



St. Patrick's College
Lacken Cross, Killala - Co. Mayo

RSE Policy

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1. INTRODUCTION AND RATIONALE

1.1 Junior Cycle and Senior Cycle RSE

Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) is a lifelong process of acquiring knowledge and understanding and of developing attitudes, beliefs and values about sexual identity, relationships and intimacy. RSE is a developmental process through experiential learning in which students participate to help cultivate a healthy attitude towards themselves and others, particularly in the area of sexuality and relationships.

RSE will provide structured opportunities for students 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, spiritual and social framework. This approach gives opportunities to young people to learn about relationships and sexuality in ways that help them think and act in a moral, caring and responsible manner.

1.2 Aims of Relationships and Sexuality Education

The aims of RSE are:

- To help young people understand and develop friendships and relationships.
- To promote an understanding of sexuality.
- To promote 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 the moral, spiritual and social framework.

RSE is located in the overall framework of Social Personal and Health Education (SPHE). SPHE provides students with a unique opportunity to develop the skills and competence to learn about themselves and to care for themselves and others and to make informed decisions about their health, personal lives and social development.

SPHE 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. SPHE deals with many issues such as self-esteem, assertiveness, communication and decision-making skills – all of which can contribute to the effectiveness of the RSE programme.

1.3 Junior Cycle Wellbeing and RSE

Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) is an integral part of Junior Cycle SPHE and the Wellbeing curriculum. Its aim is to help young people 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, spiritual and social framework'.

At this age, students are exposed to a lot of information about sex, sexuality and relationships from a variety of sources. RSE provides the context within which students can learn about the physical, social and emotional and moral issues related to relationships, sexual health, sexuality and gender identity including where to source reliable information.

1.4 Circulars

Circular 0037/2010 states all second level schools must develop a school policy in regard to RSE and implement a programme in this area as an element of SPHE at Junior Cycle, and as an RSE programme in Senior Cycle, even in the absence of a timetabled SPHE class.

Schools are required to teach all aspects of the RSE programme, elements of the programme cannot be omitted on the grounds of school ethos. All aspects of the programme can and should be taught within the ethos and value system of the school as expressed in the RSE policy. The Board of Management have a responsibility to ensure RSE is made available to all students.

Circular 0015/2017 states the new area of learning entitled Wellbeing will be introduced for First Years from September 2017. A key component of this area of learning is Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE), including Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE).

2. Scope

The RSE policy applies to all aspects of teaching and learning about relationships and sexuality. RSE is a structured module within the SPHE programme at Junior Cycle and Religious Education at Senior Cycle.

In order to be effective, the RSE module in St Patrick's College, Lacken Cross must be supported in a school climate that is marked by gender, equity and a healthy respect for sexuality. Information and discussion regarding RSE can also take place in other classes. The RSE module is supported by the wider curriculum in such areas as Science, Home

Economics, Physical Education and Civic, Social, Political Education. It is therefore important that all teachers are familiar with the RSE policy.

This policy applies to school staff, students, Board of Management, parents/guardians, visiting speakers, external facilitators and outside agencies.

3. Relationship to the Ethos and Mission of the School

As stated in our school's Mission Statement;

We believe we can make a difference by providing quality education to our students in a caring and respectful environment.

We value respect, fair play and everyone's right to be himself or herself.

We aim to help our students to develop a sense of their own unique worth, to become their best selves and to respect the rights of others.

We strive for good relationships between our students, our staff and our parents.

We educate our students not only for now but for life.

This statement reflects the school's commitment to the learning and personal growth of our students. The aims of RSE contribute to the overall ethos of St Patrick's College, Lacken Cross in promoting the holistic development of our students. All aspects of the RSE curriculum will be taught. Teachers of RSE will facilitate students in discussing a range of views in relation to topics within the RSE programme, where appropriate.

4. OBJECTIVES

The RSE Policy will:

- Ensure clarity and consensus on how RSE is taught in St Patrick's College, Lacken Cross.
- Provide information on the practicalities of delivering the programme.
- Clarify 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, and the Board of Management.
- Ensure that teachers, parents and students understand how the RSE programme is linked to the ethos of St Patrick's College, Lacken Cross.

5. KEY MEASURES

5.1 Provision of Training and Staff Development

The value placed on SPHE by the school will be evident by the commitment on the part of management to developing a core of trained SPHE teachers preferably gender balanced and to appointing an SPHE co-ordinator. SPHE is enhanced when the appointment of teachers to the subject has been negotiated in advance of timetabling.

In-career development is an integral part of this programme. Management is responsible for responding to the relevant expressed and perceived training needs of SPHE teachers and whole staff.

All SPHE teachers are encouraged to attend RSE in-service training when available and will be provided with access to resources including the following;

- SPHE Junior Certificate Syllabus and Guidelines.
- Junior Cycle Wellbeing Guidelines.
- RSE Junior Cycle Resource Materials Book.
- RSE Senior Cycle Resource Materials Book.
- HSE leaflets and DVDs – Including Busy Bodies, contraception and STI leaflets and DVDs.
- Stand Up Belong To resources.
- Lockers.

This list is not exhaustive.

6. Inclusion of Parents

The school accepts that it is in the interests of all parents that their child/children grow up in a healthy and mature fashion. The school will strive to keep parents informed of the contents of the RSE programme.

The RSE Policy is available on the school website and on request at the school. Notifications regarding reviews are also available on the school website. Parents of incoming first years are informed of the availability of the RSE Policy along with other relevant policies on the school website.

The involvement of parents at the core of RSE gives it extra impetus, depth and validity and from time to time training and/or input and development opportunities will be offered to parents in certain aspects of RSE.

The Parent's Association is involved in reviews of the RSE Policy. Parents are made aware of HSE materials such as the 'You Can talk To Me' DVD and 'Advice for Mams and Dads' leaflet when they attend Year Head Parents Information Evenings or contact the school for information. Parents of first year students will also be provided with copies of 'The Shona Handbook for Girls' and 'Making the 'Big Talk' many small Talks'

Furthermore, parents will be informed when R.S.E. modules are being taught by letter and will have the opportunity to withdraw their child for class once they have informed the RSE teacher or the school principal.

6.1 Withdrawing Students from the RSE Programme

The Education Act [1998; section 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 eighteen years, the student. Parents/Guardians have a right therefore to withdraw their son or daughter from all or any aspect of RSE. Parents/Guardians must notify the Principal in advance of their wish to have their child withdrawn from all or part of the programme. The school may wish to ask the Parents/Guardians to put their request in writing.

Issues such as overpopulation and birth control are met in a minor way in subjects such as Geography and RE. However, as any discussion is limited and set within the context of the other subject concerned, it does not constitute part of the formal RSE Programme.

Parents/Guardians do not have to give reasons for withdrawal, but we respectfully invite them to do so – we aim to resolve misunderstandings if possible. Once a Parent's/Guardian's written request to withdraw is made, that request must be compiled with until revoked by the Parents/Guardians.

If a student is withdrawn from the lessons pertaining to the sensitive elements of the RSE Programme, Parents/Guardians must give notice in writing to the school that they are withdrawing their child. The student may be accommodated in another teacher's classroom in the school.

What we do if a request for withdrawal from the RSE Programme is made by a Parent/Guardian:

- We discuss the nature of the concerns with the student's Parents/Guardians and if appropriate, attempt to reassure them. Initially such discussion takes place at a meeting with the RSE teacher, but the Principal may become involved if necessary.

- We consider whether the programme can be amended or improved in a way that will reassure Parents/Guardians; care is taken not to undermine the integrity of the RSE Programme and the entitlement of the other students.
- We attempt to ensure that where a student is withdrawn from RSE there is no disruption to other parts of their education.
- We point out that students who have been withdrawn may be vulnerable to the observations and comments of others; therefore, we attempt to cause minimal embarrassment to the student and minimal disruption to the programme.
- We also point out that students may sometimes receive inaccurate information from their peers.
- We offer Parents/Guardians access to appropriate information and resources.

7. Ethical and Moral Considerations during RSE Class

7.1 Answering Questions

Class discussion will be of a general nature, and will not be personally directed, in accordance with the previously agreed class ground rules. Inappropriate questions will not be answered in class by a teacher, or from student to student. Teachers may not be able to answer all questions asked by students and will set appropriate limits.

Students may ask questions about issues which are not included in the curriculum, such as masturbation or abortion. Only questions directly pertinent to the lesson content will be addressed in class. Teachers will use their professional judgement on these, and all questions, guided by the age of the students, the RSE curriculum and the RSE Policy.

If a teacher becomes concerned about a matter that has been raised, they should seek advice from the Guidance Counsellor, Student Support Team, and/or the Principal.

7.2 Confidentiality

While an atmosphere of trust is a pre-requisite of RSE, the following limits of confidentiality must be observed. These limits are:

- Child abuse – physical, emotional, sexual, neglect.
- Intention to harm self or others.
- Substance misuse.
- Underage sexual intercourse.

7.3 Child Protection and Safeguarding

All SPHE and RSE teaching will be delivered in accordance with the school's Child Safeguarding Statement and the Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools (2017). Teachers will follow all mandated reporting and safeguarding responsibilities.

Any disclosure will be reported to the Designated Liaison Person in compliance with the Child Safeguarding Statement and the Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post Primary Schools 2017.

RSE teachers will inform students of the limits of confidentiality at the beginning of the year, remind them at necessary points throughout the year and where possible before making a disclosure.

7.4 Sexual Activity/Contraception/Sexually Transmitted Infections/Sexual Orientation

The pace of social change in Ireland over the last number of years has been rapid. Parents, students and teachers can experience a sense of confusion in relation to sexual mores. 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, contraception and sexually transmitted infections – however sources of professional information and advice will be identified when appropriate.

Teachers may provide pupils with education and information about where and from whom they can receive confidential sexual advice and treatment, e.g. their doctor or other suitable agency. Advice offered should not be directive and should be appropriate to the age of the pupil.

RSE classes will inform students of the age of consent which, in line with the Criminal Law (Sexual Offences) Act, 2006, is 17 years of age for both males and females.

Contraception will be dealt with in an age appropriate, open manner, looking at all sides of the issues in a non-directive way.

8. Class Organisation and Timetabling

All Junior Cycle classes, 1st, 2nd and 3rd year, are timetabled one class of SPHE a week. Senior Cycle students are also timetabled for one SPHE class per week. Students receive SPHE classes in their dedicated class tutor groups. RSE is delivered to mixed groups of students, or single sex groups if deemed necessary. This happens at the discretion of the SPHE teacher and/or the availability of cover.

8.1 Visiting Speakers

In accordance with Circular 0023/2010 visiting speakers are rarely used when teaching the RSE programme. If outside speakers are used teachers inviting these speakers must:

- Inform the Principal in advance.
- Make the speaker aware of the ethos of the school and the SPHE and RSE Policies.
- Agree the content of the presentation.
- Do preparatory and follow up work where possible.
- Remain with the class group during the visit.

9. Students with Special Educational Needs

Children with Special Educational 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.

For learning activities to be made meaningful, relevant and achievable for all students, it is important that the teacher finds ways to respond to students' diversity by using differentiated approaches and methodologies. In consultation with the Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator the following strategies will be adopted:

- Interacting and working with other students in small groups.
- Spending more time on tasks and organising the learning task into small stages.
- Language used is pitched at the students' level of understanding.
- Outlining the steps to be learned/completed in any given task.
- Posing key questions to guide students through the different stages/processes.
- Modelling task analysis by talking through the steps of a task as it is being done.
- Having short and varied tasks.
- Displaying word lists and laminated charts with pictures.


10. CROSS CURRICULAR LINKS

- Physical Education.
- Science.
- Home Economics.
- CSPE.
- Wellbeing Class.


11. Monitoring and Review

The RSE programme and policy will be reviewed and evaluated on an annual basis by the SPHE team.

The opinions of students will be included and SPHE teachers will liaise with the Student Council. The opinions of parents will also be included and SPHE teachers will liaise with the Parents Association through the principal. The opinions of management will be included and the SPHE co-ordinator will liaise with the Principal and the Board of Management.

Signed: 
Chairperson

Date: 10/12/25

Signed: 
Secretary

Date: 10/12/25

Appendices

Appendix One

Topics 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.

Appendix Two

R.S.E. forms part of the Senior Cycle S.P.H.E. Curriculum and is the second strand of the curriculum. The strand is outlined below;

Strand outline:

Within this strand students will explore the wide range of relationships that are important for their lives with a particular focus on gaining the awareness, knowledge and skills to support them in creating and nurturing respectful, caring and healthy relationships. This strand also supports students to recognise and be empowered to respond to instances of abuse or violence in relationships.

Note: Each of the learning outcomes below should be taught in a way that LGBTQ+ identities, relationships and families are fully integrated and reflected in teaching and learning, as opposed to being addressed within stand-alone lessons.

- Healthy Relationships.
- Gender.
- Abusive and violent relationships.
- Sexual Health.

