



## St Louis Community School, Kiltimagh, Co. Mayo

### Relationships and Sexuality Education Draft Policy Statement

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

#### **(A) School**

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The school is co-educational where all students are cherished equally with an enrolment of circa 650 pupils.

This draft policy statement is hoped to be an approval approach to the teaching of R.S.E in St. Louis Community School Kiltimagh. Every Board of Management is obligated to arrange for the development of a school policy and implement a programme in this area as an element of S.P.H.E at Junior cycle and as an R.S.E programme in Senior cycle (Circular 0037/2010)

#### **(B) Scope/ Rationale**

This 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 S.P.H.E/ R.S.E such as Science, Biology, Home Economics and Religious Education. As we all know S.P.H.E is a part of every teacher’s job in terms of how we relate to and discipline our students. It is therefore important that all teachers are familiar with the R.S.E policy furthermore; the policy will apply to all our school staff, students, Board of Management, parents/guardians, visiting speakers and external facilitators. The effectiveness of an R.S.E programme is dependent on a collaborative policy process involving teachers, parents/guardians, members of the Board of Management and students.

### **(C) St Louis Philosophy**

1. The Institute of the Sisters of St Louis was founded, by Louis Bautain and Mere Therese de la Croix in France in 1842, to promote the Christian education of the young. The first St Louis Sisters came to Ireland in 1859. Bautain saw Christian education as the great need of his day, as “the beautiful enterprise”.

It was his vision of a “world healed, unified and transformed by the saving wisdom of Christianity” that led Louis Bautain to a lifelong search for unity and truth. His guiding words were ‘Ut Sint Unum’, ‘May they all be one’. This is part of the crest of every St Louis school worldwide; it shapes the approach to community and partnership in each school, and creates the “family spirit” which is so much part of the tradition of St Louis. Bautain’s “beautiful enterprise” of education is at once worldwide and holistic. It creates a learning environment in which the Catholic/ St Louis identity is balanced with openness to the new and the yet unknown. The international St Louis educational network, to which all St Louis schools belong, helps to promote awareness of different perspectives and to experience interconnectedness.

2. The mission of St Louis Community School is to enable each pupil to realise their individual potential and to develop their sense of self worth, to foster human and spiritual values which will equip students for a full mature life. Our school also aims to provide students with an education that has a sound academic and practical content and to foster a sense of community within the school.

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

RSE is a developmental process through experiential learning in which pupils participate to help cultivate a healthy attitude towards themselves and others, particularly in the area of sexuality and relationships.

### **(E) Relationships and Sexuality Education within Social Personal and Health Education.**

The Draft Guidelines for RSE (NCCA, June 1995, 1.2) state that Social Personal and Health Education is “spiral, developmental in nature and age appropriate in content and methodology”. The RSE programme is designed to follow this principal 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.

### **(F) The aims of our Relationships and Sexuality Education Programme.**

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

- (a) To help pupils understand and develop 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 pupils to develop attitudes and values towards their sexuality in a moral, spiritual and social framework in keeping with the policy of the school
- (f) To provide opportunities for pupils to learn about relationships and sexuality in ways that helps them think and act in a moral, caring and responsible way.

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

It is hoped that on completion of the R.S.E module every student will be:

1. Comfortable with their body and Sexuality
2. Can talk effectively with their peers, family and partners
3. Know their body and how it functions
4. Understand the risks, responsibilities, and consequences of sexual behaviour
5. Are able to recognize risks and ways to reduce them
6. Are able to access and use health care services and information
7. Are able to set boundaries when it comes to sex and sexual relationships
8. Act responsibly according to their personal values
9. Are able to form and maintain healthy relationships

**(G) Guidelines for the management and organisation of Relationships and Sexuality Education in our school**

1. Arrangements regarding the teaching of the programme and the deployment of staff will be made by the Principal.
2. **Informing and Involving the Parents:**

Parents are the primary educators of their children and the school sees their role in education concerning relationships and sexuality as very important. This policy has been designed in consultation with Parents and the views expressed by parents will be taken into account when reviewing the policy. A copy of this policy will be made available to any parents on request to the school office. Parents will be kept fully informed through circulars, Parents' Council and the Board of Management of the development and presentation of the R.S.E. programme. While all partners in the school community- teaching staff, parents and management are agreed on the programme, we recognise, nevertheless, the right of any parent who so wishes to request that his/her daughter should not participate in the programme.

### 3. Offering Advice:

The school's function is to provide a general education about sexual matters and issues and not to offer individual advice, information or counselling on aspects of sexual behaviour and contraception- however sources of professional information and advice will be identified when appropriate. Teachers may provide pupils with education and 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 pupil.

Issues that arise in class will be addressed in a manner that reflects:

- (i) Ethos of the school
- (ii) Department of Education and Skills and Relationships and Sexuality Education Guidelines
- (ii) Child Protection Guidelines

### 4. Explicit Questions:

It may not be appropriate to deal with some explicit questions in class. Teachers may choose to say 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 he/she should seek advice from the S.P.H.E. coordinator, school counsellor or the Principal. When deciding whether or not to answer questions the teacher should consider the age and readiness of the students, the R.S.E. programme content, the ethos of the school and the R.S.E. policy.

**5. Confidentiality:**

It is school policy that in circumstances where a pupil is considered at risk of any type of abuse or in breach of the law, the teacher must refer this immediately to the Principal. The Principal will deal with such incidents in accordance with statutory guidelines.

The following is also school policy:

- a. Teachers must not promise absolute confidentiality;
- b. Pupils must be made aware that any incident may be conveyed to the Principal and possibly to parents if the Principal decides that it is in the best interests of the pupil to notify parents;
- c. Teachers must use their professional judgement to decide whether confidence can be maintained having heard the information;
- d. Teachers must indicate clearly to pupils when the content of a conversation can no longer be kept confidential, the pupil can then decide whether to proceed or not.

The Child Protection Guidelines and Procedures for Post Primary Schools state in 4.1.1 and 4.2.1

*4.1.1 If a member of staff receives an allegation or has a suspicion that a child may have been abused, or is being abused, or is at risk of abuse he/she should, without delay, report the matter to the Designated Liaison Person in that school. A written record of the report should be made and placed in a secure location by the Designated Liaison Person. The need for confidentiality at all times, as previously referred to in Chapter 1 Paragraph 1.2 of these guidelines, should be borne in mind. The supports of the school should continue to be made available to the child.*

*4.2.1 If the Designated Liaison Person is satisfied that there are reasonable grounds for the suspicion or allegation he/she should report the matter to the relevant health board immediately.*

**6. The Division between Biological and Non-Biological aspects of Sex Education:**

The school policy is that the Science, S.P.H.E and Home Economics Departments deal primarily with the biological aspects of reproduction.

**7. Withdrawing pupils from the R.S.E. programme:**

- a. Relevant sections of this policy are made available to parents in the school publication entitled *Information for Parents* together with details about the parent's right to withdraw their child from sensitive aspects of R.S.E. parents will always be provided with a full copy of this policy following a request to do so.
- b. Parents do not have to give reasons for withdrawal, but we respectfully invite them to do so- sometimes we can then resolve misunderstandings. Once a parent's request to withdraw is made, that request must be complied with until revoked by the parent. (See also appendix 1)

**8. Using visiting Speakers and Others**

- a. It is school policy that most of the R.S.E. programme is best discussed openly with teachers who are known and trusted by the pupils. 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 R.S.E.
- b. The S.P.H.E. coordinator will provide the visitor, well in advance of the visit, with a copy of this R.S.E. policy. 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 R.S.E. programme. Issues to consider are:
  - (i) The degree of explicitness of the content and presentation;
  - (ii) The visitor will be accompanied by teaching staff
  - (iii) Will the staff take an active role in the visitor's activities?
  - (iv) How will the visitor be prepared for the visit?
  - (v) How will the visit be built upon and followed up?
- c. Visitors should be given advance notice of the composition of the class and an idea of how their contribution fits to the scheme of work.
- d. In order to inform the visitor of the precise requirement of a group and to make better use of the time of the visitor it is advisable for the group to draw up questions in advance and these should be forwarded to the visitor. This will involve the pupils in the visit and will make the experience more relevant for them- it also facilitates planning.

- e. The office should be informed of the date and name of the visitor.
- f. Where applicable, refreshments should be arranged.
- g. The visitor should be welcomed at the main door.
- h. At the end of the session a vote of thanks should be given by a pupil and the visitor escorted to the main door after refreshments.
- i. A written acknowledgement of their contribution should be sent on to the visitor and could appear on the school website.

## 9. School Ethos

This R.S.E. Policy reflects the educational philosophy of the trustees. Spiritual, moral and ethical issues will arise when teaching R.S.E. A school can express its ethos and core values while at the same time facilitate students in discussing a range of topics within the R.S.E. Programme. For instance;

### (i) Homosexuality

The post primary R.S.E. 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. Teachers do not promote any one life-style as the only acceptable one for society and therefore it is inevitable and natural 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 should be appropriate to the age of the pupils.

### (ii) Contraception

The post- primary R.S.E. Curriculum Guidelines state that the subject of family planning should be covered within the R.S.E. Senior Cycle R.S.E. Programme. The R.S.E .programme requires that young people are provided with information about methods of contraception. This topic will be dealt with in an age appropriate manner, looking at all sides of the issues in a non-directive way.

**(iii) Sexually Transmitted Infections (STI's)**

While awareness of STI's is one of the objectives of the second year S.P.H.E/R.S.E. syllabus, STI's are mainly addressed in Senior Cycle. It is important that the subject is addressed.

**Special Needs**

Pupils 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 sorts of behaviour are and are not acceptable, and in being warned and prepared against abuse by others.

**(H) Ongoing support, development and review**

**Training:**

1. All teachers involved in this work do not necessarily have to be 'experts on the issues concerned'. However, they do require sensitivity to the needs of the group, an ability to deal with questions openly/honestly and preparedness to refer to more expert advice if necessary. The skills acquired in general teaching apply to health education. Furthermore, many teachers have training in related areas such as counselling. Some teachers have expert training in the specific areas of health, relationships and sexuality education and will be encouraged to train other teachers.
2. The school will facilitate teachers to obtain expert training in this field, bearing in mind the overall budgetary framework and the need for the ongoing teaching and learning programme of the school to continue with as little disturbance as possible.

**Resources:**

The school will purchase appropriate R.S.E. teaching materials which have been identified by staff as useful and which have been approved by the Principal, and recommended by the S.P.H.E. support services, within the normal budgetary framework and as general school resources allow. A list of these resources is available from the school.

**Assessment:**

Students keep a folder of work done throughout the year. At the end of the school year, students complete an evaluation sheet on the modules carried out as part of the S.P.H.E. programme. Participating teachers meet at least once a term to evaluate and review programme.

**Monitoring, evaluating and reviewing the R.S.E. Programme:**

We are committed to monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of this programme. Specifically important to the R.S.E. Programme are:

- A) Pupil feedback
- B) Staff review and feedback
- C) Parental feedback

**Appendix 1**

What we do if a request for withdrawal from the R.S.E. Programme is made by a parent:

- A) We discuss the nature of the concerns with the child's parent and if appropriate attempt to reassure them (initially such discussions takes place at a meeting with the Year Head and S.P.H.E Co-ordinator, the Principal may become involved if necessary.)
- B) We consider whether the programme can be amended or improved in a way that will reassure parents- care is taken not to undermine the integrity of the R.S.E. programme and the entitlement of the other pupils, e.g. it may be appropriate and desirable to have single sex classes for some sections of the R.S.E. Programme;
- C) We attempt to ensure that where a pupil is withdrawn there is no disruption to other parts of their education.
- D) We point out that pupils who have been withdrawn are vulnerable to teasing-we therefore attempt to cause minimal embarrassment to the pupil and minimal disruption to the programme:
- E) We also point out that pupils may receive inaccurate information from their peers:
- F) We offer the parents access to appropriate information and resources.