

St Malachy's Boys' National School

Relationships and Sexuality Education Policy

Introduction

This RSE policy is a written statement of the aims of the RSE programme, the relationship of RSE to SPHE, and the organisation and management of RSE within the school. It was developed to inform teachers and parents of the material covered in the RSE programme within the SPHE curriculum.

The policy was developed in 2015, after communication and collaboration with all school staff.

Scope

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 SPHE/RSE; it is therefore important that all teachers are familiar with the RSE policy.

The policy will apply to school staff, students, board of management, parents/guardians, visiting speakers and external facilitators.

Rationale

It is necessary to devise an RSE policy at this time because:

- 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.
- The [Education Act, 1998](#) requires that schools should promote the social and personal development of students and provide health education for them.
- 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.

School Philosophy

St. Malachy's Boys' school is a Catholic school under the patronage of the Bishop of Armagh. It is managed by a Board of Management, elected according to the procedures agreed by the Partners in Education. The school has a Catholic ethos and this ethos is a guiding principle in the formulation and implementation of this RSE Policy. This ethos recognises the value and dignity of each pupil and all those working in the school community, and aims at promoting the full and harmonious development of all aspects of the person, including:

- a) relationship with God
- b) relationship with family
- c) relationship with teachers
- d) relationship with self
- e) relationship with others
- f) relationship with the environment.

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This ethos also acknowledges the cultural and religious values of all the pupils attending the school. The school recognises that the parents are the primary educators of their children and we support them in that role.

In the area of RSE, above all, the schools' role is subsidiary to that of the parents. We support and compliment their work.

Relationship of RSE to SPHE and Religion

- Social Personal and Health Education contributes to developing the work of the school in promoting the health and well being of children and young people. This happens in the context of their emotional, moral, social and spiritual growth as well as their intellectual, physical, political, religious and creative development.
- The RSE policy should reflect the educational philosophy of the trustees and the core values and ethos of the school, as outlined in the school's mission statement.
- Spiritual, moral and ethical issues will arise when teaching RSE. The school's RSE policy should guide teachers in the treatment of such issues in accordance with the ethos of the school. It is important that teachers of RSE understand that their role is to express the views of the whole school community on these sensitive issues, and not their own personal views.

The aims of our RSE Programme:

When due account is taken of intrinsic abilities and varying circumstances, the Relationships and Sexuality Education curriculum should enable the child to:

- Develop a positive sense of self-awareness, self-esteem and self-worth
- Develop an appreciation of the dignity, uniqueness and well-being of others
- Understand the nature, growth and development of relationships within families, in friendships and in wider contexts
- Develop an awareness of differing family patterns
- Come to value family life and appreciate the responsibilities of parenthood
- Develop strategies to make decisions, solve problems and implement actions in various personal, social and health contexts
- Become aware of the variety of ways in which individuals grow, change and understand that their developing sexuality is an important aspect of self-identity
- Develop personal skills, which will help to establish and sustain healthy personal relationships
- Develop some coping strategies to protect themselves and others from various forms of abuse
- Acquire and improve skills of communication and social interaction
- Acquire and use an appropriate vocabulary to discuss feelings, sexuality, growth and development
- Develop a critical understanding of external influences on lifestyles and decision making.

Content of Policy

A. Provision of Training and Staff Development

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B. Inclusion of Parents/Guardians

C. Ethical/Moral Considerations

D. Practical Issues

A. Provision of Training and Staff Development

- Mrs Hughes is the appointed co-ordinator of SPHE.
- Mrs. Hughes will be released to attend training courses in the area of RSE and report back any developments.
- Teachers are consulted prior to being timetabled to teach SPHE/RSE.
- Although it is a boys school there is still consideration of gender balance in the teaching of SPHE/RSE topics.
- All teachers of SPHE/RSE have access to the SPHE and RSE teaching materials from the SPHE shelves.

B. Inclusion of Parents/Guardians

- Parents are informed of the intentions to teach SPHE by way of letter as their child begins second class.
- Parents receive notices of intent to teach sensitive areas of the RSE programme prior to the lessons
- The school ensures that parents/guardians are kept informed by:
 1. inviting parents/guardians to a talk in the event of concerns
 2. providing all parents/guardians with access to the RSE policy
 3. providing parents/guardians with a summary of the SPHE/RSE programme in the school
 4. at the start of the school year, providing parents/guardians for each year group with a summary of those aspects of the SPHE/RSE programme which will be covered during the year
 5. giving parents/guardians access to the SPHE/RSE teaching materials if requested

Note: 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 parent or in the case of a student who has reached the age of 18 years, the student. Hence, parents have a right to opt their child out of the sensitive issues in RSE if they wish to do so. It is the responsibility of the school to make alternative arrangements for the student in this situation. The school may wish to ask the parents to put their request in writing.

C. Ethical/Moral Considerations

- **Answering Questions:** While it is important to create an environment in SPHE/RSE in which students can discuss issues openly, teachers may not be able to answer all questions asked by students and can set appropriate limits. Students may ask questions about issues which are not included in the curriculum, such as masturbation or abortion. On these, and on all questions, teachers should use their professional judgement, guided by the age of the students, the RSE curriculum and the RSE policy for the school.
- **Confidentiality:** While students will not be encouraged to disclose personal or private information in SPHE/RSE classes, there may be times when they do talk about their own lives. Confidentiality will be respected unless a teacher becomes aware that

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a child is at risk, in which case the appropriate action will be taken e.g. follow the procedures set down in the Child Protection Procedures and Guidelines for Primary Schools or the school's Substance Use Policy, notify parents etc.

Students will be made aware of the limits of confidentiality and that teachers will not give unconditional guarantees of confidentiality.

D. Practical Issues

- SPHE is timetabled in all classes.
- An external teacher will be brought in to cover the following sensitive areas RSE to Fifth and Sixth classes:-
 - My body grows and changes
 - The wonder of new life
 - Preparing for new life
 - Caring for new life
 - Relationships and new life
 - Growing and changing(some of this contents is from the 3rd/4th programme)
The class teacher will remain in the class for the duration of these lessons.
- Classes will be taught RSE/SPHE in their own class setting and size.
- Contents of the RSE programme for each class level are set out in Appendix A.
- As it is an all boys' school there will be no need for a gender divide for lessons.
- Any outside speakers will be given access to the schools RSE, SPHE and Child Protection policies.
- Prior to the teaching of lessons involving "sensitive issues", parents will be informed by letter with an accompanying outline of the lesson.
- It is a parents/guardians right to withdraw a pupil from these lessons. This request for withdrawal must be made in writing.
- If parents/guardians request the withdrawal of a child from RSE lessons, provision will be made for them to leave the classroom at that time. Supervision will be provided. With regard to matters of a confidential nature, the school cannot take any responsibility for what is discussed in the yard or classroom. Should a child who is withdrawn from the sexually sensitive classes receive inappropriate information from others outside of these classes, it will be the responsibility of the parent/guardian to address the issues.
- Any teacher has the right to opt-out from teaching the sexually sensitive issues in RSE. It is responsibility of Board of Management to ensure that the curriculum will be delivered to the children, by another teacher, or an outside speaker.

Links with related school policies

The following policies form connections with our RSE policy:

- SPHE Policy
- Child Protection Policy
- Anti-Bullying Policy
- Substance Use Policy.
- Alivo Programmes

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Implementation Arrangements, Roles and Responsibilities

Mr. Stanley and Mrs Hughes have the role of co-ordinating the implementation of the policy.

All staff members are responsible for implementing the plan at their class level.

Ratification and communication

This policy was reviewed and updated in 2015. Its implementation will be reviewed once in every school year.

Upon ratification by the board of management, this becomes the school's agreed RSE Policy. It will be circulated within the school community. The entire teaching staff will be familiar with the policy and aware of any changes implied in curriculum delivery.

Parents/guardians will be informed of the RSE Policy from the time of enrolment of the student.