



Relationships & Sexuality Education Policy

1.1 Scope

This policy applies to students of Gaelcholáiste Charraig Uí Leighin, their parents/guardians and teachers in the school.

1.2 Rationale

This policy recognizes the importance of RSE for each pupil. The daily challenges that teenagers face in developing and understanding relationships are growing. The school supports each child to develop an understanding of the various types of relationships people may have. RSE is available to all pupils to support each child to reach their full potential in a safe, friendly and pleasant setting where respect, fairness and integrity are central to all aspects of school life.

1.3 Links to the School Ethos

Each child is supported to reach their maximum potential in Gaelcholáiste Charraig Uí Leighin. The school recognizes the importance of RSE for the holistic development of each child. Every effort is made to support each child in the area of RSE. We understand that the pupils are in our care during a sensitive period in their lives as they grow physically and develop their sense of identity. Pupils need support and understanding during this stage of their lives, and RSE is available to support our pupils.

1.4 Context

This Policy has been developed and should be read with the school's guiding principles in mind, and in conjunction with Gaelcholáiste Charraig Uí Leighin's Draft Wellbeing Policy and Pastoral Care Policy.

1.5 Aims

The aims of this policy are:

- a) To support each child in the school in developing a clear understanding of relationships.
- b) To provide age-appropriate RSE to all students.
- c) To inform parents/guardians and pupils of the school's RSE programme.
- e) To ensure that pupils are participative and connected during RSE class;
- f) To help pupils become active and involved in their own RSE;
- g) To help pupils to grow in to responsible adults with a clear understanding of Relationships and Sexuality.
- h) To enable pupils to be more understanding of other's sexuality.
- i) To enable pupils to develop an understanding of how relationships work.
- j) To assist teachers with short and long-term planning in the areas of wellbeing and RSE.
- k) To fulfil the requirements on the school in the areas of RSE;

2. Policy Content

2.1 Definition of RSE

The World Health Organisation define sexual health as a state of physical, mental and social well-being in relation to sexuality. It requires a positive and respectful approach to sexuality and sexual relationships, as well as the possibility of having pleasurable and safe sexual experiences, free of coercion, discrimination and violence.

Relationships 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. Such education is delivered consciously and unconsciously by parents, teachers, peers, the media and other influential adults in an adolescent's life.

2.2 Education concerning RSE

In schools RSE will be taught mainly through the subject of SPHE but elements of it will be covered in other subject areas such as Biology, Home Economics, Religion, Guidance and Counselling, Science and CSPE.

Schools are required to teach RSE as an integral component of Junior Cycle SPHE up to third year, as outlined in the Junior Cycle SPHE Curriculum framework, produced by the

National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA 2000). Schools are also required to teach Senior Cycle RSE even in the absence of a timetabled SPHE class.

Parents are the primary educators of their children and their role in supporting the RSE policy within schools is very important. Parents will be made aware of how the RSE programme operates within the Gaelcholáiste and will have access to all policies concerning RSE. Parents have a right to withdraw students from RSE Activities at any time, and a request for withdrawal must be made through the Principal and the SPHE coordinator (In line with Section 30 (e) of the Education Act 1998).

In relation to RSE, the function of the Gaelcholáiste is to provide general education about sexual matters and issues concerning relationships. The college does not offer specific or individual support. However, where appropriate, referrals will be made if such support is required. Where advice is given by the college, it will be non-directive and will be age appropriate.

2.3 Aims and Objectives of the RSE Programme

- a) Help young people understand and develop friendships and relationships;
- b) Promote an understanding of sexuality;
- c) Promote a positive attitude to one's own sexuality and in one's own relationship with others;
- d) Promote knowledge of and respect for reproduction;
- e) Enable young people to develop attitudes and values towards their sexuality in a moral, spiritual and social framework;
- f) Acquire the understanding and skills necessary to form healthy friendships and relationships;
- g) Develop a positive sense of self-awareness, and the skills for building and maintaining self-esteem;
- h) Become aware of the variety of ways in which individuals grow and change especially during adolescence and to develop respect for difference between individuals;
- i) Understand human physiology with particular reference to the reproductive cycle, human fertility and sexually transmitted diseases;
- j) Understand sexual development and identity and explore aspects of sexuality including sex roles, stereotyping, gender issues and cultural influences on sexuality;
- k) Value family life and appreciate the responsibilities of parenthood;
- l) Develop strategies for decisions and actions consistent with personal moral integrity and respectful of the rights and dignity of others;
- m) Develop skills for coping with peer pressure, conflict and threats to personal safety.

2.4 Pupil access to information regarding relationships and sexuality and procedures regarding issues of concern

- a) Within the Gaelcholáiste we promote and support diversity. Therefore, it is inevitable that topics will be discussed during the RSE programme that will reflect this, e.g. homosexuality, contraception. Exploring these issues can provide opportunities to correct false ideas, and assumptions and address prejudice.

Discussion will be age-appropriate to students and will be discussed in an open manner, looking at all sides of the issues in a non-directive way.

- b) All teachers involved in this work are not required to be 'experts' on the issues concerned. However, they do require a sensitivity to the needs of the group and an ability to deal with questions openly and honestly. The same skills that are used in general teaching also apply to the RSE programme and therefore the school will facilitate teachers to engage in ongoing in-service in this area where possible.
- c) Within certain classes, explicit topics are covered in relation to relationships and sexuality and students may ask questions about matters concerning sexuality. It is the responsibility of the teacher at that time to answer such questions in an appropriate way that is in keeping with the school's core principles. At all times the values and opinions of all involved in school life must be valued and respected.
- d) When preparing classes and deciding on topics to be discussed in class, the teacher will always consider the age and readiness of the students, he/she will consult the RSE Curriculum guidelines and will also examine the ethos of the school and the RSE policy. Within the science curriculum the biological aspects of sexual reproduction will primarily be dealt with.
- e) In some cases, teachers may choose to say that the question is not appropriate to deal with at that time. If a teacher becomes concerned with a subject matter that has arisen out of a class, then he/she should seek advice from the Principal /SPHE Co-Ordinator/Guidance Counsellor.
- f) It is school policy that within circumstances where a student is considered to be at risk of abuse or in breach of law that this must be referred immediately to the Designated Liaison Person. The Designated Liaison Person and teacher will then decide on appropriate action, following Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools 2017.
- g) Confidentiality cannot be guaranteed in all cases for students and therefore no one within the school setting should promise absolute confidentiality. Students must be made aware that any discussions or incidents may be conveyed to the Principal and possibly to the parents, if it is felt that the student is at risk and that such action would be in the best interests of the student.
- h) Teachers must indicate clearly to the student when the content of a conversation cannot be kept confidential and the student may then decide whether to proceed or not.

2.5 Outside Speakers and Workshops

- a) Visitors to the school can enhance the quality of the RSE programme if they are used in addition to, and not instead of, the planned programme of RSE. Visitors will be made aware of the RSE policy and the ethos of the college as this will affect the manner in which it is delivered to the RSE Programme. All guest speakers will be Garda Vetted by Cork ETB.

- b) Teachers of the RSE programme will liaise about the suitability of visitors and will consider the following:
1. The content of the programme and the level of explicit content for the year group involved;
 2. How the visitor will be prepared for the visit;
 3. What information will he/she require;
 4. How will the visit be progressed upon.
- c) Visitors will be accompanied by a staff member during all talks/workshops. Parents will be informed when talks and workshops are being held and permission will be sought where necessary. Parents have a right to withdraw students from talks or workshops concerning RSE.

2.6 Pastoral Care/ Counselling

Regarding the RSE programme, the college will promote the other supports that are available i.e. Guidance Counsellors. All parties will work together in promoting better health education for our young people. All students, staff and parents can avail of this support.

2.7 Students with Additional Needs

Students with additional needs may need more support in coping with the physical and emotional aspects of growing up. Teachers will work in consultation with SNA and/or SEN department. The National Council for Curriculum and Assessment's 'Guidelines for Teachers of Students with General Learning Disabilities' contains comprehensive guidelines on teaching SPHE to students with mild general learning disabilities at primary and post-primary level, and to students with moderate and severe and profound general learning disabilities. These guidelines are available at www.ncca.ie. A list of students with learning difficulties is available from the Principal.

2.8 Exceptional Circumstances

If a teacher is aware that a student is pregnant, or if a student has a sensitive sexual background, they will inform the student in advance of teaching the RSE module so the student can decide whether to participate. Should a parent/guardian of a student, or a student over 18 years of age, wish to remove themselves from RSE classes, they are required to advise the school in writing of this. The student will be required to sign-out of the school for the duration of this lesson in such circumstances.

2.9 Staff and Parent Training Resources

1. Given the sensitivity of some aspects of RSE, schools are advised to avail of the RSE and SPHE training offered through the PDST (Circular 0037/2010 DES article 3.4). Staff will be made aware of any training and in-service days that may be provided in relation to the subject of RSE and where possible will be facilitated to attend these days.
2. The school will purchase appropriate RSE teaching materials which have been identified as being useful for the teaching of RSE and which have been approved by the Principal and

other national bodies that deal with issues around relationships & sexuality education. Information will be provided to parents/guardians at parent teacher meetings and, where necessary, talks and information meetings will be organized at certain times during the school year.

2.10 Resources

Teaching resources for SPHE for junior and senior cycle are available from the website www.sphe.ie. Resources are also available to teachers who attend Junior Cycle and Senior Cycle RSE training.

Other resources include:

- a) Class sets of SPHE books for each year;
- b) Packs and information provided by the HSE, for schools about RSE;
- c) SPHE support programme;
- d) Agencies such as Pact, Accord, Response, Crisis Pregnancy Agency, the Sexual Health Centre;
- e) The local health clinic, nurses and doctors, and the Gardaí Síochána;
- f) Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post Primary Schools 2017;
- g) The following websites;

www.sphe.ie

www.b4udecide.ie

www.webwise.ie

www.healthpromotion.ie

www.yoursexualhealth.ie

www.belong2.org

2.11 Monitoring Review and Evaluation

The RSE programme will be monitored and evaluated on a continuous basis. This will be done through student feedback, staff reviews and parental feedback. The responsibility for policy review rests with the Principal and the Board of Management of Gaelcholáiste Charraig Uí Leighin and will be carried out within the framework of Whole School Planning.

The policy will be updated in the context of changing legislation, developments in education programmes, and feedback from staff, students, and parents/guardians.

This policy was adopted by the Board of Management on May 5th 2019.
It was last reviewed on November 28th 2023.
It will be reviewed by the Board of Management on an annual basis, and/or as
is deemed necessary.