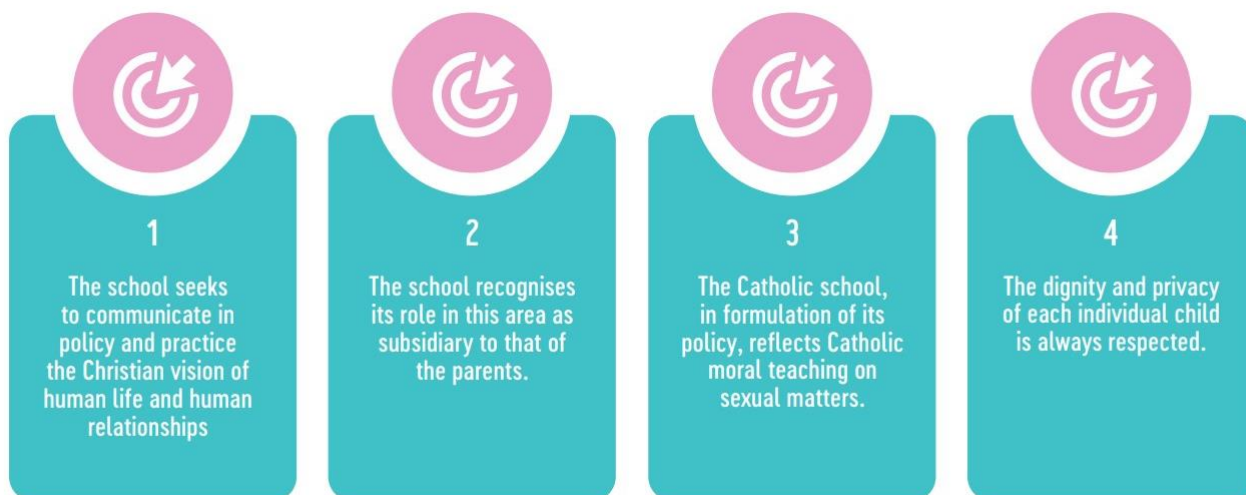
The policy will apply to College staff, students, Board of Management, Parents / Guardians, visiting speakers and external facilitators.



Rationale

- The Education Act (1998) states that: A recognised school shall promote the moral, spiritual, social and personal development of students and provide health education for them, in consultation with their parents, having regard to the characteristic spirit of the school.
- St Mary's College's Policy on Relationships and Sexuality Education supports the Marist vision for educating young people. As outlined in "Relationships and Sexuality Education: Guidance for Catholic Post Primary Schools: Republic of Ireland", schools are called to be safe spaces for all students and a safe school is one that affirms the value of every individual. Students of St Mary's College should be supported in reaching a deep appreciation for themselves and the wonder and beauty of their sexual identity and be provided with material and space that helps them to consider the physical, emotional, mental, spiritual and moral implications of their behaviour towards one another.
- While our RSE Programme is set within a clear framework of Christian values, teachers delivering the programme need to acknowledge that not all families represented in the College come from Christian perspectives and therefore ensuring that the values of inclusivity, profound respect and care for all students in discussions and methodologies is paramount.
- 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.
- Circular 0023/2010 states that young people flourish in an environment where there is a whole-school approach to the holistic growth of students and where there is a shared belief in their potential for development, learning and wellbeing.
- 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. The College community needs to reflect on how to provide for the complex needs of our students in relationships and sexuality education.
- 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.
- Circulars M4/95 and M20/96 requested 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.
- Following a period of school closures, it is necessary to audit, review and implement a robust RSE programme to bridge any gaps in knowledge and understanding in an age appropriate strategic manner.



Policy Formation and Consultation Process

16.11.21 Consultation meeting with teachers of SPHE, RE and RSE.

22.11.21 Working Group for RSE planned audit of student knowledge and understanding of RSE topics

23.11.21. Parents' Council consultation and review of RSE Policy

Following audit, student council consulted and reviewed policy in relation to students' needs

How this policy was drawn up

Who was involved?

How & when it will be reviewed.

How it will be disseminated

Who will be the named person to receive feedback?

Parents:

Students:

Teachers:

Board of Management:

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 personal thoughts, values, attitudes and feelings about relationships.
- To develop an understanding of the different types of relationships, what is important in them and the skills to enhance relationships
- Provide empathy with others who have different cultural values, attitudes and beliefs about family relationships, sex and sexuality
- Develop students' knowledge, understanding and skills in support of sexual and reproductive health
- Develop students' understanding of sexuality and sexual orientation and the importance of an inclusive environment
- Provide opportunities for students to learn about relationships and sexuality in a ways that support them to think and act in a moral, caring and responsible way
- Develop personal and interpersonal skills which support beginning, maintaining and ending relationships
- Develop skills for coping with peer pressure, conflict and threats to personal safety
- 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.

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 a stand-alone module timetabled during RE and during Social Education in LCA

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 Parent/Guardians

- The RSE Policy and programme will be posted on website and disseminated through the College Compass App
- Parents will be invited to peruse the policy and contact the College RSE link person with any observations/concerns.
- Parents will be notified, through the College Compass App, of the commencement of the RSE Programme in order to support their child's learning at home
- 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. Parents have the right to opt their child out of the sensitive issues in RSE if they wish to do so. **Parents will be invited to make this request in writing.**
- Parents are made aware through this policy of the RSE Parent Booklet for RSE: [Relationship and Sexuality Education - Going Forward Together \(File Format PDF 265KB\) \(sexualwellbeing.ie\)](#)
- Parents may address any concerns to the RSE link person named in this document.

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

Family Planning

- The post-primary RSE Curriculum Guidelines state that the subject of family planning should be covered within the Senior Cycle RSE programme.
- The RSE programme requires that young people are provided with information about methods of contraception, but consideration needs to be given by the policy committee to the moral and values framework within which it is taught. Schools can use their discretion with regard to the age at which students receive any aspect of the RSE programme e.g. a school might decide to provide some information on contraception to students earlier than Senior Cycle.

Homosexuality

- The post-primary RSE Curriculum Guidelines include the subject of sexual orientation. RSE training courses delivered by the SPHE Support Service provide teachers with further materials. A school may decide the topic needs to be addressed before Senior Cycle, especially if homophobic bullying is an issue.
- The [Equal Status Act, 2000](#) and the [Equality Act, 2004](#) prohibit discrimination across nine grounds, including sexual orientation. Consideration needs to be given to the messages that are conveyed if the subject of homosexuality is not discussed in a clear and open way in schools. However, teachers will need guidance from the policy committee on the parameters within which such a discussion will take place.

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.

Links to Other Policies & Subjects

Links to Other School Policies

To ensure consistency in terms of learning for life and work all school policies should strive to be consistent and cohesive within the framework of the overall school plan. The RSE policy is developed in this context and shares links with the following policies:

- Teaching and Learning Policy
- Child Protection/Safeguarding Children
- Anti-bullying policy.
- Religious Education Policy
- Code of Behaviour
- Acceptable Use Policy
- Additional Educational Needs Policy
- Substance Use Policy

Links to Other School Subjects

In so far as possible RSE will be taught in a cross-curricular way. The following subject areas contribute to a cross-curricular approach:

- Home Economics
- Physical Education
- Religious Education
- Science
- English
- Music
- Art

Additional Educational Needs

St Mary's College seeks to honour

- individuals' giftedness and that seeks to be inclusive, it is essential that a school's RSE policy attends to those students with additional education needs.
- the right of all students, male and female, have a right to an education which adequately prepares them for adult life, regardless of their age, gender, culture, sexual orientation, disability status, religion or social class

- Teachers of students with AEN will make careful and appropriate plans for RSE for the AEN student in their class. Consideration may be given to ensuring students with AEN are provided with a more personalised, individual educational intervention in the area of RSE, when and as appropriate and in accordance with his/her Student Support Plan.
- It is recognised that students with additional education needs are more vulnerable to all forms of abuse and exploitation. Teachers must try to ensure that they develop the knowledge, understanding and skills of students to enable them to:
 - identify inappropriate and exploitative behaviour
 - help develop their own prevention strategies to stay safe
 - recognise and build healthy relationships
 - know who they can talk to

Creating A Safe Space for Sensitive Topics

1. Teach the fundamental principle of respect for human person
2. Challenge any discriminatory remarks
3. Deal firmly with any acts of bullying, including homophobic, transphobic and cyberbullying
4. Follow school procedures for accessing outside support for any student requiring additional help
5. Support parents who may want to speak to someone at the school about one or more of these issues
6. Arrange a meeting with the parents and relevant support agencies to consider any appropriate measures of support that may be needed to ensure the needs of the student are met
7. Follow school procedures for monitoring the wellbeing of students
8. Teacher should use professional judgement in answering questions of a really sensitive nature. Appropriate limits may need to be set. Parents can be empowered to respond to questions deemed inappropriate to be discussed at a school level.

Roles and Responsibilities

Trustees and Board of Management

St Mary's College Board of Management fosters and supports the development of our RSE Policy and programme by collaborating with teachers and parents. The Board will facilitate the consultative process, examine and approve the completed policy and programme prior to its implementation and review the policy at regular intervals.

At all times the Board of Management seek to accommodate and be sensitive to the religious and cultural beliefs of both teachers and parents while fulfilling their responsibility to ensure the availability of appropriate and educationally excellent RSE for all young people.

Principal and Senior Management Team

- As with all subject areas, it is the role of the Principal to make possible a coherent and coordinated approach to RSE in keeping with the ethos of the school.
- Communicating the vision of the human person and human relationships at the heart of a Catholic school's provision for RSE is a key responsibility of the Principal and his senior management team.
- The Deputy Principals support the work of the Principal.
- The Principal and Senior Management Team coordinate the school's approach to RSE and consult the Board of Management, staff, parents and health professionals as appropriate.

RSE Coordinator

- The RSE coordinator is a member of staff appointed to be responsible for coordinating all issues related to the RSE policy, the curriculum, and the programme designed for the students. It is essential that the coordinator is respectful and committed to the school's ethos and the aims and direction of RSE within the school. The RSE coordinator's role may include:
 - ensuring that the programme is taught effectively and is appropriate to the age and maturity of the students;
 - liaising with the Board of Management as requested and with the Principal, the Deputy Principal, the Student Support Team, all staff, parents and, educational visitors and students on RSE matters;
 - establishing a cross-curricular team to include the Special Needs Coordinator, members of the Student Support Team, all teachers teaching RSE and other teachers delivering relevant RSE-related material/content in other subject areas;
 - attending in-service training and disseminating appropriate information to other staff members;

- seeking opportunities to involve students, as appropriate in terms of the policy development, programme delivery and policy and programme review. This may include the student council or school prefects and initiating age-appropriate classroom discussion;
- upholding and ensuring that the programme is taught in accordance with the school's Catholic ethos;

RSE Working Group

- Teachers involved in delivering the RSE Programme, student representatives (Student Council), parent representatives (Parents' Council) the SENCO, a member of the Student Support Team and a member of the Senior Management Team will collaborate to form and review the RSE Policy.

Ms Pippa Brady

Ms Rosie Reynolds

Ms Charlene Matheison

Ms Silin Murphy

Mr Tadhg Malone

Teaching Staff

- The staff provide an obvious link in terms of communicating the content of RSE and the relevant programme, possibly through curriculum planning meetings and by other means. Teachers are of central importance in terms of any review of RSE provision. They are also key to identifying their own needs around ongoing professional development in their RSE work.

Chaplain

- The College Chaplains will support the teaching of RSE where possible
- meet with the coordinator to discuss the RSE programme and its delivery in school
- witness to Gospel values

Student Voice

- Students will be consulted in the creation of the policy and in the identification of student needs in the area of RSE. Suggested methods to ascertain student voice include
 - Student surveys
 - age appropriate discussion at Student Council meetings
 - Student Question boxes in SPHE/RSE class

Child Protection / Designated Liaison Person

In St Mary's College the Designated Liaison Person is the Principal **Mr. Alan Craven**.

The Deputy Designated Liaison Person is **Ms. Anita White**.

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: 

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

Dated: 8th December 2021.

Appendix 1: Outline of RSE Programme from First to Sixth Year.		
Year	Modules	Outcomes
First Year	• Me as unique and different • Friendship • Changes at adolescence • The reproductive system • Images of male and female • Respecting myself and others	Students will have • an appreciation of their personal talents and those of others • explored some aspects of sex stereotyping • a knowledge of the physical, emotional and psychological changes related to adolescence • a clear understanding of the male and female reproductive systems • a sensitivity to the need for respect for one's own sexuality and the sexuality of others.
Second Year	• From conception to birth • Recognising and expressing feelings and emotions • Peer pressure and other influences • Managing relationships • Making responsible decisions • Health and personal safety	Students will • have a knowledge of the developmental stages from conception to birth • have a heightened awareness of the emotional aspects of a range of relationships • have analysed some of the influences that shape views of sexuality • have developed their skills for communicating in relationships • have further developed their decision-making skills

		• be aware of the potential for danger in forming new relationships • have a basic knowledge of sexually transmitted disease • have a knowledge of some help agencies and their role
Third Year	• Body image • Where am I now? • Relationships: what's important? • The three R's: respect, rights, and responsibilities • Conflict	Students will • Have practiced communication skills and skills for enhancing self-esteem • have reviewed their understanding of the adolescent stage of human growth and development • have identified and recognised the importance of respect, rights and responsibilities in relationships • be aware of the causes of conflict in relationships • be prepared to deal with such situations of conflict. • Understand the issue of consent
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Fifth Year	• Healthy Friendships • Influence of Self Esteem on Relationships • Sex and Values • Decision Making • Relationships, Rights and Responsibilities • Human Reproduction and Fertility • Teenage Crisis Pregnacny • Family Planning. • Sexually Transmitted Infections • Evaluation	Students will • Be aware of the feelings and emotions associated with a variety of relationships Be more aware of how their sense of themselves can be influenced by their peers • Have practiced the skill of positive self-talk • Have reflected on beliefs and attitudes about sex • Have considered the consequences of being sexually active • Be more aware of the development of physical and emotional intimacy have reflected on the nature of love and attraction • have reflected on appropriate stages for various levels of physical intimacy e.g. kissing, touching, making love • Revise and understand the human reproductive systems • Understand how conception takes place • Understand male and female fertility • Be aware of related health issues

		• Reflect on the issues surrounding an unplanned pregnancy for young people • Be aware of the supports and services available to someone with an unplanned pregnancy • have explored the concept of choice and responsible planning in sexual relationships • have a greater understanding of the range of contraceptives available and some of their advantages and disadvantages • Understand what an STI is, the causes, transmission routes and treatments of a range of STI's • Have a better understanding of STI transmission risks associated with sexual activity
Leaving Cert Applied Year 1	• Exploring Values and Attitudes in relating to others • Values and Attitudes in intimate relationships • Exploring what Love is • Sex and Sexuality • Sexual Orientation • Marriage • Contraception • Sex Talk: Fact vs Fiction • Sexual Harassment • Sexual Assault • Rape • Sexually Transmitted Infections	Students will • identify a range of influences on behaviour and relationships and develop an awareness of the ways in which behaviour is influenced by gender expectations • look critically at ways in which the media promote sex-role stereotyping and assess how this influences behaviour • recognise the changing nature of friendship and relationships and understand the needs which relationships meet in peoples' lives • explain the consequences of sexual activity and the importance of sexual responsibility • explain the functions of the reproductive organs and the process of reproduction using appropriate vocabulary • list the different kinds of sexually transmitted diseases, including AIDS, and the ways in which they are transmitted • clarify their attitudes towards a person who is suffering from AIDS and understand their needs and difficulties.
Sixth Year	• Exploring Values and Attitudes in relating to others • Values and Attitudes in intimate relationships • Exploring what Love is	Students will Recap on modules covered in Fifth Year • recognize and understand the influence of others (individuals, society and media) on their values and attitudes towards sex and sexuality. • Be able to differentiate between affection, love and infatuation

	• Sex and Sexuality • Sexual Orientation • Marriage • Contraception • Sex Talk: Fact vs Fiction • Sexual Harassment • Sexual Assault • Rape • Sexually Transmitted Infections	• Be able to define sexuality and understand the role sexual activity plays in contributing to one's sexuality • Be familiar with appropriate language around discussing a person's sexual orientation • Understand the concepts of respect, inclusion and equality when discussing the topic of Sexual orientation. • Recap on previously covered lessons on reproduction and reproductive health. • Differentiate between sexual myths and facts in relation to sexual health, family planning and sexual activity. • Know and understand how STI's are contracted, how to prevent such infections and be aware of support structures in their area in relation to sexual health. • Consolidate their learning through case-studies, role play and questionnaires. • Understand the issues of consent, rape, harassment and assault. • Know how to stay safe and where to seek help.
Leaving Cert Applied Year 2	• Readiness for Relationships • Family relationships • Family Planning • Responsibility of Parenthood • Conflict in Relationships • Abuse • Sexual Harassment • Sexual Assault • Rape • Consent • Crisis Support.	1. identify the range and level of relationships in which they are involved and list the factors which help or hinder a good relationship 2. understand and describe the many forms that family life can take and identify the needs that families meet for each of the individuals involved 3. assess their own readiness for parenthood and family life and understand the factors influencing decisions about having children 4. describe the responsibilities of parents and the needs that children have at various stages e.g. pregnancy, infancy, early childhood, school-going etc. 5. identify some of the problems which might occur in family life and the effects such problems have on family members 6. Give examples of ways of dealing with common family conflict situations 7. discuss attitudes to and develop understanding of sexual orientation. 7. explain the nature and meaning of sexual harassment and learn skills to deal effectively with this problem

		8. understand the nature of rape, sexual abuse and sexual assault, the effects of such assaults on the victim, and where help can be sought in the case of such an event occurring 9. identify and list the agencies that exist to provide support and advice in crisis situations, and practice ways of accessing such help.
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Appendix 2: Resources for Teaching RSE