

## *Relationships and Sexuality Education Policy*

**Colaiste Iognaid, Sea Road, Galway (091) 501550**

### **A. *School***

Coláiste Iognáid is a voluntary, Catholic secondary school under the trusteeship of the Jesuit Fathers. Coláiste Iognáid is a co-educational, academically non-selective school.

### **B. *Our School Philosophy***

1. The college is Catholic, Jesuit, Irish and Free. The ethos of the school seeks to ‘foster each pupil’s unique talents and qualities as people of competence, confidence, conscience and compassion’ (Mission statement). The holistic formation of each individual is emphasized as well as individual care and concern for each person (Cura Personalis). The Vision document emphasizes the importance of religious education: ‘it is important that the religious education of the individual should permeate everything else’. An education at Colaiste Iognaid also ‘tries to deepen the pupil understanding of himself/ herself thus permitting them to grow and to develop adequate critical faculties. In tandem with this must be the development of the individual’s knowledge of reality and ability to evaluate it critically’ (Vision Document).
2. The school gives its pupils the opportunity to explore the humanities, sciences, arts, business and technical subjects and other student centered learning. In addition, it provides religious, moral and physical education.

### **C *Scope of RSE Policy***

The R.S.E. policy currently applies to students taking Social, Personal and Health education to Junior Cert. level.

The school recognizes that parents/guardians are the primary educators and home is the natural environment in which relationships and sexuality education (R.S.E.) should be initiated and developed.

### ***Definition of Relationships and Sexuality.***

RSE 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 relationships and sexuality.

### ***D Relationships and Sexuality Education with Social Personal and Health Education.***

The Draft Guidelines for RSE (NCCA, June 1995, 1.2) state that Social Personal and 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. 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. SPHE deals with many issues such as self-esteem, assertiveness, communication and decision making skills – all of which can contribute to the effectiveness of the RSE programme.

### ***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:

1. To help pupils understand and develop friendships and relationships.
2. To promote an understanding of sexuality.
3. To promote a positive attitude to one’s own sexuality and in one’s relationship with others.
4. To promote knowledge and respect for reproduction.
5. 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.
6. To provide opportunities for pupils 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 inspirational. This RSE policy allows for the roll-out of RSE in the context of Junior and Senior cycle SPHE.

### **What the school currently provides.**

In its broadest sense, RSE is a whole-school responsibility and all members of this community share responsibility for modeling relationships that are characterized by justice and respect. At a more formal level, RSE is dealt with in the context of certain subjects; Health Education in Transition Year, Science which is compulsory for all students up to Junior Certificate level, Biology at Leaving Certificate level, Home Economics and SPHE classes up to Junior Certificate level.

***Section F: Guidelines for the management and organization of Relationships and Sexuality Education in our school***

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

***2. Informing and involving parents:***

Parents/ Guardians play a have a very important role in Relationships and Sexuality Education, being the primary educators of their children. Relevant sections from the school's RSE policy will be made available to parents through the school's website. A copy of this policy will be made available to any parents on request at the school office.

***Withdrawing pupils from the RSE programme:***

- It is the right of parents to withdraw their child from the FSE module of the SPHE programme. Parents must notify the Principal in advance by letter should they wish to exercise this right
- This policy is made available to parents on the school website, including details about the parent's right to withdraw their child from sensitive aspects of RSE - parents can always be provided with a full copy of the syllabus following a request to do so.
- Issues such as over population and birth control are met in a minor way in subjects such as Geography and RE. 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.
- 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.

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

- 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-coordinator, the Principal may become involved if necessary)
- we 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 the other pupils, e.g. it may be appropriate and desirable to have single sex classes for some sections of the RSE programme;
- we attempt to ensure that where a pupil is withdrawn there is no disruption to other parts of their education,

- we point out that pupils who have been withdrawn are vulnerable to teasing - we therefore attempt to cause minimal embarrassment to the pupil and minimal disruption to the programme;
- we also point out that pupils may receive inaccurate information from their peers;
- We offer the parents access to appropriate information and resources.

### **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 counseling on aspects of sexual behavior and contraception; however sources of professional information and advice will be identified when appropriate. Teachers may provide students 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 student.

### **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-coordinator 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. The Principal will decide whether to inform the parents and/or appropriate authorities and may arrange for counseling.

- 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 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 i.e. the Principal, or Deputy Principal if Principal is unavailable, in the 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, as previously referred to in Chapter 1 Paragraph 1.2 of these guidelines, should be borne in mind. 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. However, during the teaching of RSE, biological terms will be used, and so there will be a cross-over of content. This may provide opportunities for cross-curricular co-operation.

**7. Using visiting speakers and others**

- 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:**

- i) the degree of explicitness of the content and presentation
  - ii) How a (SPHE) teacher will be present in class with the visiting speaker for the duration of their presentation;
  - iii) Will staff take an active role in the visitor's activities?
  - iv) How the visitor will be prepared for the visit, and how the visit can be built upon and followed up.
- 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.

- 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.
- The Office should be informed of the date and name of the visitor.

## **8. Homosexuality**

Teachers do not promote any one orientation 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 and assumptions, and address homophobic prejudice and bullying. Discussion of homosexuality should be appropriate to the age of the students.

## **9. Contraception**

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

## **10. Abortion**

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

## **11. Special Needs**

Children 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 behavior are and are not acceptable, and in being warned and prepared against abuse by others.

### ***G. Ongoing support, development and review***

#### **Training:**

1. 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 trained 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.

2. 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 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 recourses allow. Some of the resource materials for the RSE programme include:

- ❖ The North Western Health Board SPHE programme (2010)
- ❖ On my own two feet Substance Abuse Programme. Dept. of Education and Science, Dept. of Health and Children, Mater Dei Counseling Service (1994)
- ❖ Resource materials for Relationships and Sexuality education, Junior Cycle, Department of education and Science (1998)
- ❖ Busy Bodies book and DVD (Junior Cycle)
- ❖ Trust book and DVD (Senior Cycle)

Teachers on occasions may use other materials deemed suitable and appropriate for student needs and in accordance with school ethos.

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 is:

- a) pupil feedback
- b) staff review and feedback
- c) parental feedback

### **Review personnel and timeframe**

Participating teachers will meet at least twice a year to evaluate the review the programme with minutes kept on file.

There will also be an annual review. The annual review team will comprise of principal, deputy principal and RSE teachers. Parents will be consulted (through Parents Council) and their comments considered.

*Approved by; Board of Management , January 2012*

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