



Ratified by Board of Management on 19th March 2014

Relationships and Sexuality Education Policy (R.S.E.)

Enacted after consultation between staff, parent representatives, Principal and Board of Management.

In this policy document all references to gender are taken to be inclusive and the term “parent” is taken to include “guardian”.

Introduction

1. The school is a co-educational, multi-denominational, academically non-selective day school with an enrolment of 475 second level students.
2. Mission Statement:
Enniscorthy Vocational College endeavours to provide a secure and supportive educational environment where all students can experience a quality of education appropriate to their intellectual, physical, personal, social, moral and spiritual needs in a changing world.

Scope

1. To what will the policy apply?

The policy will apply to all aspects of teaching and learning about relationships and sexuality within the school.

2. To whom will the policy apply?

The policy will apply to school staff, students, parents, Board of Management, visiting speakers and external facilitators.

Rationale

Why is it necessary to devise a policy on RSE at this time?

- Relationships and sexuality are key elements of healthy social and personal development.
- Young people are exposed to a bewildering variety of messages about relationships and sexual activity.
- Schools, in consultation with parents, need to reflect on how to provide for the needs of their students.
- Department of Education Circulars M4/95, M20/96, M22/00 M11/03, M27/2008 and 0037/2010 are available at www.education.ie. These circulars require schools to develop an RSE Policy and Programme and to implement them for all students from First to Sixth Year.
- Schools have a responsibility under *Section 9 of the Education Act 1998* to promote the moral, spiritual, social and personal development of students and promote health education for them, in consultation with their parents, having regard to the characteristic spirit of the school.

Goals / Objectives of this policy document

In precise terms, what is the policy intended to achieve?

1. The policy will ensure clarity and consensus on how RSE is taught in the school.
2. It will articulate the relationship of RSE to SPHE (Social, Personal and Health Education).
3. It will articulate the aims of the RSE Programme.
4. It will clarify the rights, roles and responsibilities of all within the school in relation to the RSE Programme, with particular reference to school staff, students, parents and the Board of Management.
5. It will ensure that teachers, parents and students understand how the teaching of RSE is linked to the school ethos.
6. It will provide information on the practicalities of delivering the programme.

Relationship to the characteristic spirit of the school

1. The RSE Policy will reflect the educational philosophy of Waterford Wexford Educational Training Board and the Board of Management, and the core values and ethos of the school as outlined in the introduction on page one of this document.
2. Spiritual, moral and ethical issues will arise when teaching RSE. The school's policy should guide teachers in the treatment of such issues in accordance with the ethos of the school. To

achieve this, it is important that teachers 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.

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.

3. Enniscorthy Vocational College gives its students the opportunity to explore the humanities, sciences, arts, business studies and technical subjects. In addition, it provides religious, moral and physical education in order to meet its objectives of supporting students in achieving their full academic potential and preparing them for participation in civic society and their future lives. The Junior Cycle has implemented mandatory SPHE classes in line with Department of Education guidelines since the inception of SPHE. The RSE Programme at Junior Cycle is part of SPHE.
4. Existing relevant Policies in the school include at present:
Health and Safety Policy
Guidance Plan
Substance abuse Policy
Enrolment Policy
Child Protection Policy
Anti- bullying Policy.

A Code of Behaviour has been published highlighting the principles of respect for people, environment, property and safety. All rules follow these basic principles which are to create

a happy and healthy school community. Students at the school are expected to respect the dignity of other students, teachers and all staff in the school and have the right to expect that their own dignity will be respected.

RSE within the context of SPHE

The guidelines for RSE (NCCA, June 1995, 1.2) state that SPHE 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.

The aims of our RSE programme

- A. To help students understand and develop healthy friendships and relationships.
- B. To promote an understanding of sexuality.
- C. To promote a positive attitude to one’s own sexuality and in one’s relationship with others.
- D. To promote knowledge of and respect for reproduction.
- E. 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.

- F. To provide opportunities for students to learn about relationships and about sexuality in ways that help them to think and act in a moral, caring and responsible way.
- G. To provide information to students as set out by the Department of Education in a non-directive, inclusive and sensitive manner.

It is acknowledged that in a course of limited duration these aims are aspirational.

Management and Organisation of RSE at EVC

1. **Staff:** Arrangements regarding the teaching of the programme and the deployment of staff will be made by the Principal.
2. **Training:** Staff being deployed to teach RSE will attend for appropriate training by the Regional Co-ordinator for SPHE/RSE where training has not already been received.
3. **Parents:** The role of parents as the primary educators of their children is seen by the school as very important. Relevant sections of this RSE Policy will be included in the Information Booklet for Parents which is provided to all parents of students at Enniscorthy Vocational College. This policy has been designed in consultation with parents representatives and the views of parents will be taken into consideration when reviewing the policy annually. A copy of this policy will be made available to any parent on request at the school office.
4. **Offering advice:** Teachers may provide students with 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.

5. **Explicit Questions:** It may not be appropriate to deal with some explicit questions in class. “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 about issues which are not on the curriculum, such as masturbation and abortion. On these, and on all questions teachers should use their professional judgment, guided by the age of the students, the RSE curriculum, and the RSE policy for the school .” (Department of Education)

6. **Personal Information:** While students should not be encouraged to disclose personal or private information in SPHE/RSE class, there may be times when they do talk about their own lives. In line with the school Guidance Plan, confidentiality should 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 for Post-Primary Schools (2011) or the school’s Substance Abuse Policy, notify parents, etc.

In cases of under-age sexual activity, Page 10 of the Child Protection Procedures for Post-Primary Schools (2011) state: “In all cases where a school becomes aware of under-age sexual intercourse the school shall take appropriate steps to inform the child’s parents.”

The following is also school policy:

- Teachers must not guarantee absolute confidentiality;
- Students must be made aware that any incident or disclosure may be conveyed to the Designated Liaison Person and possibly to the parents and/or appropriate authorities if the Designated

Liaison Person decides that it is in the best interests of the student

- Teachers must indicate clearly to students when the content of a conversation can no longer be kept confidential - the student must then decide whether to proceed or not.
- Teachers should give students information on the age of consent which is 17 years of age for both males and females, See: Criminal Law (Sexual Offences) Act, 2006

7. **Family Planning**: The RSE Curriculum Guidelines state that the subject of family planning should be covered within the Senior Cycle RSE Programme. Schools however can use their discretion with regard to the age at which students receive any part of the RSE Programme.

8. **Homosexuality**: The Junior and Senior Cycle S.P.H.E./R.S.E Curriculum Guidelines include the subject of sexual orientation. Teachers will be trained by the S.P.H.E Regional Manager to address this issue in a sensitive and appropriate way in the classroom using the Growing Up LGBT Resource.

9. **STI's**: Given that the rates of STI transmission are increasing, it is important that the subject be addressed in school. Awareness of STI's is an objective of the second year SPHE/RSE Syllabus. This topic is mainly addressed at Senior Cycle.

10. **Practical issues**:

- SPHE is timetabled at one period per week for all Junior Cycle classes to include RSE lessons.
- RSE will be timetabled on a modular basis in the Religious Education timetable for Senior students.

- An RSE module will last approximately 6 weeks for one 40 minute period per week.
- Class sizes will not exceed the student/teacher ratio laid down by the Department of Education.
- In line with our school ethos and as Enniscorthy Vocational College is co-educational, classes will be mixed gender.

11. **Students with Special Needs**

Children with special needs may need more help than others in coping the physical and emotional aspects of growing up. As such, teachers will encourage students to discuss what they have learned with their parents after each lesson ; and the school will ensure all parents receive the school Information Booklet.

In addition, parents of children with special needs will have an opportunity to discuss all aspects of their child's education, in particular the SPHE/RSE Programme at scheduled Parent/Teacher meetings held regularly throughout the year or by making an appointment with the SPHE/ RSE teacher, Co-ordinator, Class Tutor or Principal.

12. **A student who may be pregnant:** Should the school be aware that a student is pregnant, the student should be offered an opportunity to discuss the RSE Programme with the school Guidance Counsellor since the student may be more sensitive to some of the issues that may arise in class. If the student requests to be absented from mainstream RSE class for some topics then arrangements may be made where possible, in consultation with the student's parents, within the constraints of timetabling, for the student to receive RSE tuition on a one-to-one basis with the Counsellor.

13. **Visiting speakers:** Should an expert speaker be invited to address the students, the speaker should be given a copy of the

RSE Policy in advance of their arrival, be made aware of the ethos of the school, be made of any students with special needs who will attend the talk, be made aware of any sensitive issues in the group of students' previous knowledge and materials covered, and be met at the front gate and sign in at the office. The teacher will remain in the classroom for child protection reasons and for appropriate follow up after the visit.

Resources

The school will purchase appropriate RSE teaching materials which have been identified by staff as useful and which have been approved by the Co-ordinator and Principal, within the normal budgetary framework as general school resources allow. A library of all the resources received at teacher training will be made available in the SPHE /RSE presses in the staffroom. A copy of the RSE Policy and associated administrative business will also be placed in this library. The RSE Policy will also be posted on the school's website.

Withdrawing students from the RSE programme

Regard must also be had to Section 30 (2) (e) of the Education Act 1998 under which a child may not be required to attend instruction in any subject which is contrary to the conscience of the parent or the student, or in the case of a student who has reached 18, the student. We would invite Parents (or student if over 18) to discuss the request to withdraw as it may be possible to resolve any misunderstanding. Once a parent's request to withdraw is made, that request must be complied with until revoked by the parent.

Name of RSE co-ordinator who will implement the policy

Avril Murphy, Guidance Counsellor.
In conjunction with Bernadette Lyons, RE Co-ordinator and
Kay Kennedy, S.P.H.E Co-ordinator.

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:

1. Student feedback
2. Staff review and feedback
3. Parental feedback and queries

The RSE Policy will be reviewed by staff regularly on an annual Basis. Any changes to this Policy will be conveyed to parents in the Information Booklet, by newsletter, through the Parents Representatives on the Parents Council and ratified by the Board of Management.

Appendix

1. Junior Cycle Resources for RSE

Busy Bodies Booklet and DVD, HSE

B4Udecide website resources

S.P.H.E. Resource Materials for Relationships and Sexuality Education,
Government of Ireland 1998

Healthy Living, Healthy Times and Healthy Choices Student Workbooks,
North Eastern Health Board

2. Senior Cycle Resources for RSE

S.P.H.E. Resource Materials for Relationships and Sexuality Education,
Government of Ireland 1998

TRUST Educational Pack

3. RSE Program Plan for 1st, 2nd, and 3rd Years

4. RSE Program Plan for 4th, 5th and 6th Years