Education Policy.

Relationship and Sexuality

Coolmine Community School
Scoil Phobail Chúil Mhín

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RSE Policy

Characteristic spirit and general objectives of the school:

Coolmine Community School was founded in 1972 and is a co-educational, multi-denominational school under the patronage of La Sainte Union Sisters, Vincentian Fathers and DDLETB. Coolmine Community School has an enrolment of approximately 1,100 pupils who live mainly within a geographically defined catchment area.

Characteristic Spirit: The School's mission statement reflects the characteristic spirit of the school: -

'We strive to create an atmosphere of mutual respect which promotes excellence in all aspects of school life and allows individuals to realise their full potential'.

Objectives of the School:

• To provide a comprehensive system of post primary education open to all the children of the community.

• To provide ongoing education for all persons in the community

• To contribute to the spiritual, moral, mental and physical wellbeing and development of the community.

Background to RSE Policy:

This policy reflects the spirit of a number of legislative documents emanating from the Department of Education over time.

The Education Act, 1998 requires that schools should promote the social and personal development of students and provide health education for them.
Section 4 of the Rules and Programme for Secondary Schools requires schools to have an agreed policy for RSE and a suitable RSE programme in place for all students at both junior and senior cycle. At Junior Cycle, the RSE programme is part of Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE).
Circulars M4/95 and M20/96 request schools to commence a process of RSE policy development.
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.

In 1999, RSE became a mandatory part of the Primary School Curriculum (DES, 1999) and in 2000, a mandatory part of the Junior Cycle SPHE Curriculum Framework.

This policy document is also written according to the guidelines and precepts as discussed in the NCCA *'Draft Report on the Review on Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) in primary and post-primary schools',* July 2019. This 'Report' outlines the following areas of concern which should be included in a holistic and comprehensive School RSE programme.

- Consent, what it means and its importance
- Developments in contraception
- Healthy, positive sexual expression and relationships
- Safe use of the internet
- Social media and its effects on relationships and self-esteem
- LGBTQ+ matters.

At the time this policy document is being drafted, the NCCA reports on their website that future RSE programmes conducted in schools will consider recommendations included in the above-mentioned report. In this policy document all references to gender are taken to be inclusive and the term 'parent' is taken to include 'guardian'.

Definition of Relationship and Sexuality Education:

Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) aims to provide age-appropriate opportunities for young people to learn about relationships and sexuality in ways that help them think and act in a moral, caring and responsible manner. RSE is a developmental process which aspires to cultivate in students a healthy attitude towards themselves and others, particularly in the area of sexuality, relationships and gender identity. The curriculum is delivered using a spiral approach which allows for the treatment of topics to be deepened as the student matures.

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 their students.

School Philosophy 'A vision is the living out of shared values':

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:

1. Love, freedom, justice, sincerity and joy find expression.
2. All religious belief as detailed in the Deeds of Trust and Articles of Management shall be respected.
3. All young people feel accepted and allowed to experience the exercise of appropriate responsibility
4. A sense of self is appreciated and fostered and differences are acknowledged and accepted.
5. The potential of each individual, spiritual, intellectual, physical and emotional is recognised, respected, and the criterion of excellence applied.
6. Positive self-assessment and reflection is developed.
7. Staff, parents, students and other relevant members of the wider community co-operate for the common good.
8. Our motto Creideamh Beo (Living Faith) is nurtured.

Present School Provisions:

The school has a Social, Personal and Health Education programme (SPHE), which is currently being implemented in an open and consultative manner. It is hoped that all teachers of S.P.H.E. complete the "Introduction Course to teaching S.P.H.E." CPD that is provided a number of times per year in Education Centre's throughout the country. As educators we believe that the approaches and methodologies used in SPHE are crucial to the effectiveness of the programme. Active learning is the principal learning and teaching approach recommended for SPHE, therefore we will endeavour to teach SPHE using a variety of strategies which include:

- Case studies
- Group Discussions
- Brainstorming
- Role play
- Art work
- Ice breakers
- Debates
- Project work
- Narrative expression

The textbook 'My Wellbeing Journey' is used by all teachers of S.P.H.E. The teachers will be responsible for designing, planning and structuring the experiential elements of the S.P.H.E. programme.

In keeping with NCCA guidelines, this revision attempts to accommodate changing attitudes which have taken place in Ireland since the previous revision

Relationship of RSE to SPHE:

The Department of Education and Science has approved the recommended syllabus for SPHE at

Junior Cycle. As a life skills programme, SPHE aims to:

- Enable students to develop personal and social skills
- Promote self-esteem and self-confidence
- Enable students to develop a framework for responsible decision making
- Provide opportunities for reflection and discussion
- Promote physical, mental and emotional health and well being

The RSE programme forms part of the SPHE programme at Junior Cycle. The Draft Guidelines for RSE (NCCA, June1995, 1.2) state that Social Personal and Health Education is "spiral, developmental in nature and age appropriate in content and methodology." All students in the Junior cycle have one period of SPHE per week**. RSE will be included as a module in the SPHE programme at Junior Cycle. This takes place in six dedicated classes to RSE within the SPHE programme, during each academic year.**

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 ten modules which include;

- Belonging and integrating
- Self-management: a sense of purpose
- Communication skills
- Physical health
- Friendship
- Relationships and sexuality

- Emotional health
- Influences and decisions
- Substance use
- Personal safety

Students in senior cycle will receive a minimum of six class periods of RSE instruction per academic year as part of their Religious Education and Career Guidance programmes. We await developments in relation to SPHE at senior cycle.

Relationships and Sexuality Education Programme Objectives:

Relationships and sexuality education in Coolmine Community School is located in the overall framework of Social, Personal and Health Education.
It aims:

- To help pupils understand and develop friendships and relationships
- To promote an understanding of sexuality
- To promote a positive attitude to one's own sexuality and to one's relationship with others
- To promote knowledge of and respect for reproduction
- To enable pupils to develop attitudes and values toward their sexuality in a moral, spiritual and social framework in keeping with the policy of the school
- To help to develop the language and communicative skills to deal with the changes that are taking place at the onset of puberty
- To develop respect and tolerance for difference between individuals and their uniqueness.
- To provide opportunities for pupils to learn about relationships and sexuality in ways that helps them think and act in a moral, caring and responsible way.
- 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.

Guidelines for the management and organisation of Relationships and Sexuality Education:

1. Provision:

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

make arrangements regarding the teaching of the RSE Programme and the development of staff. Teachers will follow the guidelines and lesson plans drawn up by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA). Junior cycle students are timetabled for one period of SPHE per week. As part of this SPHE programme six timetables periods will be assigned to RSE during each academic year. RSE is an integral part of the Leaving Certificate Applied Social Education programme. Students following Transition Year and the traditional Leaving Certificate will receive a minimum of six lessons of RSE per year.
The school has purchased and will continue to 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.

All students will be taught all aspects of RSE together irrespective of gender.
The boundaries of the RSE programme will be delivered with due deference to:
(a) The age of the students
(b) Limits of confidentiality, limits to discussions and questions.
(c) Ensuring that the RSE classroom is a safe place for all, including students and teachers.
(d) Consideration and sensitivity must be given to the needs of students with unique circumstances. In this case the Pastoral Care Team will be consulted.

2. 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 RSE classes to inform parents of the programme, and to give them the option to withdraw their child from the class should they wish to. (Please see Letter to Parents Template Appendix 3).

3. 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 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.

4. 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 SPHE Co-ordinator, School Counsellor or the Principal. When deciding whether or not to answer questions the teacher should consider the age and readiness of the students, the RSE programme content, the ethos of the school and the RSE policy.

5. 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 (Reference: The Child Safeguarding Statement). The Principal will decide whether or not to consult/inform relevant agencies and parents where appropriate.

The following guidelines/directives also apply to this 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 - the pupil can then decide whether to proceed or not.

The Child Protection Guidelines for Post Primary schools state in 4.1.1. 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 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 relevant health board immediately.

6. 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.

7. Withdrawing pupils from the RSE programme:
This RSE policy will be made available on the school website. Parents have the right to withdraw their child from sensitive aspects of RSE. 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. (Please see Appendix 4 which outlines procedures to be considered in the case a student is withdrawn from RSE programme).

8. Using visiting speakers and non-teaching staff:
It is school policy that most of the RSE programme is best discussed openly with teachers who are known and trusted by the pupils. However, visitors can enhance the quality of the provision as long as they are used in addition to, not instead of a planned programme of RSE.
The SPHE Co-ordinator will provide the visitor, well in advance of the visit, with a copy of this RSE policy. After gaining approval from the Principal for the visit the organiser makes the visitor aware of the ethos of the school and the manner of delivery of the RSE programme. Issues to consider are:

1) the degree of explicitness of the content and presentation;
2) Which staff member will accompany the guest speaker
3) will the staff take an active role in the visitor's activities?
4) how will the visitor be prepared for the visit?
5) how will the visit be built upon and followed up?

9. ***LGBTI+***
The Equal Status Act 2000 and the Equality Act 2004 both prohibit discrimination across nine grounds, including sexual orientation The school's RSE policy will abide by the ethos of a document entitled 'Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Students in Post

Primary Schools; Guidance for Principals and School Leaders', published in 2012 by the DES in association with GLEN (Gay and Lesbian Equality Network).

Teachers do not promote any one life-style as the only acceptable one for society and therefore it is inevitable and natural that homosexuality will be discussed during a programme of sex education. One of the advantages of exploring issues concerning homosexuality is the opportunity to correct false ideas, assumptions and address prejudice. Discussion of homosexuality should be appropriate to the age of the pupils.

10. 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.

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

12. 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. Given that rates of STI transmission are increasing, it is important that the subject is addressed in schools.

13. Special Education Needs:
Students with special 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.

Ongoing support, development and review :

Training:
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 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. 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.

Monitoring, evaluating and reviewing the RSE programme:

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

- Pupil feedback;
- Staff review and feedback;
- Parental feedback.

Revised following consultation between Staff, Parent Representatives, Principal and Board of Management.

Ratified by the Board of Management on _____

RSE Learning Outcomes:

- develop self-awareness through opportunities to reflect on thoughts, values, attitudes and feelings
- enhance students' knowledge and understanding of essential health concepts and the wider influences on health and wellbeing to enable informed decision making
- develop students' self-efficacy; the confidence to think and behave independently especially in the face of social pressure
- strengthen students' capacity to empathise with another person's situation, feelings and motives in order to enhance relationships with other people
- develop coping strategies for adolescence and adult life in support of greater resilience
- develop students' health literacy skills, including the ability to obtain, critically evaluate and act on health information in support of health and wellbeing
- develop a willingness to participate in the creation and maintenance of healthy communities and environments.

Human Growth and Development

- understanding the function and structure of sex organs
- awareness of fertility
- awareness of the importance and methods of family planning
- understanding of pregnancy and the development of the foetus
- appreciation of the importance of health care during pregnancy
- recognising the range of human emotions and ways to deal with these
- an understanding of the relationship between safe sexual practice and sexually transmitted diseases with particular reference to HIV/AIDS

Human Sexuality

- Understanding of what it means to be biologically male or female, as well as other identifiable genders
- consideration of each person's role in relationships and in society
- awareness and understanding of sexual orientations and genders

- exploration of some of the issues pertaining to equality
- understanding the concept of sexual harassment and its different forms
- awareness of sexual abuse and rape, including legal issues and the identification of help agencies in these areas
- skills for making choices about sexual activity, and understanding legal regulations surrounding consent
- exploration of the range of attitudes, values and beliefs regarding sexual behaviour in modern society

Human Relationships

- understanding the nature of peer pressure
- developing skills for resolving conflict,
- development of an awareness of the complex nature of love and loving relationships

Appendix 1

Junior Cycle RSE Programme

Junior Cycle RSE is conducted as part of the SPHE Programme and content is included in the SPHE book 'My Wellbeing Journey' with a separate book for each year.

1st Year	2nd Year	3rd Year
Understanding Difference Self-esteem in self and others, appreciate uniqueness of self and others	**Being an Adolescent** Review of changes which take place in Adolescence	**Being an Adolescent** Review of changes which take place in Adolescence, Puberty
Changes at Adolescence Puberty, Adolescence, Hormones, (physical, emotional, social, psychological changes).	**Having Friends and Being a Friend** Changing nature of friendship, peer pressure, other influences.	**Anti-Bullying** Bullying and Control in Relationships.
Bullying Relational bullying, appropriate responses.	**The Relationship Spectrum** Understanding different types of relationship. Establishing and understanding relationships.	**The Making and Maintaining of Friendships** What is a good friend, what makes me a good friend? Conflict Resolution.
Friendships Making and maintaining friendships, recognising food friends.	**Health and personal Safety** Relationship difficulties, establishing boundaries, keeping safe, affects of alcohol.	**The Relationship Spectrum** People who influence, why and how people influence us.

Sexuality, Gender Identity, Sexual Health Male and Female Reproductive Systems, Intercourse, Conception, Menstrual Cycle, Gender Stereotyping, LGBTI+ issues.	**Sexuality, Gender Identity and Sexual Health.** Stages of human development from conception to birth, Self-Care before and during pregnancy.	**Sexuality, Gender Identity and Sexual Health.** Male and Female Reproductive Systems
	Sexuality, Gender Identity and Sexual Orientation Understand Language of Sexual Identity and Orientation, inclusive environments, LGBTI+ movements.	**Sexual Intercourse and Conception** Menstrual Cycle, Fertilisation, Reproduction story.
		Gender Stereotypes and Discrimination Gender Stereotyping, attitudes and behaviours.
		Sexuality, Sexual Identity and Sexual Orientation Issues faced by LGBTI+ people, respect, acceptance. LGBTI+ issues.

Note: 3rd Year Science students study Human Reproductive System as part of the Junior Cycle Syllabus, often at the beginning of the academic year.

Methodologies:

- **Group work**
- **Visualisation**
- **Worksheets**
- **Case studies for discussion**
- **Brainstorming**

- **Group discussion on case studies**
- **Clips from DVDs**

Appendix 2:

Senior Cycle RSE Programme

4th Year and 5th Year RSE:

TRUST PROGRAMME: produced by the HSE, Crisis Pregnancy Agency and Department of Education and Skills (Comes with DVD) 2009

Relationships

Transition Year	**Fifth Year**
Communication	Dealing with Feelings
Healthy Relationships	Keeping your cool
Self-Esteem	Trust: When we feel Hurt
What we Value in Relationships (	The influence of self -esteem
	Trust: Understanding Boundaries
	Communicating our Boundaries

Taking Time to Think

Transition Year	**Fifth Year**
Human Sexuality	Sexuality
Accepting Sexual Orientation.	Sexual Orientation
Implications of Sexual Activity	Challenging Roles

Sexual Health

Transition Year	**Fifth Year**
Human Reproduction and Fertility.	Human Reproduction
Contraceptive Methods 1	Unplanned pregnancy.
More than you bargained for.	STIs What's What.
Sexual Harassment	Without Consent
When Sexual Assault becomes a reality.	Sexual Abuse
Review of Learning	Review of learning

6th Year RSE:

For RSE , 6th Year undertake "**The BodyRight Programme".** This is a programme, developed over 10 years ago by Dublin Rape Crisis Centre (DRCC). It aims to raise awareness about sexual violence amongst young people and assist in its prevention through equipping them with the awareness and skills they need to make positive choices and to protect themselves. It also aims to raise awareness amongst young people about the possible negative impact of their own behaviours on others. 5th Year Groups are given a basic introduction to the BodyRight Programme.
The programme covers:

- **The nature and impact of sexual violence**
- **Understanding Consent**
- **Supporting young people affected by sexual violence**

The BodyRight programme also deals with **sexting –** the sharing of intimate images by electronic means -and **sextortion** which educates young people on safe internet use.

Sexual Harassment and Consent
Consent Vs Lack of Consent, (when clarity is essential) 'NO' means 'NO' Establishing and Maintaining Boundaries.
Child Sex Abuse and how to address a situation if a person/friend discloses he/she is at risk.
Healthy Vs Unhealthy Relationships, Choices/options, awareness of unhelpful behaviours, nature of Intimacy.

Methadologies:

- **Group work**
- **Visualisation**

- **Worksheets**
- **Case studies for open/group discussion**
- **Brainstorming**
- **Clips from DVDs**

Appendix 3

Letter to Parents Template

Dear Parent/Guardian

In line with directives published by the Department of Education and Skills and as part of the school's Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) programme, your son/daughter is due to receive lessons in Relationship and Sex Education (RSE). Your son's/daughter's programme is due to commence the week of ……

Nowadays, a vast amount of information exists regarding sex and relationships on social media sites, on TV, in magazines which young people are exposed to. These often-negative influences can frequently make for young people an already confusing time even more complicated. This school is of the view that, if students are provided with timely and appropriate information about their bodies and relationships, they can make their transition into adulthood with the confidence and knowledge to understand their own developmental journey. It is also hoped that such confidence and knowledge will empower students to make healthy and positive choices in adult life. You can be assured that issues discussed will be conducted in a safe, sensitive, respectful and confidential manner.

Consequently, your consent is required if you wish your son/daughter to participate in this RSE programme by signing the attached consent form. If you have any questions regarding the school's RSE Policy or programme, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely,

_____

Consent Form

Name of Student: _____

I consent/do not consent to my son/daughter attending the Relationship and Sex Education Programme in Coolmine Community School starting _____

Signed: _____ Parent/Guardian

Date: _____

Appendix 4

What we do if a request for withdrawal from the RSE programme is made by a parent:

a) we discuss the nature of the concerns with the child's parent and if appropriate attempt to reassure them (initially such discussion takes place at a meeting with the Year Head and SPHE Co-ordinator, the Principal may become involved if necessary)

b) we consider whether the programme can be improved in a way that will reassure parents - care is taken not to undermine the integrity of the RSE programme and the entitlement of the other pupils. It may be appropriate and deal with topics with a specific group of students.

c) we attempt to ensure that where a pupil is withdrawn there is no disruption to other parts of their education,

Cover Letter

While this draft policy reflects the most recent legislative documents pertaining to RSE at Post-Primary level, it should also be noted that the NCCA are currently in the process of developing am SPHE programme for Senior Cycle. Consequently, some minor alterations may need to be made to this draft proposal in order to accommodate guidelines emanating from the NCCA.