

Relationships & Sexuality Education Policy (last edited 03/05/17)

The aim of RSE in schools is to provide opportunities for children and young people to learn about relationships and sexuality in ways that help them think and act in a moral, caring and responsible way.

Revised following consultation between staff, parent representatives, Principal and Board of Management

In this policy document all references to gender are taken to be inclusive and the term 'parent' is taken to include 'guardian

Coolmine Community School is a co-educational, multidenominational school, with an enrolment of approximately 1,100 pupils who live mainly within a geographically defined Catchment area.

A. School Philosophy

'A vision is the living out of shared values' (Diggins, Doyle, Herron, '96)

Our philosophy and vision is to deliver a programme which will reflect and contribute to the objectives of the school, to the development of the student as a whole person and to the spirit of openness and tolerance which the school already fosters.

To this end we endeavour to create an environment in our school where:

- I. Love, freedom, justice, sincerity and joy find expression.
- II. All religious belief as detailed in the Deeds of Trust and Articles of Management shall be respected.
- III. The young people feel accepted and allowed to experience the exercise of appropriate responsibility
- IV. Sense of self is appreciated and fostered and differences are acknowledged and accepted.
- V. The potential of each individual, spiritual, intellectual, physical and emotional is recognised and respected. The criterion of excellence is applied.
- VI. Positive self-assessment and reflection is developed.
- VII. Staff, parents, students and other relevant members of the wider community co-operate for the common good.
- VIII. Our motto Creideamh Beo (living faith) is nurtured.

B. Definition of Relationships and Sexuality Education

R.S.E. is a developmental process through experiential learning in which pupils participate to help cultivate a healthy attitude towards themselves and others, particularly in the area of sexuality and relationships.

C. Relationships and Sexuality Education (R.S.E.) within Social Personal and Health Education (S.P.H.E.)

The R.S.E. Policy Guidelines (1997) suggest that '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 S.P.H.E./R.S.E.; it is therefore important that all teachers are familiar with the R.S.E. policy'

Apart from the specific lessons of R.S.E., S.P.H.E. covers other areas which are pertinent to the development of a healthy attitude to sexuality in oneself and one's relationship with others. S.P.H.E. deals with many issues such as self esteem, assertiveness, communication and decision making skills - all of which can contribute to the effectiveness of the R.S.E. programme.

D. Present School Provisions

- I. The school has a Social, Personal and Health Education programme, which considers the ethos and value system of the school community. It is hoped that all teachers of S.P.H.E. complete the Introduction Course to teaching S.P.H.E.

- II. The textbook 'Healthy Lifestyles' is used by all teachers of S.P.H.E. and is supplemented with a variety of resources held in the S.P.H.E. room. The teachers are responsible for designing, planning and structuring the experiential elements of the S.P.H.E. programme. The teaching methods which support experiential learning include:
- Group discussion
 - Case studies
 - Brainstorming
 - Role play
 - Art work
 - Narrative expression
 - Ice breakers
 - Debates
 - Project work
- III. It is anticipated that all students in Junior Cycle participate in S.P.H.E. class once a week. The following is an outline of the modules included for each year of the Junior Cycle programme.
- Belonging and integrating
 - Self management
 - Communication skills
 - Physical health
 - Friendship
 - Relationships and sexuality
 - Emotional health
 - Influences and decisions
 - Substance abuse
 - Personal safety
- IV. It is anticipated that students in the Senior Cycle will participate in six periods of R.S.E. Delivered in 5th year.

E. The aims of our Relationships and Sexuality Education programme

Relationships and sexuality education which is located in the overall framework of Social, Personal and Health Education, has as its specific aims:

- To help young people develop healthy friendships and relationships.
- To enable students assume responsibility for their own sexuality and relationships with others.
- To help to develop the language and communicative skills to deal with the changes that are taking place during puberty
- To promote knowledge and respect for reproduction
- To assist students in developing healthy attitudes and values towards their sexuality leading to effective social interaction and appropriate language of communication.
- To develop respect and tolerance for difference between individuals and their uniqueness.
- To assist students in understanding sexual development and identity and to explore aspects of sexuality including sex roles, stereotyping, gender issues and cultural influences on sexuality.
- To value family/home life and to appreciate the responsibilities of parenthood.

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

F. Guidelines for the management and organisation of Relationships and Sexuality Education in our school

I. Arrangements by management:

Arrangements regarding the teaching of the programme and the deployment of staff will be made by the Principal as recommended in Circular 37/10.

II. Informing Parents:

Parents are the primary educators of their children and their role in education concerning relationships and sexuality is seen by the school as very important. Letters are sent out prior to the teaching of R.S.E. classes to inform parents of the programme, and to give them the option to withdraw their child from the class should they wish to.

III. Offering Advice:

The school's function is to provide a general education about relationships and sexuality 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 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 agencies. Advice offered should not be directive and should be appropriate to the age of the pupil.

IV. 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 S.P.H.E. Co-ordinator or the Principal. When deciding whether or not to answer questions the teacher should consider the age and readiness of the students, the R.S.E. programme content, the ethos of the school and the R.S.E. policy.

V. Confidentiality:

It is school policy that in circumstances where a pupil is considered at some risk of any type of abuse or in breach of the law, the teacher must refer this immediately to the Principal as the designated liaison person. The Principal will decide whether to inform the parents and/or appropriate authorities and may arrange for counselling.

The following is also school policy:

- teachers must not promise absolute confidentiality;
- pupils must be made aware that any incident may be conveyed to the Principal and possibly to parents if the Principal decides that it is in the best interests of the pupil to notify parents;
- teachers must use their professional judgement to decide whether confidence can be maintained having heard the information;

- teachers must indicate clearly to pupils when the content of a conversation can no longer be kept confidential – if the student is putting himself/herself or someone else at risk it is then considered an unsafe situation and it is referred to the principal

The Child Protection Guidelines for Post Primary schools state in 4.1. and 4.2.1;

- 4.1.1. If a member of staff receives an allegation or has a suspicion that a child may have been abused, or is being abused, or is at risk of abuse he/she should, without delay, report the matter to the Designated Liaison Person in that school. A written record of the report should be made and placed in a secure location by the Designated Liaison Person. The need for confidentiality shall be borne in mind at all times. The supports of the school should continue to be made available to the child.
- 4.2.1 If the Designated Liaison Person is satisfied that there are reasonable grounds for the suspicion or allegation he/she should report the matter to the HSE immediately.

VI. The division between biological and non biological aspects of sex education:

The school policy is that the Science Department deals primarily with the biological aspects of reproduction.

VII. Withdrawing pupils from the R.S.E. programme:

- Relevant sections of this policy are made available to parents in the school publication entitled 'Information for Parents' together with details about the parent's right to withdraw their child from sensitive aspects of R.S.E. - parents will always be provided with a full copy of this policy following a request to do so.
- Parents do not have to give reasons for withdrawal, but we respectfully invite them to do so - sometimes we can then resolve misunderstandings. Once a parent's request to withdraw is made, that request must be complied with until revoked by the parent.

VIII. Using visiting speakers and others

- It is school policy that most of the R.S.E. programme is best discussed openly with teachers who are known and trusted by the pupils. However visiting speakers can enhance the quality of the provision as long as they are used in addition to, not instead of a planned programme of R.S.E..
- The S.P.H.E. Co-ordinator will provide the visiting speaker, well in advance of the visit, with a copy of this R.S.E. policy. After gaining approval from the Principal/Vice-Principal for the visit the organiser makes the visiting speaker aware of the ethos of the school and the manner of delivery of the R.S.E. programme. Issues to consider include:
 - i) the degree of explicitness of the content and presentation;
 - ii) will the visiting speaker be accompanied by teaching staff?
 - iii) will the staff take an active role in the visiting speaker's activities?
 - iv) how will the visiting speaker be prepared for the visit?
 - v) how will the visit be built upon and followed up?

IX. Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender & Queer

Teachers do not promote any one life-style as the only acceptable one for society and therefore it is inevitable and natural that LGBTQ issues will be discussed during a programme of relationships and

sexuality education. One of the advantages of exploring issues concerning being LGBTQ, is the opportunity to correct false ideas, assumptions and address prejudice.

X. Contraception

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

G. Ongoing support, development and review

I. Training:

- All teachers involved in this work do not 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 and honestly and preparedness to refer to more expert advice if necessary. The skills acquired in general teaching apply also to health education. Furthermore, some 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.
- 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.

II. Resources:

The school will purchase appropriate R.S.E. 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.

III. Monitoring, evaluating and reviewing the R.S.E. programme:

We are committed to monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of this programme. Specifically important to the R.S.E. Programme are:

- Pupil feedback
- Staff review and feedback
- Parental feedback
- Visiting Speaker feedback

IV. Updates to this Document

This document will be reviewed from time to time but not exceeding every 4 years.

Signed: _____

Ratified 29/06/2017