

Relationships and Sexuality Education Policy (RSE)

INTRODUCTION

At St. Cecilia's College we recognize and fully respect that parents have the primary duty and right to be the first and principal educators of their children. We see ourselves as supporting and helping parents to fulfil this responsibility. The attitudes, beliefs and behaviour of pupils in all their relationships are primarily formed and greatly influenced by their experiences within the family and the relationships they have with their parents/guardians.

We will endeavour to help and support parents in this important area of education. RSE in school is intended to supplement and complement what goes on at home. We are fully aware that an RSE programme in school, no matter how well written, resourced and taught, is greatly diminished in its effectiveness, if it does not have parental input and support at all stages.

RATIONALE

- St. Cecilia's College is a Catholic school committed to the education of the whole person. We, as a Christian Community, care for the faith and personal development of each student. We, like all Catholic schools, try to develop persons who are responsible and capable of making informed decisions, inspired by Christian values. Education at St. Cecilia's College prepares young people to open themselves up to life as it is and to create in themselves a positive attitude to life as it should be.
- We believe that much of the media's treatment of sexuality and relationships, in music, TV soaps, films and magazines, is contrary to, and often in direct conflict with, Catholic Church teaching.

THE RSE CURRICULUM

RSE is a statutory element of the N.I. Curriculum taught through:

- (1) Personal Development in Learning for Life & Work.
- (2) Subject areas e.g. Science.

DEFINITIONS

- Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE)
RSE is a lifelong process of acquiring knowledge and understanding, and developing one's beliefs, attitudes and values, about sexual identity, relationships and intimacy. RSE seeks to provide young people with formal opportunities to acquire knowledge and understanding of human sexuality and how to develop the skills and values they need to initiate and sustain healthy, mature, Christian relationships.
- Sexuality
People are sexual beings. Every human being is either male or female. Sexuality is about much more than its biological aspects. It concerns the innermost being of the human person. We believe sexuality is a gift from God. It is the drive within every person to give and receive love and affection. Our sexuality shapes and permeates all our relationships.

- RSE in St. Cecilia's College is taught within the moral, social and spiritual framework that reflects the beliefs and ethos of a Catholic School.
- **Morality:** is essentially linked with behaviour and what we actually do. It is also directly connected with experience and faith.
- **Ethics:** refers to a systematic structure such as the "Christian Tradition", which provides a particular lifestyle with corresponding and inherent values.
- **Values:** the attitudes, beliefs, virtues and principles which spring from within the person and inform her/his behaviour e.g. respect for self, honesty with self and others.
- **Personal:** Morality is about each of us taking responsibility for the choices we make. We endeavour to ensure our pupils make moral decisions with an "informed conscience".

AIMS

The Relationships and Sexuality Education Programme aims to:

- Help young people to appreciate their uniqueness and dignity as daughters of God.
- Help young people understand and develop friendships and relationships.
- Promote a Christian vision of sexuality i.e. a vision that promotes love, respect and commitment.
- Help young people understand that sexuality is a gift from God that encompasses the whole person, body, mind, emotions and soul.
- Promote a positive attitude to one's own sexuality and in one's relationships with others.
- Promote knowledge and understanding of, and respect for, human reproduction.
- Help young people understand that marriage is a sacrament and that sexual intercourse is ideally an expression of married love.

SPECIFIC ISSUES

- **The Status of the Family**
Roman Catholic teaching believes that men and women should pledge their love for each other in a lifelong mutual commitment and it is ideally within marriage that couples should seek to bring children into the world. We promote this idea of the Christian family while remaining sensitive to, and being aware of, the different types of family backgrounds from which our pupils come.
- **Sacredness of Life**
We believe that from the moment of conception the embryo is a human being and must be recognized as having the rights of a person. The most fundamental right, for every human being is the right to life. This belief is one of the foundation stones on which the RSE programme is built.
- **Confidentiality and Child Protection Issues**
 - i. The pupil's right to privacy must be respected at all times by both the teacher and all other pupils in the class. A key rule agreed in advance of any discussion in class is that no one will be expected to ask or answer any personal questions.
 - ii. Teachers cannot promise absolute confidentiality. Pupils should be made aware that a teacher has a moral and legal responsibility to inform the principal or designated teacher for Child Protection if a pupil discloses information that suggests she is a risk of, or is actually suffering from any kind of abuse, e.g. physical, sexual, emotional or neglect.
- **Homosexuality**
Sex is a God-given gift that ideally enables married people to express and deepen their love for each other, a love that should unite the couple as well as be open to the gift of new life. Teachers should deal with the issue of homosexuality in a sensitive and respectful manner.

The ideals of respect and dignity for every person regardless of their race, creed or sexual orientation are to be recognized.

- **Withdrawal from Class and Supervision**
St. Cecilia's College, in compliance with the advice offered by DENI Circular 2001/15, will make alternative arrangements for any pupil whose parent wishes her to be excused from particular; or all, sex education classes.
- **Detail**
All teachers are responsible for teaching aspects of RSE, appropriate to the age, maturity, stage of development and family background of their pupils.
- **Puberty**
Emotional and physical changes during adolescence are interlinked and are caused by hormonal activity. Through the RSE programme we hope to help our pupils to identify, understand and accept the emotional and physical changes they are experiencing.
- **Special Educational Needs (SENCO)**
Materials will be adapted through teacher differentiation to meet the SEN of individual pupils and, where necessary, the particular needs of groups of pupils. On occasion the SENCO may be asked for advice/input in the development of these materials.
- **Answering Pupils' Questions**
We are confident in the professional judgement and skill of our teachers to deal with questions that may arise during the course of class discussions. Establishing boundaries and dealing with difficult or sensitive questions, is an area we will continually address through in-service training. We advocate the use of a question box to allow teachers time to prepare their responses or, where appropriate, to consult with parents about a specific question. If pupils raise issues that are offensive to some or beyond the maturity level of the majority of the pupils, staff should not answer in class. If the teacher feels the question was a genuine one they may suggest the pupil ask their parents/may decide to answer in a sensitive manner in the presence of another colleague. If the question raises child protection issues this should be referred to the designated teacher for child protection.
- **Terminology**
We encourage the use of the proper biological terms during RSE lessons. We point out to pupils that the use of slang words, or offensive words, often indicates embarrassment, lack of knowledge, and/or a lack of respect for self and others.
- **Use of Visitors and Other Resources**
St. Cecilia's College encourages the involvement of outside agencies to complement the delivery of the RSE programme. There should be adequate preparation and appropriate follow-up lessons in relation to all guest speakers. The RSE co-ordinator and other Heads of Departments, when inviting guests into school, will ensure that resource materials obtained from other agencies, and presentations by outside speakers, are in harmony with the ethos of the school. A teacher will always be present when an individual or a representative from an agency is speaking to pupils. Parents will also be given advance detailed information about the content of these talks.
We will make alternative arrangements for any pupil whose parent wishes her to be excused from a particular talk.

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

St. Cecilia's believes that the responsibility for relationships and sexuality education should be appropriately shared between teachers, male and female; parents and the school community as a whole including the school nurses. Its effectiveness depends on a collaborative process involving

teachers, parents, governors and other educational and health professionals. Each of the partners has distinctive contributions to make and the school will endeavour to define and fulfill its responsibility, providing an opportunity for teachers, governors and parents to raise any issues and concerns they might have about the RSE policy and programme.

Role of the RSE Co-Ordinator

The Senior Pastoral Leader in conjunction with Heads of Departments and LLW Coordinators is the member of staff responsible for co-ordinating all issues related to RSE policy and programme development. His/Her role includes liaising with Heads of Department, LLW Co-ordinators and RSE teachers to:

- Ensure that the programme is taught effectively and is appropriate to the age and maturity of the pupils.
- Liaising with the Principal, designated teacher for child protection, Board of Governors, all staff, parents, health and educational visitors on RSE matters.
- Attending in-service training and disseminating appropriate information to other members of staff.
- Organising training for staff as and when appropriate.
- Liaising with outside agencies for curriculum purposes.

Role of Parents/Guardians:

Parents and Guardians will be fully informed about the RSE policy and the content of the programme. A copy of the RSE policy will be available on our website.

On-going dialogue between parent/guardians and staff will examine what is taught in the classroom and what is taught at home.

Role of Staff:

All staff should be consulted and informed about the policy and the programme. Teachers will design a programme to meet the specific needs of the individual pupils in their class. They will continually monitor the programme to ensure it is appropriate to the age and maturity of our pupils & through HOD's & coordinators feedback areas for development etc. to the S.L.T

Who Will Teach It?

The programme will be delivered by LLW, Science and Home Economics teachers. We believe that only teachers, who feel confident, competent and enthusiastic about all aspects of the programme, will be effective in its delivery. A copy of the RSE policy will be made available to every parent/guardian and to each member of the Board of Governors. It can be accessed on our website or collected in person from the school office.

This policy was reviewed by the Leadership Team: August 2015

Due to be Reviewed: August 2017