



Mount Sackville Secondary School

Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) Policy

INTRODUCTION

This Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) policy is a written statement of the aims of the RSE programme within Mount Sackville Secondary School, the relationship of RSE to Social Political and Health Education (SPHE), and the organisation and management of RSE within our school context.

This policy was developed in November 2019 in consultation with school management, the SPHE teachers, students and parents/guardians.

The policy will apply 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 this policy reaches all staff members and they in turn become familiar with it. The policy will apply to school staff, Board of Management, parents/guardians, visiting speakers and external facilitators.

SCHOOL PHILOSOPHY AND ETHOS

Mount Sackville Secondary School was founded in 1864 by the Sisters of St. Joseph of Cluny, and now under the trusteeship of the Le Cheile Schools Trust. Since its foundation, Mount Sackville has taken its place among the leading secondary schools in Ireland and has been synonymous with the education of young women for over 150 years. It encourages the pursuit of excellence, while offering a high standard of teaching and learning opportunities.

We are committed to respecting the individuality of each student and helping her to realise her full potential.

- We encourage the pursuit of excellence and a high standard of teaching and learning opportunities is offered.
- We provide opportunities for prayer and reflection and to relate to others in a Christian way.
- We work to create a caring school community based on respect, integrity, honesty and justice.
- We prepare our students to take their place as self-confident, articulate young women who will meet the challenges of modern life with serenity, resilience and courage.

SPHE AND THE SCHOOL ETHOS

The aims of RSE and SPHE curriculum contribute to the overall ethos of Mount Sackville Secondary School in promoting the holistic development of our students. The Education Act of 1998 requires that all 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 Senior

and Junior Cycle. At Junior Cycle RSE is part of Social, Personal and Health Education, (SPHE). At Senior Cycle, RSE is taught for the required 6 classes a year and is done off timetable. It is allocated day of team teaching from the core team.

DEFINITION OF RSE

Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) is a lifelong process of acquiring knowledge and understanding and of developing attitudes, beliefs and values about sexual identity, relationships and intimacy. This education is delivered consciously and unconsciously by parents/guardians, teachers, peers, adults and the media.

Building on the work done in primary school, Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) at post-primary level seeks to provide opportunities for young people to learn about relationships and sexuality in ways that will enable them to think and act in a moral, caring and responsible way.

RSE AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

- To help young people understand and develop friendships and relationships
- To promote an understanding of sexuality
- To promote a positive attitude to one's own sexuality and in one's relationship with others
- To promote knowledge of and respect for reproduction
- To enable young people to develop attitudes and values towards their sexuality in a moral, spiritual and social framework.
- To enable students to make informed choices
- To enable the students to develop skills for self-fulfilment
- To promote self-esteem and self confidence
- To enable the students to develop a framework for responsible decision making
- To provide opportunities for reflection and discussion
- To promote physical, mental and emotional health and well-being

With such support, students may be enabled to participate as active and responsible adults in the personal and social dimensions of society and to make responsible decisions that respect their own dignity and others. There is a growing recognition that RSE and SPHE (delivered to our junior cycle students) is as important as any other area of the curriculum.

RSE should enable the students to:

1. Explore personal thoughts, values, attitudes and feelings about relationships.

2. Develop an understanding of the different types of relationships, what is important in them and the skills to enhance relationships
3. Promote empathy with others who have different cultural values, attitudes and beliefs about family, relationships, sex and sexuality.
4. Develop students' knowledge, understanding and skills in support of sexual reproductive health
5. Develop students' understanding of sexuality and sexual orientation and the importance of an inclusive environment.
6. Develop personal and interpersonal skills which support beginning, maintaining and ending relationships.
7. Develop skills for coping with peer pressure, conflict and threats to personal safety

The close connections between Social, Personal, and Health Education (SPHE) and RSE provides students

- with a unique opportunity to develop the skills and competence to learn about themselves and to care for themselves and others
- to make informed decisions about their health, personal lives and social development

It allows students to

- acquire the understanding and skills necessary to form healthy friendships and relationships
- develop a positive sense of self-awareness and the skills for building and maintaining self-esteem
- become aware of the variety of ways in which individuals grow and change especially during adolescence and to develop respect for difference between individuals
- understand human physiology with particular reference to the reproductive cycle, human fertility and sexually transmitted infections
- understand sexual development and identity and explore aspects of sexuality including sex role stereotyping, gender issues and cultural influences on sexuality
- value family life and appreciate the responsibilities of parenthood

CLASS ORGANISATION AND TIMETABLING

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. (Circular M11/03)

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 40 minute classes per year. (Circular 0037/201)

In Mount Sackville Secondary School, 1st years are timetabled for two classes of SPHE per week. 2nd and 3rd year are timetabled one class of SPHE per week. Junior cycle RSE Programme is delivered for a 6 lesson block after Christmas.

SPHE is not a timetabled class for Senior Cycle students but senior students will receive a full one day block course of RSE in both 5th and 6th year. Mount Sackville Secondary School is committed to providing a full 6 hours at senior cycle for RSE. Teachers from the core group will meet and plan a vibrant programme suitable to each of the 5th and 6th year group. Where necessary, speakers/groups will be invited in to compliment the RSE day.

CONTENT AND TEACHING METHODOLOGIES

Themes of RSE at Post-Primary Level:

1. Human growth and development

(Fertility/reproductive organs/family planning/pregnancy/development of foetus/STIs)

2. Human sexuality

(Gender/sexual orientation/attitudes and values/making choices/sexual harassment and abuse)

3. Human Relationships

(Peer Pressure/conflict resolution/loving relationships/marriage and commitment/importance of family life)

The above themes are weaved throughout the 4 strands in the SPHE syllabus. In Mount Sackville Secondary School, SPHE is part of Junior Cycle well-being. It is designed to enable students to develop a positive sense of themselves and a commitment to caring for themselves and others. It is divided into four strands:

Strand 1 – Who am I?

Strand 2 – Minding Myself and Others

Strand 3 – Team Up

Syrand 4 – My Mental Health

Syllabus Structure: Senior Cycle

SPHE is not a timetabled class for Senior Cycle students but senior students will receive a full one day block course of RSE in both 5th and 6th year. Mount Sackville Secondary School is committed to providing a full 6 hours at senior cycle for RSE.

In line with Circular 0027/2008 DES, it is the responsibility of the Board of Management to ensure that RSE is available to **ALL** students.

Modules covered are:

- Relationships
- Sexuality
- Consent
- Commitment/Love/Marriage
- Fertility and Conception
- Contraception
- Gender
- STI's

Learning in RSE

RSE will incorporate the physical, emotional, mental and spiritual dimensions of the lives of young people. Using the **ASK** model to provide students with opportunities to develop their:

ATTITUDES AND VALUES,

SKILLS AND

KNOWLEDGE

Teaching methods must be of an experiential nature with the emphasis on discussion, reflection and classroom participation. These teaching methods will be student centered and appropriate to the age and development of the student. The class atmosphere must be one of respect and privacy where the student feels that they are participants in a safe environment. A respectful code of conduct is expected from all participants. Every class group establishes a class contract which is referred to throughout the class if necessary. Teaching methodologies may include:

- Groupwork
- Roleplay
- Brainstorming
- Icebreakers
- Walking debates
- Project work
- Artwork
- Multi-media materials
- Case studies
- Visiting speakers

The Department of Education and Skills recognises that each school has flexibility to plan the RSE Programme in harmony with the students needs and schools resources. Mount Sackville Secondary School realises its obligation to provide an RSE programme for its students and that no aspect of the RSE programme can be omitted on the grounds of a schools' ethos. The RSE programme is taught within a framework of values and morality consistent with its ethos. Mount Sackville Secondary School recognises that the primary responsibility for the moral, spiritual, social and personal development of the children lies with their parents/guardians.

STUDENTS WITH SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS

For learning activities to be meaningful, relevant and achievable for all students, it is important that the teacher find ways to respond to students' diversity by using differentiated approaches and methodologies.

In consultation with the Special Educational Needs (SEN) Coordinator the following strategies will be used:

- Ensuring that the objectives are realistic for students and ensuring that the learning task is compatible with prior learning
- Pre-teaching concepts by the resource teacher where applicable
- Co teaching or withdrawal of students with SEN for pre-teaching/reteaching concepts
- Providing opportunities for interacting and working with other students in small groups
- Spending more time on tasks and organising the learning task into small stages
- Ensuring that language is pitched at the students level of understanding and does not hinder understanding of the activity
- Posing key questions to guide students through the different stages/processes and to assist in self direction and correction
- Teacher to check for understanding
- Having short and varied tasks
- Creating a learning environment through the use of concrete and where possible everyday materials
- Role play could be used here as a learning tool where appropriate for scenarios of acting out situations such as an understanding of public/private or safe/unsafe situations
- Meet with students individually or in a group to check understanding and unpack any issues that may arise for the student(s).
- Teacher responsible for assessing/monitoring student progress. An example method: gather sample of work and consult with SEN Coordinator if needed.

Cross Curricular Links

The following subject areas form the cross curricular links with the RSE Programme:

- SPHE
- P.E.
- Science
- R.E.
- CSPE
- I.T.
- English

RESOURCES AND ACCOMMODATIONS

A limited budget is available for RSE and is used to purchase resources and textbooks and to accommodate workshop facilitators and guest speakers.

Resources include:

- www.sphe.ie
- RSE Curriculum Guidelines
- RSE Policy Booklet
- RSE Parent Booklet
- Junior Cycle RSE Resource Materials Senior Cycle Resource Material
- www.healthpromotion.ie
- You Can Talk To Me
- Busy Bodies
- Leaflets-STIs, Contraception, Pregnancy etc
- **TRUST** - Talking Relationships Understanding Sexuality Training (Senior Cycle RSE pack)
- Supports for Teachers PDST
- The RSE Policy
- Parents/Guardians
- Team Approach
- Whole School Environment
- PDST-Health and Well-being
- DES Syllabus and Guidelines

CONFIDENTIALITY AND REFERRALS

Participation

It is a legal requirement of schools to provide RSE to students at Junior and Senior Cycle. Each parent/guardian has a right to withdraw their child from some or all RSE classes but parents/guardians are encouraged to provide alternative RSE at home. The school will respect this choice as their right. Parents/Guardians must write a note to the Coordinator to withdraw their child from RSE lessons. Time in the library will be arranged for the student during the RSE lessons.

Sensitive Issues

Group discussion will be of a general nature, and will not be personally directed at any person, in accordance with the agreed class ground rules. Inappropriate questions will not be answered by the class teacher, or from student to student. Only questions directly pertinent to the lesson content will be addressed in class. The RSE facilitators may also exercise his or her own professional judgement in checking whether to answer the question privately after the class has finished. Should a teacher be concerned about a matter that has been raised he/she should seek advice from the Guidance Counsellor or Chaplain without identifying the student.

The teacher has the responsibility to set clear boundaries to ensure the classroom is a safe place for everyone, including themselves. While there are no definitive guidelines, the teacher should bear the following in mind when making decisions about where to set limits:

- age of student
- school ethos
- school's RSE policy
- RSE Curriculum Guidelines

Referral

While it is acknowledged that the teachers have a professional obligation to impart the RSE course content, the needs of students will be addressed in a caring and supportive manner. Where it is appropriate, the teacher may refer students to other supportive links within the school. As far as possible this should be done in negotiation with the student. RSE teachers where in doubt as to a course of action, are encouraged to discuss the issue with the Student Support Team without identifying the student.

Confidentiality

While an atmosphere of trust is a pre-requisite of RSE class, the following limits of confidentiality must be observed. These limits are:

- Child abuse-physical, emotional, sexual, neglect
- Intention to harm self or others

- Substance misuse
- Underage sexual intercourse

Any disclosure will be reported to the Designated Liaison Person in compliance with the Child Protection Policy. RSE teachers will inform students of the limits of confidentiality at the beginning of the year, remind them at necessary points throughout the year and where possible before making a disclosure.

CHILD PROTECTION

All students of RSE are made aware of the limits to confidentiality that should a teacher become aware that a student is at risk they are obliged to pass this information on to the Designated Liaison Person (DLP). However should a student who is not at risk choose to confide in a teacher about something, the teacher should keep this information to him or herself. *The Department of Education's Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-primary Schools 2.1.6* state, "In all cases where a school becomes aware of underage sexual intercourse the school should take appropriate steps to inform the child's parents". The age for consent is 17 for boys and girls for heterosexual and homosexual sex.

VISITORS

National and international research has consistently shown that the qualities of the classroom teacher is the best placed professional to work sensitively and consistently with students and that he/she can have a powerful impact on influencing students' attitudes, values and behaviour in all aspects of health education.

Research findings indicate that the following teaching approaches have limited effect and are counterproductive to the effective implementation of SPHE:

- Scare tactics and sensationalist interventions
- Testimonials
- Information only interventions
- Short term/once off interventions
- Outside speakers can be an excellent resource when used as part of a schools planned programme for SPHE/RSE

Protocol for inviting Guest Speakers

Visiting speakers are to be viewed as complimenting and supporting the RSE Programme. It is imagined that visiting speakers would only be invited should there be a specific need identified.

Teachers inviting these speakers must:

- Inform the Principal in advance

- Make the speaker aware of the ethos and SPHE Policy of the school
- Agree the content of the presentation
- Do preparatory and follow up work where possible
- Remain with the class group during the visit

PARENTS/GUARDIANS

The school accepts that it is in the interests of all parents/guardians that the child grows up in a healthy and mature fashion. The school will strive to keep parents/guardians informed of the contents of the RSE Programme. A notification will be sent 2-3 weeks prior to beginning the RSE lessons in each year group. The notification will inform parents/guardians the date of the module commencement, an outline of the content of each RSE class, and also information regarding opting out of the module. The RSE Policy is available online at www.mountsackville.ie and notifications regarding reviews are also published online. The involvement of parents/guardians at the core of every aspect of RSE gives it extra impetus, depth and validity.

WHOLE STAFF

This policy will be available for all staff in the school by its inclusion with the Policy Documents, which are kept in the development office. Copies will be given to each teacher of RSE by the SPHE Coordinator at the beginning of the school year, should they require it.

The school aims to apply for support from the PDST and the Health and Well-being Team supports the whole staff throughout the year during Croke Park hours.

REVIEW AND EVALUATION OF THE RSE MODULE AND POLICY

The RSE course is never static and must be examined and evaluated regularly and adapted to the needs of the students. The RSE programmes and policy will be reviewed and evaluated on an annual basis by the RSE and SPHE team.

The opinions of students are included and SPHE teachers will communicate with the Student Council. The opinions of parents/guardians are also be included and SPHE teachers will communicate with the Parents Association. The opinions of management are included and the SPHE coordinator will communicate with the Principal and the Board of Management.

The value placed on RSE by the school is evident by the commitment on the part of management to developing a core of trained RSE teachers and to appointing an RSE/SPHE coordinator.

Career development is an integral part of this programme. The Management is responsible for responding to the relevant expressed and perceived training needs of RSE teachers and whole staff.

The SPHE Coordinator is: Ms Niamh O’Flaherty

The core SPHE/RSE teaching team for 2020/2021 includes:

Niamh O’Flaherty, Evelyn Mc Moreland, Alice Brady O’Connell, Anna Jennings, Paula Roche

Supports:

Principal – Mrs Eileen Cuddihy Higgins

Deputy Principal – Dr Orla Walsh

Guidance Counsellor – Ms Vivienne Meade, Ms Miriam Kenny

Chaplain – Ms Niamh O’Flaherty

SEN Co-ordinator - Ms Trudy Loftus

Student Support Team

Deans

Tutors

Parents Association

Student Council

6th Year Prefects

Ember Team

Caroline Renehan (Chairperson of the Board of Management)



Signed: _____

Date: 12th September 2020

Eileen Cuddihy-Higgins (Principal)



Signed: _____

Date: 14th September