

## **Relationship and Sexuality Education Policy**

# **Scoil Dara's Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) Policy**

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Scoil Dara's RSE Policy will be outlined under the following headings:

1. Policy Statement
2. Aim & Objectives of our RSE Policy
3. Principles Underpinning our RSE Policy
4. Responsibilities within the school community to the RSE Policy
  - (a) Parents
  - (b) Students
  - (c) School Staff
  - (d) Principal
  - (e) Board of Management
5. Support Structures
6. Implementation and Compliance
7. Success Criteria
8. Review and Evaluation

## **SCOIL DARA'S MISSION STATEMENT**

Scoil Dara promotes the development of a community of faith inspired by Gospel values. The community of the school works in a holistic manner to ensure that dependence is gradually replaced by responsibility for self, society and the world. The dignity of each student, staff member and parent is honoured and reflected in school policies and structures. While educational excellence is promoted, it is the needs of the learner that direct the development of the school. We engage with alternative approaches to education especially for those who are most disadvantaged. The school promotes a spirit of service and care.

### **Ethos**

In line with our mission statement we endeavour to create an ethos, which will enable boys and girls entrusted to our care to develop in an atmosphere of mutual respect. We encourage our students to become involved in the life of the school and their local community. We strive to be constantly aware of the dignity of each person. We try to show gentleness, courtesy and consideration for each other at all times. We acknowledge the individuality of each person and we try to show tolerance and compassion in our dealing with each other. We recognise the need to grow ourselves in order that we can help our pupils to grow in their personal development. We recognise that the curriculum of the school must be sufficiently wide and flexible to give all pupils (including those who are disadvantaged), clear educational goals and opportunities to achieve success – each to the level of their own ability. We strive to build a sense of community based on Christian values.

### **1. POLICY STATEMENT**

Scoil Dara's RSE Policy is underpinned by:

- (i) Department of Education & Science Relationships & Sexuality Education Policy Guidelines
- (ii) Department of Education & Science Circulars
- (iii) NCCA Curriculum & Guidelines for Post Primary Schools
- (iv) Our School Ethos and Mission Statement

#### **Definition of Relationships & Sexuality Education**

For the purposes of this policy Relationships and Sexuality Education is defined as 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

The Policy specifies:

- (a) the aims and objectives of the RSE policy

- (b) the responsibilities of the school community members to the policy
- (c) the implementation and organisation of RSE in the school
- (d) an overview of Social, Personal and Health Education in Junior Cycle
- (d) guidelines to parents on how to proceed should they wish to withdraw their child from the RSE programme

## **2. AIMS OF THE RSE POLICY**

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

- (a) To help students understand and develop friendships and relationships
- (b) To promote an understanding of sexuality
- (c) To promote a positive attitude to one's own sexuality and in one's relationship with others
- (d) To promote knowledge of and respect for reproduction
- (e) To enable students to develop attitudes and values towards their sexuality in a moral, spiritual and social framework in keeping with the policy of the school
- (f) To provide opportunities for students to learn about relationships and sexuality in ways that help them think and act in a moral, caring and responsible way.

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

## **3. OBJECTIVES OF THE RSE POLICY**

Relationships and Sexuality Education should enable students to

- (a) acquire the understanding and skills necessary to form healthy friendships and relationships
- (b) develop a positive sense of self awareness and the skills for building and maintaining self esteem
- (c) become aware of the variety of ways in which individuals grow and change especially during adolescence and to develop respect for difference between individuals
- (d) understand human physiology with particular reference to the reproductive cycle, human fertility and sexually transmitted infections
- (e) understand sexual development and identify and explore aspects of sexuality including sex role stereotyping, gender issues and cultural influences on sexuality
- (f) value family life and appreciate the responsibilities of parenthood

#### **4. PRINCIPLES UNDERPINNING THE POLICY**

- (i) The Draft Guidelines for RSE (NCCA, June 1995, 1.2) state that Social, Personal & 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.
- (ii) Students are expected to respect the dignity of other students, teachers and other staff in the school and have the right to expect that their own dignity will be respected

#### **5. RESPONSIBILITIES OF SCHOOL COMMUNITY MEMBERS TO THE RSE POLICY**

##### **(a) Parents**

Brief themselves on the upcoming module in RSE so that they can seek clarification on content, in advance, if they so wish

##### **(b) Students**

Participate in the class in a constructive way

##### **(c) SPHE Teachers**

Teachers will draw up/amend an SPHE subject plan at the beginning of each school year which will include details of the RSE module for each year group. The programme will be approved by the Board of Management before it is implemented

Teachers will, in as far as possible, cover the content of the RSE module as outlined in the subject plan

##### **(d) Principal**

Arrangements regarding the teaching of the programme and the deployment of staff will be made by the Principal.

The Principal will support the ongoing training of teachers.

##### **(e) Board of Management**

The Board of Management will ensure that all aspects of SPHE including RSE are fully supported and resourced within existing budget.

## **6. SUPPORT STRUCTURES**

### **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 a preparedness to refer to more expert advice if necessary. The skills acquired in general teaching apply to health education also. Furthermore many teachers have training in related areas such as counseling. 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

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.

## **7. IMPLEMENTATION and ORGANISATION of RSE in SCOIL DARA**

### **Informing and Involving Parents**

It is recognized that parents are the primary providers of RSE to their children. The function of the school is to play a supportive role in this area. To ensure that parents are involved in the development and implementation of a programme of RSE this policy has been developed in consultation with Parents’ Association representatives and the views expressed by parents will be taken into account when reviewing the policy. Opportunities will be given to any parent who so requests to view the content of the programme to be taught in the school. Parents have the right to withdraw their child from an RSE class. (See Appendix One) Students will be advised to discuss particular topics and issues at home. Parents will be consulted as part of the regular review of this policy.

### **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 counseling 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 eg their doctor or other suitable agency. Advice offered should not be directive and should be appropriate to the age of the pupil

### **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 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.

### **Confidentiality**

In circumstances where a student is considered at some risk of any type of abuse a teacher must refer this matter immediately to the Principal. This is in line with the Child Protection Guidelines and Procedures for Post Primary Schools (DES Circular M44/05) which have been adopted as school policy in Scoil Dara.

In addition

- (a) teachers will not promise absolute confidentiality
- (b) students will 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 student to notify parents
- (c) teachers will use their professional judgement to decide whether confidentiality can be maintained having heard the information
- (d) teachers will indicate, where possible, to pupils when the contents of a conversation can no longer be kept confidential

### **Cross Curricular Links**

Linking with other subject areas can be extremely valuable in using available RSE time most effectively. It also brings the area of RSE into the wider context of the whole school. RSE does not take place exclusively in a designated set of lessons eg six classes in the school year. It should be seen by students and teachers alike as an ongoing part of the students' growth and development and as being relevant to all areas of the students' education. Using cross curricular links effectively also enhances the possibility of pooling teaching resources.

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

### **Ideal Size of Class**

The promotion of maximum student involvement in each lesson is of primary importance. As a consequence, the smallest possible number of students will be allocated to each class.

### **Approaches to Teaching RSE**

A variety of teaching approaches will be used. These may include:

Group work, role play, story, worksheets, case studies, brainstorming, project work, debates, mixed/single sex classes, visitors/guest speakers

### **Using Visiting Speakers and Others**

(a) It is school policy that most of the RSE programme is best discussed openly with teachers who are known and trusted by the students. 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

(b) The SPHE class teacher 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 organizer will make the visitor aware of the ethos of the school and the manner of delivery of the RSE programme. In planning a visit by a guest teacher issues to be considered by the SPHE class teacher include:

- (i) the degree of explicitness of the content and presentation
  - (iii) will the teacher take an active role in the visitor's activities?
  - (iv) how will the visitor be prepared for the visit?
  - (v) how will the visit be built upon and followed up?
- (c) Visitors should be given advance notice of the composition of the class and an idea of how their contribution fits into the scheme of work
- (d) The visitor will be accompanied in the classroom by the SPHE class teacher.
- (e) In order to inform the visitor of the precise requirements of a group and to make better use of the time of the visitor it is advisable for the group to draw up questions in advance and these should be forwarded to the visitor. This will involve the pupils in the visit and will make the experience more relevant for them – it also facilitates planning.
- (f) The Office should be informed of the date and name of the visitor.
- (g) Where applicable, refreshments should be arranged for the visitor
- (h) The visitor should be welcomed at the main door
- (i) At the end of the lesson a vote of thanks should be given by a pupil and the visitor escorted to the main door after refreshments
- (j) A written acknowledgement of their contribution should be sent to the visitor.

### **Homosexuality**

The school accepts it is inevitable 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.

### **Contraception**

This topic will be dealt with in an age appropriate, open manner, looking at all sides of the issue in a non directive way. The teaching of the Catholic Church will be outlined clearly to students

## **Special 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 about and prepared against abuse by others. The school will take all reasonable steps to identify such need and to cater for it.

## **9. MONITORING, REVIEW & EVALUATION**

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

- (a) Student feedback
- (b) Staff review and feedback
- (c) Parental feedback

This policy will be reviewed at least every 5 years.

This Policy was adopted by the Board of Management on June 26<sup>th</sup> 2008.

Signed:

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(Chairperson BOM)

## **Appendix One**

### **Withdrawing Students from the RSE Programme**

1. Parents will always be provided with a full copy of this policy following a request to do so.
2. Parents do not have to give reasons for withdrawing their child from the RSE programme but we respectfully invite them to do so -- sometimes misunderstandings can be resolved by doing so.
3. Once a parent's request to withdraw is made, that request must be complied with until revoked by the parent
4. When a parent requests to withdraw their child from RSE
  - We will discuss the nature of the concerns with the student's parent and, if appropriate, attempt to reassure them
  - We will consider whether the programme can be amended or improved in a way that will reassure parents – care is taken not to undermine the integrity of the RSE programme and the entitlement of other students eg it may be appropriate and desirable to have single sex classes for some sections of the RSE programme
  - We will attempt to ensure that where a student is withdrawn there is not disruption to other parts of their education
  - We will point out that students who have been withdrawn are vulnerable to teasing – we will therefore attempt to cause minimal embarrassment to the student and minimal disruption to the programme
  - We will also point out that students may receive inaccurate information from their peers
  - We will offer the parent/s access to appropriate information and resources.
  - We will discuss with the parent the most appropriate alternative activity possible for the student, having regard to the school's existing commitments.