

2021 / 2022

# Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) Policy



**St. Michael's College**  
**Listowel, Co. Kerry**

Reviewed	Ratified by the Board of Management	Review Date
	25 October 2019	5 <sup>th</sup> November 2021

### **Introductory Statements**

Schools play a vital role in the promotion of a young person's academic, physical, mental, emotional, social and spiritual development. Our education system is key to equipping young people with the knowledge, skills and competencies to deal with challenges that may impact on their wellbeing. In line with the Wellbeing Policy Statement and Framework for Practice and as set out by the Department's ambition and vision for wellbeing promotion St. Michael's College has developed and tailored a programme that supports and promotes the wellbeing and individual needs of our students.

Young people learn more effectively and have better academic outcomes if they are happy in their work, believe in themselves and feel acknowledged and supported in their schools. National and international research highlights that the wellbeing of our young people is critical to their success in education and in life. This framework will help guide us at St. Michael's College to identify our strengths, examine areas for further development and take ownership of our own development and improvement as set out in LAOS.

Having examined anecdotal evidence, St. Michael's College has adopted a whole school approach to Wellbeing. The nature of the school environment and connectedness has been found to be a key determinant of success in terms of wellbeing promotion. An environment that enhances competence and wellbeing is one that consciously fosters warm relationships, encourages participation, develops pupil and teacher autonomy and cultivates clarity about boundaries, rules and positive expectations.

We endeavour to promote Wellbeing in all aspects of teaching and learning. Young people spend most of their day in classrooms and, consequently, their daily experience of teaching and learning contributes greatly to their wellbeing. Our teaching and learning must be democratic, inclusive, engaging, differentiated, fostering expectations of high achievement and providing opportunity for success. The importance of having a deliberate focus on the development of emotional and social competencies is also highlighted at St. Michael's

College. The World Health Organisation (WHO), for example, recognises the need to promote wellbeing through interventions that promote competence and psychological strengths (WHO, 2005). Furthermore, social emotional learning programmes have been shown to significantly improve young people's social and emotional skills, attitudes, behaviour and learning performance (Durlack, Weissbert, Dymnicki, Taylor & Schellinger, 2011). Such programmes are delivered to our students as part of the SPHE and RSE curriculum.

### **Relationship of RSE to the School's Mission Statement**

St. Michael's College is committed to providing the best educational formation possible for all our students, by providing equally for all, a broadly based curriculum. We aim to provide an education for all students which will embrace their full human development: personal, academic, physical, moral, and religious. Relationships and Sexuality Education encompasses the development of attitudes, beliefs, and values about relationships, sexual identity and intimacy, contributing towards the full human development of the student. As outlined by the Department of Education and Skills in Circular 0037/2010, no aspect of the RSE programme including Sexually Transmitted Infection (STI's), family planning, or sexual orientation can be omitted on the grounds of religious ethos. As we seek to promote the overall development of the student, this involves the integration of Relationships and Sexuality into personal understanding, growth, and development within the context of our holistic educational ethos.

### **Definition of Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE)**

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. Relationship and Sexuality education (RSE) aims to provide opportunities for students in the school to learn about relationships and sexuality in ways that help them think and act in a moral, caring and responsible way.

### **Scope**

The policy applies to school staff, students, Board of Management, Parents/Guardians, Guest Speakers and External Facilitators. The policy applies 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.

### **Policy Context and Rationale**

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

- Circulars M4/95 M20/96 0023/2010 0037/2010 and Child Protection Circular 2011 request schools to commence a process of RSE policy development.
- Circular 15/2017 'Arrangements for the Implementation of the Framework for Junior Cycle with particular reference to school years 2017/18 and 2018/19'
- The school adopts and adheres to the DES Child Protection Procedures, Children First Legislation (2017) and has a Child Protection Policy / Child Safeguarding Statement in place
- Sexuality is a key element of healthy social and personal development. Young people are exposed to a wide variety of messages about sexuality and sexual activity. Schools, in consultation with parents, need to reflect on how to provide for the needs of the students.
- The effectiveness of an RSE programme is dependent on a collaborative policy process involving teachers, parents, members of the Board of Management and students.

### **Relationship of RSE to SPHE / Wellbeing**

- SPHE provides opportunities for pupils to learn basic personal and social skills which foster integrity, self-confidence and self-esteem while nurturing sensitivity to the feelings and rights of others.

- The Guidelines for RSE state that SPHE is ‘spiral, developmental in nature and age-appropriate in content and methodology.’ (NCCA, 1995, 1.2). The RSE programme is designed to follow this principle and pattern.
- SPHE covers areas such as self-esteem, assertiveness, communication, and decision-making skills – all of which can contribute to the effectiveness of the RSE programme.
- SPHE adds the dimension to education of empowering people to manage their own lives. By providing RSE through an SPHE programme we teach students personal skills to increase their personal effectiveness so that, in the context of their own lives, they are able to make informed decisions in relation to their sexuality and relationships with others.
- There is continued emphasis on health and well-being, responsibility, and decision-making throughout the RSE programme.

### **Aims and Objectives**

Aims:-

- To help students understand and develop friendships.
- To help develop students’ understanding of sexuality. • To develop a positive attitude towards and acceptance of sexuality.
- To promote a knowledge and respect for the opinions of others.
- To provide an opportunity to learn about relationships and sexuality.
- To encourage students to think and act in a moral, caring, and responsible way.

### Objectives:-

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

### Key Measures

- Provision of Training and Staff Development
- Inclusion of Parents/Guardians and Students.
- Ethical/Moral Considerations
- Practical Issues

#### 1. Provision of training & staff development

- Opportunities provided by the PDST and our Education Centre will be brought to the attention of staff members. Teachers will be encouraged to attend CPD in RSE.
- Application for in-school support from PDST sought when necessary.

- Staff Department meetings utilised as a platform for discussion and development of RSE materials.

The Board of Management and Senior Management Team at the College are committed to ensuring access to CPD opportunities for all teachers involved in RSE, to providing relevant RSE school resources and to supporting efforts of parents to provide educational opportunities for other parents. Senior Management and the Board of Management facilitate teachers to participate in professional development opportunities, with due regard to the school budget and Supervision/Substitution rota, and the need for the ongoing teaching and learning programme of the school to continue with as little disturbance as possible.

### **2. Inclusion of parents/guardians and students**

It is recognised by the school that the parents/guardians are the primary educators of the children and their role in education concerning relationships and sexuality is seen by the College as very important. It is the policy of this College that all parents/guardians opt into all school policies. A copy of the policy is available on the College website, [www.stmichaelscollege.ie](http://www.stmichaelscollege.ie)

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. The school may wish to ask the parents to put their request in writing.

### 3. Ethical/Moral Considerations

RSE is a complex area of the curriculum. A school's RSE policy provides guidance for teachers on the moral and ethical framework within which the programme will be taught. In this regard, the policy committee has considered the following issues:-

**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 abortion. On these, and on all questions, teachers will use their professional judgement, guided by the age of the students, the RSE curriculum and the RSE policy for the school.

**Offering Advice:** The school's function is to provide a general education about sexual matters and issues and not to offer individual advice, personal opinion, information, or counselling on aspects of sexual behaviour and contraception – however sources of professional information and advice will be identified if appropriate. Teachers may provide students with educational information about where and from whom they can receive confidential sexual advice and treatment, e.g., their doctor or other suitable agency. Advice offered must not be directive, must be appropriate to the age of the

pupil, and must be consistent with the school ethos. Some sensitive questions may be asked of the teacher and may be answered in a professional way.

**Explicit Questions:** It may not be appropriate to deal with some explicit questions in class. In this case, teachers state, in a sensitive manner, 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 s/he should seek advice from RSE 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**

From the outset students will draw up a set of acceptable ground rules. While students should not be encouraged to disclose personal or private information in RSE classes, there may be times when they do talk about their own lives. Confidentiality will be respected unless a teacher becomes aware that a child 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 or the school's Substance Use Policy.

In cases of under-age sexual activity, P10 of the Child Protection Guidelines for 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.'

All students will be made aware of the limits of confidentiality and teachers will not give unconditional guarantees of confidentiality.

**Sexual Activity:** The pace of social change in Ireland over the last number of years has been rapid. Parents, students, and teachers can experience a sense of confusion in relation to sexual morals. The religious ethos of a school may seem to be in conflict with the lived experience of the students. Teachers will 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.

**Contraception:** The post-primary RSE Curriculum Guidelines state that the subject of family planning should be covered within the Senior Cycle RSE programme. The RSE programme requires that young people are provided with information about methods of contraception, but consideration will be given by teachers to the moral and values framework within which it is taught. Schools can use their discretion with regard to the age at which students receive any aspect of the RSE programme. If need arises the topic of birth control will be dealt with in an age appropriate manner.

**Sexual Orientation:** The post-primary RSE Curriculum Guidelines include the subject of sexual orientation. RSE training courses delivered by the SPHE Support Service provide teachers with resource materials. The school may decide the topic needs to be

addressed before Senior Cycle, especially if homophobic bullying is an issue. Teachers will not promote any one life-style as the only acceptable one for society and therefore it is likely 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 will 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 will be given to the messages that are conveyed when the subject of homosexuality is discussed. Should teachers need guidance on the parameters within which such a discussion will take place they should refer to the pastoral care team.

Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs): While awareness of STIs is one of the objectives of the Second Year SPHE/RSE syllabus, STIs are mainly addressed in Senior Cycle. Given that rates of STI transmission are increasing, it is important that the subject is addressed in schools.

#### **4. Practical Issues**

- SPHE is timetabled in all Junior Cycle classes and RSE is delivered within this subject.
- RSE to Fifth and Sixth Years will be delivered as a 6 week programme, during the time scheduled for Wellbeing. It will be delivered by the RSE Co-ordinator with

follow up workshops/classes with the individual Wellbeing teacher timetabled for that class group. The class size will not exceed thirty students for RSE/SPHE.

### **The role of guest speakers:-**

It is College 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. Guest speakers will be made aware of the schools RSE policy and the SPHE Guest Guidelines (Attachment 1). 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. The class teacher will generally accompany students during the visit.

- Every attempt will be made to accommodate students with special needs, with their best interest kept to the fore. 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 behaviour is and is not acceptable, and in being alerted and prepared against the possibility of abuse by others: NCCA – Document for students with mild learning disability ([http://www.ncca.ie/uploadedfiles/PP\\_SPHE.pdf](http://www.ncca.ie/uploadedfiles/PP_SPHE.pdf)).

### **Withdrawing Students from RSE programme**

- I. 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 eighteen years, the student. Parents have a right therefore to withdraw their son from all or any aspect of RSE. Parents must notify the Principal in advance of their wish to have their son withdrawn from all or part of the programme. The school may wish to ask the parents to put their request in writing.

- II. 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 formal RSE Programme.
- III. Parents do not have to give reasons for withdrawal, but we respectfully invite them to do so – we aim to resolve misunderstandings if possible. Once a parent's written request to withdraw is made, that request must be complied with until revoked by the parent.
- IV. If a student is withdrawn from the lessons pertaining to the sensitive elements of the RSE programme, parents must give a notice in writing to the school that they are withdrawing their child. The student may be accommodated in another teacher's classroom in the school.

### **Resources**

The resources used in class will be guided by the advice given at Continual Professional Development (CPD). Resources will be in the form of textbooks, workbooks, appropriate DVDs, brochures etc. Junior Cycle students have an SPHE

textbook and the RSE content section will be covered within it. In Senior Cycle, RSE teachers will source appropriate resources.

### What the School Currently Provides

The RSE module is taught to all Junior Cycle classes in SPHE and at Senior Cycle during Wellbeing classes. Fifth- and Sixth-Year classes participate in the RSE module during Wellbeing classes. Some aspects of RSE are approached during subjects such as Biology, CSPE, Guidance and Counselling, Physical Education and Science. The RSE programme is supported by the Student Support system and by the Management and Staff of the school.

#### Junior Cycle topics covered include: (this is a sample list)

Friendships and relationships  
 Self-esteem  
 Puberty  
 Identifying and labelling parts of male and female reproductive system  
 Functions of parts identified.  
 Conception  
 Consent  
 Sexuality- some key terms

#### 5<sup>th</sup> year - below is a sample of the topics covered:

<p><b>Relationships:</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Keeping your cool in conflict and how to resolve conflict in a relationship</li> <li>• Self-esteem and being yourself</li> <li>• Boundaries and communicating boundaries</li> </ul>	<p>Taught during Wellbeing class.</p>
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## RELATIONSHIPS AND SEXUALITY EDUCATION (RSE) POLICY

<i><b>Human Sexuality:</b></i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What is sexuality?</li> <li>• Sexual orientation</li> <li>• Changing roles in society</li> </ul>	Taught during Wellbeing class.
<i><b>Human growth and development:</b></i>	Consent <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rape: myths and truths</li> <li>• Rape and sexual assault</li> <li>• Sexual abuse and how to deal with it</li> <li>• Contraceptive methods</li> <li>• Sexual Transmitted Infections</li> </ul>	Taught during Wellbeing class.

### 6<sup>th</sup> year - below is a sample of the topics covered:

<i><b>Relationships:</b></i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• When we feel hurt</li> <li>• Loss and coping with loss</li> </ul>	Taught during Wellbeing class.
<i><b>Human Sexuality:</b></i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Gender and identity</li> </ul>	Taught during Wellbeing class.
<i><b>Human growth and development:</b></i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Human reproduction</li> <li>• Unplanned pregnancy</li> <li>• Fertility</li> <li>• Health care before and after pregnancy</li> <li>• Transmission of Sexual Transmitted Infections</li> </ul>	Taught during Wellbeing class.

### **Policies which support RSE**

The following policies have been considered in the drafting of the RSE policy:

- SPHE Policy
- Child Protection Policy
- Child Safeguarding Statement



- Code of Positive Behaviour
- Admissions Policy
- Anti-Bullying Policy
- Substance Use Policy
- Acceptable Use Policy
- Guidance and Counselling Plan

### **Child Protection**

This policy is cognisant of all aspects of our current Child Protection Policy. The College follows the DES child protection guidelines and has a child protection policy with the Principal as Designated Liaison Person (DLP) and the Deputy Principal as the Deputy DLP. Where a child protection concern is raised, the procedures outlined in the schools Child Protection Policy will be followed.

### **Guidelines for the Management and Organisation of RSE at the College**

1. Arrangements regarding the teaching of the RSE programme and the deployment of staff are made by the Principal.
2. CLASS ORGANISATION AND TIMETABLING: Circular M11/03 All second level schools must timetable Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) as part of the Junior Cycle Core Curriculum from September 2003. The time allocation recommended is the equivalent of one class period per week.
3. Circular 0037/2010. All second level schools must implement Relationship and Sexuality Education (RSE) as an element of SPHE at junior cycle and as an RSE

programme in senior cycle, even in the absence of a timetabled SPHE class. The time allocation recommended is six periods of 40minute classes per year.

#### 4. Provision of Support, Training and Staff Development:

- A Co-ordinator of SPHE has been provided (see SPHE policy)
- A Co-ordinator of RSE, with rotate between the Guidance Counsellors.
- Teachers are encouraged and facilitated to attend RSE and SPHE training
- Teachers of RSE and SPHE have access to teaching materials and resources.
- Teachers who express an interest in SPHE / RSE will be given consideration.

#### 5. Inclusion of Parents:

- This policy has been brought to the attention of the Parents' Council.
- Parents have a responsibility to inform themselves of the RSE programme content and to prepare their son(s) for the information they will acquire around the sensitive areas covered in RSE.
- The RSE policy is available to download from [www.stmichaelscollege.ie](http://www.stmichaelscollege.ie) or a copy may be requested by a parent from the school office. Parents are asked to familiarise themselves with the policy content.
- While all partners in the school community - teaching staff, students, parents, and management - are agreed on the programme, we recognise, nevertheless, the right of any parent who so wishes to request that his/her son should not participate in the programme.

### **Organisational Matters**

- Parents have a responsibility to become involved, to inform themselves of the programme content and to prepare children for the information they will acquire around the sensitive areas and discuss areas covered in RSE/SPHE. • Parents are invited/welcome to view the curriculum and may speak to the class teacher if they have any concerns.
- In the class situation students will be encouraged to recognise that certain information is for them only and it would be inappropriate to discuss this with younger siblings/children for example
- With regard to matters of a confidential nature, the College cannot take any responsibility for what is discussed.
- If a teacher has concerns about teaching the sensitive elements in RSE they should consult with the Principal. Any teacher has the right to opt out of teaching the sensitive elements of RSE. It is the responsibility of the B.O.M. to ensure content is covered by another teacher or a guest speaker.
- Special consideration will be taken to ensure that the needs of students with SEN are met. Taking into account the student's social and emotional development, instruction will be based on individual needs where possible. Parents will be consulted around sensitive issues.

### **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).

- 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.
- Parents are recognised as the first teachers of their children about relationships and sexuality. Parents will be informed of the content of the programme and will be allowed withdraw their son from the programme having consulted with the Principal.
- The programme will be taught to the students in the class groupings with which they are familiar. Arrangements regarding the teaching of the programme and deployment of staff will be made by the Principal.
- Issues such as the description of sexual intercourse, teenage pregnancy, separation, divorce, homosexuality, and methods of family planning will be dealt with in a sensitive manner in accord with the ethos of the College.

### **Links to Curriculum Delivery**

- Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) is timetabled as part of the Junior Cycle core curriculum and is an integral part of this programme.
- RSE is delivered as a separate module in the Senior Cycle; delivered as part of the Wellbeing programme.
- Aspects of RSE are delivered across the curriculum, through subjects such as Religious Education, Science and Biology.

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

All partners, including Board of Management, Parents/Guardians, College Management, and teaching staff, have roles and responsibilities in ensuring the implementation of the RSE Policy in our school. Teachers delivering the RSE programme attend CPD provided by the PDST / SPHE support service.

### **Monitoring the implementation of the policy**

We are committed to monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of this programme.

Specifically important to the RSE Programme are:

- Whole School Evaluation

This will address the impact of the RSE programme on the whole school environment from how students relate to each other both inside and outside the RSE classroom to resource requirements for the effective delivery of the programme.

- Programme Evaluation

This will examine the relationship between the stages of the programme, the building of cross curricular links, student and parent participation and resources and strategies useful in the delivery of the programme.

- a) Student feedback through the Student Voice Team.
- b) Staff review and feedback /parental feedback.
- c) Feedback from representatives of the BOM.