

# Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) Policy

## Coláiste na Mí



## **Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) Policy**

### **Introductory Statement:**

This RSE policy was developed in accordance with:

1. Our mission statement and the 9 values of Coláiste na Mí.
2. Guidelines as set out in Circular M4/95, M20/96, C23/10 *Social and Personal Health Education (SPHE) and Relationships and Sexuality Education-Best Practice Guidelines for Post Primary Schools* and C37/2010.
3. Guidance from SPHE Department
4. Consultation with the Care Team.
5. Consultation with the Students, Staff, Parents and Management of Coláiste na Mí.

All members of the School community are consulted during its development.

This RSE policy is a written statement of the aims of the RSE programme within Coláiste na Mí. The policy reflects the relationship of RSE to SPHE and other subjects e.g. Religious Education, Science, Biology and Home Economics and the organisation and management of RSE within Coláiste na Mí.

This policy applies to all aspects of teaching and learning about relationships and sexuality. It also applies to all school staff, students, parents /guardians, visiting speakers, invited guests, volunteers and members of the Board of Management.

### **Rationale:**

It is necessary to have a Relationships and Sexuality Education policy as RSE is a key element of healthy social and personal development as:

- Young people are exposed to a wide variety of messages about sexuality and sexual activity. Schools 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. Section 4 of the Rules and Programme for Secondary schools requires schools to have an agreed policy for RSE and a suitable RSE programme in place for all students at both Junior and Senior cycle.

At both Junior and Senior Cycle the RSE programme is part of Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE).

- Circulars M4/95, M20/96, C23/2010 and C37/2010 request schools to commence a process of RSE policy development.
- 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.
- The RSE policy of Coláiste na Mí must embrace the promotion of the 9 values and CNM Mission Statement as an intrinsic part of school life, adhered to by all parties involved.

### **School's Ethos and Vision**

The RSE policy will guide teachers in the treatment of such issues in accordance with the ethos of the Coláiste. 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.

In this regard, it should be noted that:

Schools are required to deliver all aspects of the RSE curriculum, including those in relation to sexual orientation, contraception, sexually transmitted infections etc. This can be done within a context in which teaching of the programme is informed by the school's ethos.

A school can express its ethos while at the same time facilitating students in discussing a range of views in relation to topics within the RSE programme.

## **Coláiste na Mí Mission Statement**

Coláiste na Mí is a child-centred, supportive learning environment where each student is encouraged and facilitated in realising their full potential in a positive climate which is caring, respectful, fair, and inclusive. The school community of Coláiste na Mí is a partnership of students, staff, parents and all members of our community. The promotion of personal development and learning through hard work, creativity and commitment is a priority in our school.

### **The Nine Values:**

The Coláiste na Mí nine values are the foundations on which our school culture is built. Every member of our school community is expected to support these nine values for our Coláiste.

#### **Coláiste na Mí Nine Values:**

- 1. Respect**
- 2. Justice**
- 3. Integrity**
- 4. Honesty**
- 5. Saothar**
- 6. Kindness**
- 7. Honour**
- 8. Teamwork**
- 9. Responsibility**

## **Coláiste na Mí's Vision of RSE**

In this age of intense social media, the access to personal devices and added peer pressure from various media forms students are vulnerable to forming false and ill-informed perceptions on Relationships, Sexuality and Human Reproduction. It is our belief in Coláiste na Mí that it is vital our students receive accurate, up to date and factual information about the natural development of humans as sexual beings. We promote the importance of developing positive, healthy, responsible and respectful relationships.

Through the deliverance of the RSE programme and by imparting this knowledge to our students, we envision that they in turn develop better self-esteem and raised levels of confidence. This inevitably results in our students being empowered to make mature, responsible and informed decisions within the relationships they develop.

### **Aims and Objectives of RSE:**

The RSE programme intends to achieve the following:

- Promote knowledge and respect for reproduction.
- Provide an opportunity to learn about relationships and sexuality.
- Encourage students to think and act in a moral, caring and responsible way.
- Help students understand and develop friendships.
- Help students understanding of sexuality.
- Develop a positive attitude towards one's own sexuality.

### **Aims and Objectives of RSE Policy:**

- The policy will ensure clarity and consensus on how RSE is taught in Coláiste na Mí.
- It will articulate the relationship of RSE to SPHE.
- It will articulate the aims of the RSE programme.
- It will clarify the rights, roles and responsibilities of all within the college community in relation to the RSE programme with particular reference to teaching staff, students, parents/guardians and the board of management/patron.
- It will ensure that teachers, parents/guardians and students understand how the teaching of RSE is linked to the school ethos.
- It will provide information on the practicalities of delivering the programme.

### **KEY MEASURES:**

#### **A. Provision of training and staff development:**

- The role of Caoimhnoir is one of great importance in our school. In recognizing the strong pastoral link created between Caoimhnoir and student management have committed to placing the class Caoimhnoir as their SPHE/RSE teacher, where possible within timetable constraints.
- It is envisioned by management that teachers in the role of Caoimhnoir also see their unique relationship with their class as a great opportunity to support the growth and

development of students within SPHE/ RSE programmes, any teacher uncomfortable with the teaching of such programmes will be encouraged to consult with management to express such concerns.

- Management is also committed to releasing teachers for appropriate CPD training for the teaching of RSE provided by the SPHE support service. Staff will be encouraged to attend by the Principal and the SPHE/RSE coordinator. • All teachers involved in this work do not 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 RSE.
- The appropriate teaching resources will be made available to staff subject to budget constraints.

### **B. Inclusion of Parents/Guardians:**

- Parents /Guardians are the primary educators of their children and their role in education concerning Relationships and Sexuality Education is seen by Coláiste na Mí as very important. Relevant sections of this RSE policy will be included in the Parent’s information pack on enrolment to our Coláiste, in the student’s Dialann and also on the school’s website.
- A letter will be sent home informing parents/guardians prior to the teaching of the 6 RSE lessons. This letter will inform parents of the general content of the programme and it will also instruct parents/guardians on procedures for withdrawing their child if they so wish.
- A copy of this policy will be made available to any parent/guardian on request to the general office.

**Note:** The *Education Act 1998* provides that a student is not required to attend instruction in any subject which is contrary to the conscience of the parents or in the case of a student who has reached the age of 18, the student. Hence, parents /guardians have a right to opt their child out of the sensitive issues in RSE if they wish to do so. Parents do not have to give reasons for withdrawal. Once a parent’s/guardian’s request to withdraw is made via correct process, that request must be complied with for that year’s session of RSE.

In the case of any student/students withdrawing from RSE provisions will be made for that student/students to sit in the RSE/SPHE Coordinator’s class, or other consulted teacher, for the duration of the RSE lessons.

### **C. Ethical/Moral Considerations:**

RSE is a complex area of the curriculum. Coláiste na Mí's RSE policy will provide guidance for teachers on the moral and ethical framework within which the programme will be taught. Issues include the following:

#### **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. On these, and on all questions, teachers will use their professional judgment, guided by the age of the students, the RSE curriculum and the RSE policy for the school. Students should be made aware at the beginning of the RSE programme that asking personal questions of staff and peers is inappropriate and unacceptable. It is suggested that teachers might make available a "question box" in the classroom (or via appropriate iPad Application) , into which students may place questions of an embarrassing nature to be dealt with anonymously and in the strictest confidence. If a teacher becomes concerned about a matter that has been raised they should inform/seek advice from the Principal/Deputy Principal.

#### **Confidentiality:**

- While students should 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 should be respected unless a teacher becomes aware that a student is at risk, in which case the appropriate action should be taken e.g. follow the procedures set down in the Child Protection Procedures and Guidelines for Post-Primary Schools (2011). Teachers will make themselves familiar with all the latest and relevant Acts and Guidelines: Children First Act 2015, Children First, National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children 2017 etc.

In cases of under-age sexual activity, the Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools (2011) state: *'In all cases where a school becomes aware of underage sexual intercourse the school shall take appropriate steps to inform the child's parents. (2.1.6)'*

## **Confidentiality Continued..**

**It is important that the students must be made aware of the limits of confidentiality and that teachers do not give unconditional guarantees of confidentiality.**

Teachers may refer back to the ground rules agreed at the start of their SPHE programme. Students must be aware that any incident may be conveyed to the Principal and possibly the parents /guardian if the Principal decides that it is in the best interests of the child. Teachers will inform students when the content of a conversation can no longer be kept confidential.

## **Sexual Activity:**

It is advisable for teachers to give young people information on the age of consent which, following the passage of the Criminal Law (Sexual Offences) Act, 2006, is 17 years of age for both males and females.

## **Family Planning/ Contraception :**

- The post-primary RSE Curriculum Guidelines state that the subject of family planning should be covered within the Senior Cycle RSE programme. There is a lesson on family planning in the RSE Senior Cycle Resource Materials on P77 and also in the “*TRUST*” pack. The RSE programme requires that young people are provided with information about methods of contraception, including Natural Family Planning. Age appropriate information is already taught as part of the Junior Certificate science curriculum. Schools can use their discretion with regard to the age at which students receive any aspect of the RSE programme.

## **Sexual Orientation:**

- The post-primary RSE Curriculum Guidelines include the subject of sexual orientation. There is a lesson on sexual orientation in the RSE Senior Cycle Resource Materials on P151. RSE training courses delivered by the SPHE Support Service provide teachers with further materials.
- The school may decide if the topic needs to be addressed before Senior Cycle, especially if homophobic bullying is an issue. Teachers do not promote any one lifestyle as the only acceptable one for society. Therefore it is inevitable and natural that homosexuality will be discussed during a programme of sex education.
- One of the many 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.
- The *Equal Status Act 2000* and the *Equality Act 2004* prohibit discrimination across nine grounds, including sexual orientation. Consideration needs to be given to the messages that are conveyed if the subject of homosexuality is not discussed in schools.
- It is important that any student who is coming to terms with their sexual identity should not experience any harassment, embarrassment or isolation which may impact on their mental and emotional health and they should be offered support from the Care Team.



### **Abortion:**

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

### **Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs):**

- While awareness of STIs is one of the objectives of the Junior Cycle SPHE/RSE syllabus, STIs are mainly addressed in Senior Cycle. There is a lesson on STIs in the RSE Senior Cycle Resource Materials on P103 and also in the “*TRUST*” pack. Given that rates of STI transmission are increasing, it is important that the subject is addressed in schools.

## **D. Practical Issues**

- All students in the Junior cycle have one period of SPHE per week. RSE will be included as a module (minimum of 6 lessons) in the third term of school as part of their SPHE programme.
- Students in Senior Cycle will receive a minimum of 6 weeks tuition in RSE as part of their SPHE programme.
- The size of the class groups will be determined by the Caomhnoir class.
- Boys and girls will be taught all aspects of RSE together.
- The boundaries of the RSE programme will be delivered with due deference to:
  - (a) The age of the students
  - (b) The school ethos
  - (c) Limits of confidentiality, limits to discussions and questions.
  - (d) Ensuring that the RSE classroom is a safe place for all, including students and teachers.
  - (e) RSE curriculum guidelines
- Visiting speakers must be made aware of the schools RSE policy, Mission statement and the SPHE visitor guidelines as laid down by the Department of Education in circular [0023/2010](#) to secondary schools. Thus, classroom teachers must remain in the classroom with the students; parents should be consulted and made aware of visiting people and agencies. All programmes and events delivered by visitors and external agencies must use appropriate evidence based methodologies with clear educational outcomes. Such programmes are best delivered by those specifically qualified to work with young people for whom the programmes are designed.
- Provision will be made for students with special needs as laid down by the NCCA guidelines. To comply with these guidelines it will be necessary for the class teacher to consult with the special needs co-ordinator, prior to the programme, to discuss any students with special needs and to ascertain how they can be supported throughout the programme.
- Consideration and sensitivity must be given to the needs of students with special circumstances. Teachers are informed to consult the Care Team and check the school’s Guidance and Counselling ‘In /Out List’, which is regularly updated.

## **Links to other Policies and to Curriculum Delivery:**

School policies need to be consistent with one another, within the framework of the overall School Plan. Relevant CNM policies already in place, being developed or reviewed, will be examined with reference to the RSE Policy and any implications which may impact upon them will be addressed. Similarly the implications of other CNM policies and guidelines/plans for the RSE policy also need to be considered.

## **Identify any links to curriculum delivery:**

- Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) is a Junior Cycle core subject. SPHE provides students with opportunities to develop the skills and competencies to care for themselves and others and to make informed decisions about their health, personal lives and social development. This includes providing information on relationships and sexuality.
- Aspects of RSE are delivered across the curriculum, through subjects such as Religious Education, Science, Biology and Home Economics. In Coláiste na Mí our aim is to ensure that all students receive a full and balanced RSE programme from First Year through to Sixth Year.

## **Implementation, Arrangements, Roles and Responsibilities:**

- The RSE Coordinator is assigned the role of coordinating the policy and spearheading the implementation of the policy.
- Teaching Staff will have direct responsibility for delivering the RSE programme at Junior Cycle and Senior Cycle.
- Year Heads and Caomhnoirs have a Pastoral Care role in liaising with students, parents/guardians, Guidance Dept, Special Education Needs Co-ordinator and SPHE/RSE Coordinator.

## **Ratification & Communication:**

When the finalised draft policy is ratified by the Board of Management, it becomes the Coláiste na Mí's agreed RSE Policy. A copy of the RSE policy will be emailed to all staff, the entire teaching staff will familiarise themselves with the policy and make themselves aware of any changes implied in curriculum delivery.

Parents/guardians will be informed of the RSE Policy from the time of acceptance of the student to Coláiste na Mí.

A copy of the RSE policy will be available at all times in the General Office and on the school's Website.

### **Monitor the Implementation of the policy:**

The Principal is ultimately responsible for the implementation of the policy but may assign the close monitoring and coordination to the RSE Coordinator.

### **Reviewing and evaluating the policy:**

Ongoing review and evaluation will take place cognisance of changing information, guidelines, legislation and feedback from parents/guardians, students, teachers and others.

The policy will be revised as necessary in the light of such reviews and evaluation and within the framework of school planning.

The policy will be reviewed at 3 year intervals or sooner if necessary.

Some practical indicators will be used to gauge the impact and effectiveness of the policy. Such indicators include the following:

- A student /teacher evaluation form may be given to some classes at the end of the RSE module.
- The range of resource material available to teachers.
- The in-service training availed of by teachers.
- Students awareness of the policy
- Parents and Guardians awareness of the policy.
- Positive feedback is received from teachers, students, parents/guardians and members of the Board of Management.

Policy Completed: 23/11/18

Policy agreed by staff: 30/11/18

Policy consultation with students: 11/10/18

Policy agreed with Care Team: 10/12/18

Policy ratified by Coláiste na Mí Board of Management: 14/02/19

Date of Implementation: Immediate

Due to be reviewed: FEB 2022 (or sooner if necessary)

# **Appendix**

1. Text for inclusion in Coláiste na Mí student Dialann and Parents Information Pack

2. Teacher Resources

1.



## **RSE in Coláiste na Mí**

### Context

- The Education Act 1998 requires that schools should promote the social and personal development of students and provide health education for them. Section 4 of the Rules and Programme for Secondary schools requires schools to have an agreed policy for Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) and a suitable RSE programme in place for all students at both Junior and Senior cycle. At both Junior and Senior Cycle the RSE programme is delivered as part of Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE).
- Schools are required to deliver all aspects of the RSE curriculum. This can be done within a context in which teaching of the programme is informed by the school's ethos and vision.
- A letter will be sent home informing parents/guardians prior to the teaching of the 6 RSE lessons. This letter will inform parents of the general content of the programme and it will also instruct parents/guardians on procedures for withdrawing their child if they so wish.

### Vision of RSE

In this age of intense social media, the access to personal devices and added peer pressure from various media forms, students are vulnerable to forming false and ill-informed perceptions on Relationships, Sexuality and Human Reproduction. It is our belief in CNM that it is vital our students receive accurate, up to date and factual information about the natural development of humans as sexual beings. We promote the importance of developing positive, healthy, responsible and respectful relationships.

A full copy of the RSE policy will be available at all times in the General Office and on the school's Website.

## Teacher Resources

### Junior Cycle

All Junior Cycle classes have SPHE textbooks My Life 1, 2 or 3 respectively. All appropriate RSE lessons are devised and included in all SPHE textbooks as currently supplied via the school's book rental scheme.

The SPHE Coordinator will liaise with SPHE teachers to ensure all teachers are supplied with a copy of relevant textbook.

Teachers will be informed of all resources available on SharePoint and department members will be encouraged to upload and share resources in SPHE department file.

### Senior Cycle

The TRUST Pack Resource Booklet can be accessed in the SPHE-RSE department folder on SharePoint. This resource is divided into appropriate schemes of work/plans for each year group covering Transition Year, 5<sup>th</sup> Year and 6<sup>th</sup> Year classes. The RSE Coordinator will have the hard copy of this resource, available upon request.

Additional resources are also available on SharePoint which department members will be informed of and encouraged to add to.