



# ***Coláiste Fionnchua***

*Mitchelstown, Co. Cork.*

*Draft*

## ***Relationships and Sexuality Education Policy***

*Ratified by The Board of Management on*

*25<sup>th</sup> Sept. 2024*

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

### **Introductory Statement**

#### **Ethos and Mission Statement**

The policy is for students, parents/guardians, teachers and management of Coláiste Fionnchua, Mitchelstown, Co. Cork. This policy should be read in conjunction with the School's Wellbeing Policy, AEN Policy, Guidance Policy and The Code of Behaviour. The purpose of this policy is to outline our approach to monitoring, encouraging and promoting Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) through our set curriculum, co and extra-curricular activities along with our Student Support Team structures.

#### **Mission Statement**

***'A caring learning community'***

***We provide an inclusive and respectful learning environment where students entrusted into our care can develop and reach their full academic and individual potential.***

The RSE programme aims to enhance the development of the school's mission through its content and structure. The school encourages its students to consider and assess different viewpoints in relation to issues of morality. The experience gained through the working out of this policy and through respecting the needs of minority groups and individuals enriches the whole life of the school. The school 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 mission to support students in achieving their full academic potential and prepare them for participation in civic society and working life.

#### **The Aims of Our Relationships and Sexuality Education programme:**

Relationships and sexuality education which is in the overall framework of Social, Personal and Health Education, has as its specific aims:

- (a) To provide opportunities for pupils to learn about relationships and sexuality in ways that help them think and act in a moral, caring and responsible way.
- (b) To help pupils understand and develop healthy friendships and relationships and appreciate and respect diversity.
- (c) To promote an understanding of sexuality.
- (d) To promote a positive attitude to sexuality and in relationships with others.

(e) To promote knowledge of and respect for reproduction.

(f) To enable pupils to develop attitudes and values towards their sexuality in a moral, spiritual and social framework in keeping with the policy of the school.

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

### **Rationale:**

- All schools, because of the Children First Guidelines, are required to provide a minimum of 4 hours of RSE per year, to each student in their care. This policy governs that provision.
- 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 Wellbeing.
- Circular M4/95 and M20/96 and 0037/2010 request schools to commence 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 BOM and students.

### **Main Content**

#### **(a) Provision of Training and Staff Development**

Coláiste Fionnchua has appointed a Wellbeing Coordinator. We make use of Oide's Health and Wellbeing Services which offer training and support to teachers in both JC and SC RSE and the school endeavours to up skill and train the SPHE teachers in this important area of the SPHE curriculum on an ongoing basis. The Principal, Deputy Principal or JCT co-ordinator(s) inform each staff member teaching SPHE/RSE of training and in-service that is available in the SPHE/RSE area and as there can be cross-curricular links, also advertises these courses for the attention of all staff. The school's policy is to allow all teachers to have access to SPHE/RSE training and the school encourages staff to attend in-service and provides substitution for in-service attendance where possible. It is school policy to consult with staff prior to being timetabled for SPHE/RSE, where possible. Collaborative

SPHE / RSE teams are established each year on OneDrive, and resources and curricular materials are shared in this online space. All teachers teaching SPHE / RSE are members of this team. It is the school's policy that all staff teaching SPHE/ RSE, including staff joining at the start of the year or during the year, should be familiar with the RSE policy and should, where possible, be trained in the subject area or be enrolled on a training programme.

### **(b) Inclusion of Parents/Guardians**

Information for parents/guardians is made available both through the school's website and through general communications between school and home, e.g. e-mails, texts, letters, VSware app etc. Consultation of parents / guardians at the policy development stage is sought through the Parents Association. The RSE policy is available on our website for easy access by all parents/guardians. Parents/guardians can make contact with the school authorities regarding this policy who will then liaise with the appropriate personnel.

### **(c) Ethical/Moral Considerations**

#### **• 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 and should set appropriate limits. Students may ask questions about issues which are not included on the curriculum. On these, and all questions, teachers use their professional judgement to appropriately answer such questions, guided by the age of the students, together with the student's emotional maturity, the RSE curriculum and RSE policy for the school.

#### **• Confidentiality**

While students are not encouraged to disclose personal or private information in SPHE/ RSE classes there may be times when they do talk about their own lives.

➤ At the beginning of each RSE lesson, students are reminded of the rules for that lesson. These rules are identified, developed and agreed to as a class group at the beginning of the school year for the SPHE programme. These rules will also include information on confidentiality:

- ❖ Students will not share personal information, about themselves or others, in the group setting and will speak in generalities.
- ❖ Students will never name another person when talking about an issue.

❖ Students will not talk outside of class about what other students might have said in an RSE discussion.

➤ Students, should they wish to discuss a matter privately with a trusted adult in the school setting, are very much encouraged to do so. Should this situation arise, the limitations to confidentiality are clearly outlined.

➤ Students are made clearly aware of the strict boundaries to the confidentiality a teacher can offer. Such boundaries include a real/perceived danger to the student or others; the use of illegal substances; or any issue that a teacher feels from his/her professional perspective needs to be referred on. The teacher will then follow the procedures set down in the Child Protection Procedures for Post Primary Schools or the school's other relevant policies. The teacher may if he/she wishes offer support to the student in the disclosure to the parents/guardians/relevant school personnel/Principal.

In the case of underage age sexual activity, page 10 of the [Child Protection Guidelines for Post Primary Schools \(2017\)](#) states:

*“In all cases where a school becomes aware of underage sexual intercourse the school shall take the appropriate steps to inform the child’s parents.”*

Staff must be aware that their obligation if entrusted with information by a student is different depending on their age. Therefore, it is important that students are made aware of the limits of confidentiality and that teachers do not give unconditional guarantees of confidentiality.

Page 10 of the [Child Protection Guidelines for Post Primary Schools \(2017\)](#) states:

4.7 Exceptions from the obligation to make a mandated report

4.7.1 Certain Underage Sexual Activity Under the Criminal Law (Sexual Offences) Act, 2006 the legal age of consent is 17 years.

A sexual relationship where one or both parties is under 17 years of age is illegal. However, a mandated person is exempted from making a mandated report to Tusla in relation to underage sexual activity where certain specified criteria are met. Section 14 (3) of the [Children First Act, 2015](#) sets out this exemption from reporting underage sexual activity. It provides that if a mandated person is satisfied that all of the following criteria are met then a report to Tusla is not required:

- The child concerned is aged between 15 and 17 years old

- The age difference between him or her and the other party to the sexual activity is not more than 24 months
- There is no material difference in capacity or maturity between the parties engaged in the sexual activity concerned
- The relationship between the parties engaged in the sexual activity concerned is not intimidatory or exploitative of either party and
- The child concerned makes known to the mandated person that he or she does not want any information about the activity to be disclosed to Tusla. In effect this means that if all of the above criteria are met, mandated persons do not have a statutory obligation to make a mandated report to Tusla in respect of sexual activity between such older children. However, it should be noted that the above exemption does not apply where a child believes that he or she has been harmed, is being harmed or is at risk of being harmed and discloses that belief to the mandated person. In addition all persons, including mandated persons, must uphold the key principle that the welfare of the child is paramount and if a mandated person has any concerns, even where all the above criteria are met, a report can still be made to Tusla. In such cases, the reporting procedures in chapter 5 shall be followed.

- **Sexual Activity**

The pace of social change in Ireland over the last number of years has been rapid. It is required that teachers 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, in heterosexual and homosexual relations.

- *Contraception*

The post primary RSE Curriculum Guidelines state that the subject of family planning/contraception should be covered within the RSE programme. The RSE programme requires that young people are provided with information about methods of contraception. Teachers should use their professional judgement, guided by the age of the students, together with the student's emotional maturity, the RSE curriculum and RSE policy for the school, while dealing with the topic of family planning/contraception.

- *Sexuality*

The post primary RSE Curriculum Guidelines include the subject of sexual orientation. The Equal Status Act, 2000 and the Equality Act, 2004 prohibit discrimination across nine grounds, including Sexual Orientation and Gender.

We recognise that SPHE is intrinsic to the teaching and learning that occurs both formally and informally in school and in the classroom. Through our SPHE programme, and subsequently through RSE, we wish to assist students to develop feelings of self-worth and self-confidence while encouraging their ability to relate to others in a positive way. The curriculum also encourages students to be aware of their rights as an individual, while at the same time accepting responsibility for their actions as members of the school and the wider community. Our ETB ethos means that we value the uniqueness of all individuals within a caring school community. Coláiste Fionnchua welcomes and encourages diversity, inclusivity, equality and respect for all students. All students have the right to learn in a safe and secure environment, to be treated with respect and dignity, and not to be treated differently on the grounds of their actual or perceived sexual orientation or gender identity.

- *Sexually Transmitted Infections*

Creating awareness of sexually transmitted infections (STIs) is undertaken in second level schools.

#### **(d) Practical Issues**

- Timetabling

- The Principal and Deputy Principal assign staff members to teach SPHE / RSE in each year.
- SPHE/RSE is timetabled for one class periods per week in first, second and third year.
- It is a module covered for 1 class period per week for in TY.
- Fifth and Sixth Year students have RSE as a separate and distinct module from Religious Education timetabled during the Religious Education class for one class period per week for six weeks.

- Curriculum

Please refer to the SPHE Team for the course content.

Please note that the Short Course Junior Cycle SPHE specifications are followed and these strands are:

- Strand 1: Understanding myself and others.

- Strand 2: Making Healthy Choices
- Strand 3: Relationships and Sexuality Education
- Strand 4: Emotional Wellbeing.

At Senior Cycle SPHE comprises the following modules:

- i) Mental health,
- ii) Gender studies
- iii) Substance use,
- iv) Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE)
- v) Physical activity and nutrition.

In addition, there may be Speaker Sessions/Workshops dedicated to SPHE / RSE, some examples of which (but not limited to) are junior cycle periods talks, stress management, internet safety, study skills, drug awareness, etc

#### • Outside Speakers

In inviting outside speakers to school the school follows [Circular 0043/2018](#) *Best practice guidance for post primary schools in the use of programmes and/or external facilitators in promoting wellbeing consistent with the Department of Education and Skills' Wellbeing Policy Statement and Framework for Practice.*

Outside speakers who are invited to speak at Coláiste Fionnchua will be directed to the school's website for the school's RSE policy.

While visitors to the classroom can be immensely valuable as part of the SPHE programme, the delivery of the programme remains the responsibility of the teacher. In light of this, it is recommended that where visitors/outside agencies are used to support SPHE the SPHE teacher be actively involved and present at all stages.

#### • Additional Needs

All teachers are made aware of students with additional needs by the AEN Coordinator. The very nature of RSE education, and the differing maturity and growth levels of students means that some students will need more support to understand the concepts and content.



Strategies to differentiate in class can support gradual and appropriate teaching, which might include (but not limited to): group work and discussion; higher and lower order questioning in groups; moderated whole class discussions; individual teacher sessions as appropriate, etc.

- Parental Requests for withdrawal from RSE

Parents/Guardians have an entitlement to withdraw their children from RSE classes. The manner in which such a withdrawal is facilitated is contingent on available resources within the school and complies with the school's policies on curriculum, supervision and child safeguarding.

Two options that are provided for students when a request for withdrawal from RSE class is made include:

1. Staying within the classroom following an activity relevant to the SPHE curriculum.
2. Parents/Guardians remove their son/daughter from the school premises for the duration of RSE class only on the specified timetabled days.

An appropriate procedure to facilitate a request for withdrawal from RSE class is as follows:

1. A written notification from the parent(s)/guardian(s) to the principal.
2. The principal meets with the parent(s)/guardian(s).
3. The principal explains the RSE Policy and the options the school can provide for the withdrawal of their son/daughter from RSE class.
4. The decision reached between the principal and the parent(s)/guardian(s) is recorded and placed on the student file and the relevant teacher(s) informed (i.e. Co-ordinator of Wellbeing and the student's SPHE teacher).

Note: Where students are withdrawn from RSE the school cannot take responsibility for any version of class content passed onto them by other students.

- Resources

In addition to and distinct from the textbooks on the school's book list, Coláiste Fionnchua uses many resources which have been recommended by approved agencies for RSE. Examples of these include (but are not limited to):

➤ Active Consent Workshop, delivered by trained teachers in 5th year.

- TRUST Talking Relationships Understanding Sexuality Teaching Resources written by the HSE and the Crisis Pregnancy Agency.
- The Facts, a sex education resource written by the HSE and the Crisis Pregnancy Agency.
- Growing Up Lesbian Gay Bisexual and Transgender by and BeLongTo and the HSE.
- Cancer Awareness Programme by Marie Keating Foundation
- B4udecide.ie by the HSE and the Crisis Pregnancy Agency
- Lockers by [www.webwise.ie](http://www.webwise.ie)

It is the school's policy to add to these resources, as new recommended material becomes available.

## **5. Links to Other School Policies**

School policies being examined or reviewed, should be considered with reference to this RSE policy; while the implications of other school policies for the RSE policy also need to be considered, such as (but not limited to):

- Child Protection Procedures and Policy.
- Whole School Guidance Plan.
- Anti-Bullying/ Bí Cinealta Policy.
- Substance Use Policy.
- ICT Policy.

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

The principal has responsibility for the day-to-day running of Coláiste Fionnchua, including implementation of school policies. The school has the following who support SPHE and RSE:

- An SPHE co-ordinator.
- A Guidance Counsellor.
- A Wellbeing Coordinator.
- Staff teaching SPHE/RSE Some of this staffing may change each year.

## **7. Monitoring of Policy.**

The implementation of the RSE policy will be monitored at SPHE/RSE department meetings and other meetings deemed necessary by the Principal or the Board of Management.

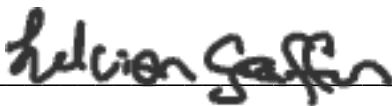
## **8. Reviewing and Evaluating.**

The school will review this policy every three years. The RSE policy may be reviewed and amended, prior to that date, where necessary.

## **9. Ratification and Communication.**

Following consultation, the Board of Management ratified the RSE Policy Document on the date noted below. Following this ratification, the RSE Policy was circulated within the school community, via a email from the Principal. Parent/Guardians should be informed of the RSE policy from the time of enrolment of the student.

Signed:



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Lillian Griffin, Chairperson of Board of Management

Date: 25th Sept. 2024

Signed:



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Aoife O'Keeffe, Principal

Date: 25th Sept. 2024

This policy should be read in conjunction with the Colàiste Fionnchua Child Protection Policy (and all other school policies).