



St Francis College

Relationships and Sexuality Education Policy Statement 2019 (Draft)

Introduction

The Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) Policy of St Francis College is a written statement of the aims of the RSE programme, the relationship of RSE to SPHE, and the organisation and management of RSE within the school. The RSE policy should be read in conjunction with the school's policies on Child Safeguarding, SPHE, Additional Educational Needs, Anti-Bullying and the Code of Behaviour. The policy is published on the school website and is available from the school office on request.

Rationale - Why is it necessary to devise a policy on RSE?

Aspects of contemporary life point to the need for a soundly based Relationships and Sexuality Education programme in the formal education system. The policy is required to bring clarity and consensus in relation to the content and delivery of the RSE programme at St Francis College. Schools have an obligation to teach Senior Cycle RSE (6 classes a year), even in the absence of a timetabled SPHE class; section 8.4.1 of the *Child Protection Procedures (2017)* states: *all post-primary schools are also required to have a Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) programme at Senior Cycle*. The Board of Management of St Francis College recognises their responsibility to ensure that an RSE programme is taught throughout Junior and Senior Cycle. The RSE policy was developed in consultation with staff, students, parents/guardians, principal and board of management and it complies with legislative requirements.

Scope

The policy will apply to aspects of teaching and learning about relationships and sexuality. The policy will apply to school staff, students, board of management, parents/guardians, visiting speakers and external facilitators.

School Philosophy on RSE

St Francis College, as a Capuchin Franciscan College, strives for excellence in the provision of intellectual, physical, social and moral education. Relationships and Sexuality Education in St Francis College is grounded in the values espoused by the school in its mission statement and carried out in its day to day living. We provide a rich and diverse curricular and co-curricular programme in order to cater for the needs of each individual student. We aim to provide an environment which promotes in a harmonious manner the physical, academic, spiritual, social and moral growth of the whole person. We respect and value all of creation but particularly the dignity of each individual within the college community. We strive to fulfil this mission in a spirit of collaboration and partnership between pupils, parents, teachers, trustees, management and the community at large.



Definition of Relationship and Sexuality Education

Relationship and Sexuality Education is a developmental process through which pupils acquire knowledge and understanding about sexual identity and relationships. It encourages pupils to make positive, responsible choices about themselves and their relationships with others.

RSE and the school ethos

The RSE programme reflects the educational philosophy of the trustees, and the core values and Catholic ethos of the school. It is cognisant of the relevant legislation, DES requirements and best practice guidelines as set out in Department circulars.¹

Aims/Objectives:

The RSE programme seeks:

- To help young people understand and develop friendships and relationships.
- To promote an understanding of sexuality.
- To promote a positive attitude towards one's own sexuality and in one's relationship with others.
- To promote knowledge of and respect for reproduction.
- To enable young people to develop attitudes and values concerning their sexuality in a moral, spiritual and social framework.
- To enable students to develop the skills for coping with peer pressure, conflicts and threats to personal safety.

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

Management and organisation of RSE

Practical arrangements

Circular M11/03

All second level schools must timetable Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) as part of the Junior Cycle Core Curriculum from September 2003; it is required that RSE is taught as an integral component of SPHE. The time allocation recommended is the equivalent of one class period per week (or 70 hours per annum). More recently, an SPHE Short Course (2015) was developed by the NCCA and introduced as part of a new Junior Cycle. RSE is integrated across a number of stands and learning outcomes within this course. Within the context of developing a Junior Cycle Wellbeing programme, schools now have scope to allocate additional time to SPHE/RSE within the 400-hour programme.

SPHE is not a timetabled class for Senior Cycle students but RSE is delivered, where appropriate, at Senior Religious Education timetabled times. Arrangements

¹ *Education Act (1998), Wellbeing Guidelines for Post-Primary Schools (2016), Children First Act (2017), Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools (2017), Circular Letters M4/95, M20/96, 37/00, 48/00, M11/03, M27/08, 0037/2010, 0023/2010, 0065/2011, 0015/2016, 0081/2017*



regarding the teaching of the programme and the deployment of staff will be made by the principal in consultation with the teaching staff.

Parents/Guardians Rights and Responsibilities

Parents/guardians are the primary educators of their children and their role in education concerning relationships and sexuality is crucial; they know the civic, moral, personal and religious values they wish to pass to them and the school RSE Programme acts as a support only to parents. The RSE programme at St Francis College, planned in consultation with parents, reflects these values. Parents will be provided with opportunities to see any materials, including websites and DVDs, which will be used in the classroom as part of the RSE programme.

1. Parents retain the right to withdraw their children from classes*. **If a parent wishes to withdraw his/her child from the RSE lesson/s, that wish must be put in writing and presented to the principal. This letter must indicate that the parent/guardian is taking full responsibility for this aspect of education themselves. This letter will then be filed in the pupil's record.** There is a section in the student's journal which draws parent's attention to the matter.

2. However, parents who opt to withdraw their children from discrete RSE lessons should be aware that the teacher or other pupils may use language from the RSE lessons in other areas of the curriculum, in keeping with the overall climate and atmosphere of the school. Parents should also be aware that material taught during the RSE programme may be discussed by the children outside class time, and the staff will have no control over what aspects of the information are passed on. Furthermore, television, videos, advertising, magazines, computers and of course friends are sources of information and influence about relationships and sexuality.

***Note: The Education Act 1998 provides that a student is not required to attend instruction in any subject which is contrary to the conscience of the parents or in the case of a student who has reached the age of 18, the student. Hence, parents /guardians have a right to opt their child out of the sensitive issues in RSE if they wish to do so. Parents do not have to give reasons for withdrawal. Once a parent's/guardian's request to withdraw is made, that request must be complied with until revoked by the parent.**

Relationships and Sexuality Education within Social Personal and Health Education

The Draft Guidelines for RSE (NCCA, June 1995, 1.2) state that Social Personal and Health Education is "spiral, developmental in nature and age appropriate in content and methodology". The RSE programme is designed to follow this principle and pattern. Apart from the specific lessons of RSE, SPHE covers other areas which would be pertinent to the development of a healthy attitude to sexuality in oneself and one's relationship with others. The content of the school's SPHE programme includes a wide range of topics such as self-esteem, self-identity, assertiveness, motivation, effective communication, decision-making skills, bullying, healthy eating,



hygiene and personal safety; all of which can contribute to the effectiveness of the RSE programme. In this school we teach aspects of RSE in any subject in which they form part of the syllabus as laid down by the Department of Education and Skills.

Topics for RSE at Junior Cycle include:

Human Growth and Development

- an understanding of physical and emotional changes at puberty.
- fertility, conception, pregnancy and birth.
- sexually transmitted infections.
- an awareness of the consequences and implications of sexual activity.

Human Sexuality

- understanding and respecting what it is to be male or female.
- an appreciation of the roles of women and men in society.
- awareness of discrimination.
- personal safety.
- sexual orientation.

Human Relationships

- developing skills regarding making and maintaining good relationships and friendships.
- family roles and responsibilities.
- group behaviour and resolving conflict.
- an understanding of how peer pressure works.

Topics for RSE at Senior Cycle include:

Human Growth and Development

- fertility and family planning.
- a deeper understanding of pregnancy and the developing foetus.

Human sexuality

- treating women and men with equal respect.
- sexual harassment.
- sexual abuse, rape, legal right: voluntary and statutory agencies.
- making moral and healthy choices regarding sexual activity.



Human relationships

- an awareness of what constitutes a loving relationship.
- the long-term commitment involved in marriage.
- parenting and family life.

Offering advice

The school's function is to provide a general education about sexual matters and issues, and not to offer individual advice, information or counselling on aspects of sexual behaviour and contraception. However, sources of professional information and advice will be identified when appropriate. Teachers may provide students with information about where, and from whom they can receive confidential sexual advice and treatment (e.g. their doctor or other agency).

Explicit Questions

It may not be appropriate to deal with some explicit questions in class. Teachers may choose to say that it is not appropriate to deal with that question at this time. If a teacher becomes concerned about a matter that has been raised he/she should seek advice from the Principal. When deciding whether or not to answer questions the teacher should consider the age and readiness of the students, the SPHE/RSE programme content, the ethos of the school and the RSE policy.

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. Confidentiality should be respected unless a teacher becomes aware that a student is at risk, in which case the appropriate action should be taken i.e. follow the procedures set down in the *Children First: National Guidelines for the Protection and Welfare of Children* (2017). It is important that the students must be made aware of the limits of confidentiality and that teachers do not give unconditional guarantees of confidentiality. Teachers may refer back to the ground rules agreed at the start of their SPHE programme. Students must be aware that any incident may be conveyed to the principal and possibly the parents /guardian if the principal decides that it is in the best interests of the child. Teachers will inform students when the content of a conversation can no longer be kept confidential.

Sexual Activity

It is advisable for teachers to give young people information on the age of consent which, following the passage of the Criminal Law (Sexual Offences) Act, 2017, is 17 years of age for both males and females.

Sexual Orientation/Identity

Teachers do not promote any one lifestyle as the only acceptable one for society and therefore it is inevitable and natural that sexuality/identity will be discussed during the RSE programme. One of the many advantages of exploring issues concerning sexuality/identity is the opportunity to correct false ideas, assumptions and address



prejudice. Discussion of sexuality/identity should be appropriate to the age of the students. The Equal Status Act 2000 and the Equality Act 2004 prohibit discrimination across nine grounds, including sexual orientation.

Contraception

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

Additional Education Needs

Students with additional education needs may need more help than others in coping with the physical and emotional aspects of growing up. They may also need more help in learning what sorts of behaviour are and are not acceptable, and in being warned and prepared against abuse by others.

Therefore, provision for children with additional needs in RSE class will be catered for with this in mind.

- Children who receive resource hours may be withdrawn and taught differentiated subject material by a resource teacher.
- RSE provision for Pupils with Additional Educational Needs will be based on what the pupils need to know.
- The content will be negotiated with pupils' own parents/carers in conjunction with the SEN/ Resource Teacher.

Visiting Speakers

Visiting speakers can play a valuable role in supplementing, complementing and supporting the work of the teacher. Speakers invited to address topics relating to RSE will be informed of the RSE Policy, the Child Protection Policy and the school ethos in advance of their visit to the school. They will be vetted in accordance with the school's Vetting Policy. The subject teacher will liaise closely with the visiting speaker and the content of the presentation will be agreed in advance. The Class SPHE teacher will always remain in class and take a central role while a speaker is present (DES circular 0023/2010)

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.

Resources include:

www.sphe.ie

RSE Curriculum Guidelines

RSE Policy Booklet

RSE Parent Booklet

Junior Cycle RSE Resource Materials

Senior Cycle Resource Materials

www.healthpromotion.ie

<https://b4udecide.ie/parents/rse-in-schools/>

TRUST Talking Relationships Understanding Sexuality Training

Supports

Guidance Counsellor, Chaplain, Pastoral Care Team, Special Needs Assistant, Parents Association, Student Council, Class Prefects, Mentors, Awards, whole school events and activities

Monitoring, evaluating and reviewing the RSE Programme:

We are committed to monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of this programme through:

- a) Pupil feedback;
- b) Staff review and feedback;
- c) Parental feedback.

This policy will be reviewed as necessary and particularly to comply with any relevant legislative changes.



Policy adopted by the board of management

Signed:

Chairperson, Board of Management

Date:



If you wish to submit feedback re the RSE Policy, please email rsepolicy@stfranciscollege.ie to request a password protected feedback form.