

Coláiste de hÍde



Meas - Bród - Comhar

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Relationships and Sexuality Education Policy

A. *School Context*

Coláiste de hÍde is a relatively small school community where both the educational and pastoral development of the student is more easily identifiable. The school prioritises pastoral care with every class having a specific pastoral tutor assigned to them. Each class group has one Social Personal and Health Education and Wellbeing period per week, this provides a forum to discuss issues related to self-esteem. Senior students also have one period of Guidance per week. There is a focus on personal development in these courses which include modules on assertive communication and mutual respect. Coláiste de hÍde runs a very successful 'Stand Up Week'. This week celebrates the identities of our LGBTQ+ community and raises awareness amongst our students.

From September 2027 onwards, each class will have at least one SPHE lesson per week, in line with the redevelopment of the senior cycle. The teaching and learning of Wellbeing contributes to the key competencies of students - being creative, communicating, working with others, participating in society, fostering wellbeing, managing learning and self-management.

B. *School Mission Statement*

In Coláiste de hÍde, we aim to empower and facilitate the individual student to reach his/her potential intellectually, physically, spiritually, culturally, socially and emotionally through the medium of the Irish language. A special effort is made in the school to promote a positive self-image in all individuals together with respect for every person, their community and their environment.

C. *Relationship with the School Mission Statement*

In Coláiste de hÍde we aim to instill our school values of Respect, Pride and Teamwork in all of our students. We believe that the advancement of the school and the academic progress of our students depends on this respect above all else. This respect forms the foundation of the relationship between students, staff, parents and school management. The school is committed to create a safe environment for everyone, a place to learn, grow and develop.

Relationship and Sexuality Education is a lifelong process of acquiring knowledge, understanding and skills and of developing attitudes, beliefs and values about sexuality identity and relationships. RSE classes will provide the students with opportunities to learn about relationships and sexuality in ways that will help them think and act in a moral, caring and responsible way. It will also enable students to develop attitudes and values towards their own sexuality in a moral, spiritual and social framework.

D. *Definition of Relationships and Sexuality Education*

RSE is a developmental process through experiential learning in which students participate to help cultivate a healthy attitude towards themselves and others, particularly in the area of sexuality and relationships.

E. *Relationships and Sexuality Education within Social Personal and Health Education*

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.

F. 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:

- ❖ To help students understand and develop friendships and relationships
- ❖ To promote an understanding of sexuality
- ❖ To promote a positive attitude to one's own sexuality and in one's relationship with others
- ❖ To promote knowledge of and respect for reproduction
- ❖ To enable students to develop attitudes and values toward their sexuality in a moral, spiritual and social framework in keeping with the policy of the school
- ❖ 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.

G. Guidelines for the management and organisation 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 and Deputy Principal.
2. **Informing and Involving 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. A copy of this policy will be made available to any parent on request to the school office.
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-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.

5. **Confidentiality:** It is school policy that in circumstances where a student 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.

The following is also school policy:

- ❖ teachers must not promise absolute confidentiality;
- ❖ students 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 student to notify parents;
- ❖ teachers must indicate clearly to students when the content of a conversation can no longer be kept confidential - the student can then decide whether to proceed or not.
- ❖ the teacher must also share the main points of the statements outlined with the students (in appropriate language) so that they understand the implications of sharing information. Students should engage in non-personal discussion during classes rather than sharing personal information in front of the class.

The Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools 2025 state in 4.1.1. and 4.2.1:

4.1.1 The Children First Act, 2015 has placed a statutory obligation on specific people to report child protection concerns that are at or above a threshold of harm (as defined in that Act) to Tusla. Such persons are referred to as “mandated persons” under the Act. All teachers who are registered with the Teaching Council are mandated persons under the Children First Act, 2015.

4.2.1 In accordance with the best practice (non-statutory) requirement of the Children First National Guidance 2017, these procedures continue the previous requirement that any member of school personnel including a registered teacher who receives an allegation or has a suspicion that a child may have been, is being, or is at risk of being abused or neglected, is still required to report the matter, without delay, to the DLP in the school. Every registered teacher, as a mandated person, now also has a statutory obligation to make his or her own mandated report to Tusla where the concern about the child is at or above a threshold of harm as defined in the Act. Therefore in addition to reporting his or her concern to the DLP, a registered teacher must also consider whether or not the concern is at or above the defined threshold of harm at which the registered teacher has his or her own statutory obligation under the Children First Act, 2015 to submit a mandated report to Tusla.

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 students from the RSE programme:** The topics covered by each year group and details about the parent’s right to withdraw their child from RSE are made

available to parents through the school app in advance – parents will always be provided with a full copy of this policy following a request to do so.

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. (Appendix 1)

8. **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 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. 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.
9. **Diversity:** Teachers do not promote any one life-style as the only acceptable one for society and therefore it is inevitable and natural that all sexualities will be discussed during a programme of sexual education. One of the advantages of exploring issues concerning LGBTQ+ is the opportunity to correct false ideas, assumptions and address prejudice.
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. **Additional Needs:** Children with additional needs may need more help in coping with the physical and emotional aspects of life.

H. 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 a 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.
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 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:

- a) student feedback;
- b) staff review and feedback;
- c) parental feedback.

Appendix 1

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 student's parent/ guardian and if appropriate attempt to reassure them (via phone call or meeting with the relevant staff member). We highlight the benefits of the RSE programme and potential disadvantages of being removed from the classes, for example students receiving misinformation online or from their peers. We offer the parents/ guardians access to appropriate information and resources.

Policy Review Date:

April 2028