

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

## Our school Mission Statement

St. Aidan's C.B.S. promotes the Edmund Rice Charter through nurturing *faith*, promoting *partnership*, excelling in *teaching*, creating *community* and inspiring *leadership*.



## Our school

St. Aidan's C.B.S. is a voluntary secondary school for boys. Located in north Dublin, we currently have an enrolment of over 700 students.

## Rationale

The Education Act, 1998 requires that all schools should promote the social and personal development of students and provide health education for them.

The Rules and Programmes for Secondary Schools requires schools to have an agreed policy for R.S.E. incorporating a suitable programme for all students.

Department of Education circulars request schools to commence a process of R.S.E. policy development.

St. Aidan's C.B.S., considering all of the above requirements, has designed a policy and programme for R.S.E. that suits the needs of our school with a particular focus on our own mission statement/school ethos.

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## **What is R.S.E. and what are its aims?**

- R.S.E. at post-primary level deals with three main themes:
    1. Human relationships
    2. Human growth and development
    3. Human sexuality
  - R.S.E. emphasises the importance of self-awareness and self-esteem and the development of one's ability to interact respectfully with others. It provides students with an opportunity to understand different types of relationships and the attitudes, values and life skills that support the healthy development of these relationships.
  - R.S.E. helps students to develop a positive attitude to their own and others' sexuality and sexual health. Students can also develop an understanding of familial, cultural and religious values and consider how these values support healthy informed choices in relation to relationships, sexuality and sexual health.
- (N.C.C.A. curriculum)
- R.S.E. aims to provide opportunities for children and young people to learn about relationships and sexuality in ways that help them think and act in a moral, caring and responsible way.

(Department of Education, R.S.E., *Going Forward Together*)

## **R.S.E. with Social Personal and Health Education (S.P.H.E.)**

R.S.E. aims to:

- help pupils understand and develop friendships.
- promote an understanding of sexuality.
- promote a positive attitude to one's own sexuality and in one's relationships with others.
- promote knowledge of and respect for reproduction.
- enable pupils to develop attitudes and values toward their sexuality in a moral, spiritual and social framework in keeping with the policy of the school.
- 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.

[*R.S.E. guidelines by N.C.C.A., 1995 state that S.P.H.E. is "age appropriate in content methodology"*]

At senior cycle, it specifically aims to:

- develop self-awareness through opportunities to reflect on thoughts, values and feelings.
- enhance students' knowledge and understanding of essential health concepts and the wider influences on health and wellbeing to enable informed decision making.
- develop students' self-efficacy; the confidence to think and behave independently especially in the face of social pressure.
- strengthen students' capacity to empathise with another person's situation, feelings and motives in order to enhance relationships with other people.
- develop coping strategies for adolescence and adult life in support of greater resilience.
- develop students' health literacy skills, including the ability to obtain, critically evaluate and act on health information in support of health and wellbeing.
- develop a willingness to participate in the creation and maintenance of healthy communities and environments.

## **Guidelines for management and organisation of R.S.E. in our school**

### **What our school currently provides**

- R.S.E. is covered for all of our junior students during S.P.H.E. classes. Schools are required to provide R.S.E. as part of the national S.P.H.E. curriculum.
- The fifth year students are timetabled for S.P.H.E. classes which incorporates a module on R.S.E.
- As part of the Transition Year (T.Y.) programme, the school facilitates R.S.E. in their S.P.H.E. modules.
- ACCORD will be invited in to supplement RSE instruction to 6th and LCA Year groups. The Irish Family Planning Association will provide a complimentary workshop. Both of these 3 hour workshops will be supported by staff who facilitate two full day RSE events.

## **Informing parents**

- Parents are the prime educators of their children and their role in R.S.E. is seen by the school as the most important one.
- St. Aidan's will play a supportive and complementary role to the home in its provision of R.S.E.
- As part of the national curriculum, students receive R.S.E.
- The parents/guardians of the students in question are contacted when the R.S.E. module is set to commence (see Appendix 1 and Appendix 2).

## **Visiting speakers**

- Our R.S.E. programme is provided by teachers. However, visitors can enhance the quality of the provision of R.S.E. and can provide additional support to the school and our students.
- In the case of visiting speakers, one of the school's teachers will always be present while the talk/presentation/workshop is taking place. This supervision will be organised by the event coordinator in the school.
- All guest speakers on R.S.E. to the school are approved by the principal.

## **Confidentiality**

- All R.S.E. modules begin with a discussion on the topic of confidentiality.
- Confidentiality will be respected if private information is shared. However, if a teacher becomes aware that a student may be at risk, appropriate action should be taken (*further details are available in our Child Protection Policy*).
- It is important that students are made aware of the limits of confidentiality and that teachers do not give unconditional guarantees of confidentiality.

## **Withdrawal of students**

- Our school is mindful of objections to the inclusion of elements of this programme and recognises the rights of parents to act in accordance with their stated beliefs.
- Parents do not have to give reasons for withdrawal, but we respectfully invite them to do so. It may be that a misunderstanding can be resolved at this stage.
- If a request to withdraw a student from R.S.E. is made the school will, where possible, make alternative arrangements for the student/s, until that request is revoked. However, we ask parents to be aware that additional supervision may not always be available. In such cases, parents may be asked to make alternative arrangements themselves. With regard to any of the above, we request that communication is made with the school to discuss the issues of concern before a decision is made.

## **Support**

### **Training**

- S.P.H.E. teachers receive training through the Professional Development Service for Teachers (P.D.S.T.). Through this process, teachers in our school who are timetabled for S.P.H.E. also attend a specific R.S.E. module.
- Teachers will require sensitivity to the needs of the group, an ability to deal with questions honestly and preparedness to refer to more expert advice if necessary.
- In a situation where an S.P.H.E. teacher is awaiting training on R.S.E., which may happen from time to time, other teachers in the school and school management will provide support to them.

## **Resources**

- The school will use approved Department of Education materials. Suitable materials are often provided for teachers at S.P.H.E. in-service training.
- The school may also source appropriate teaching materials which have been identified by staff as useful.
- Applying for resources is, as always, considered within the normal budgetary framework and as school funding will allow. All resources must come from a factual, unbiased educational source.

## **Communication, involvement and dissemination**

- This policy was written by the school planning co-ordinator. The formation of this policy was done by engaging in a process of collaboration involving the principal and deputy principal, S.P.H.E. teaching staff, the school care team, our guidance counsellor, the students' council and the parent's council. It was then shared with the full teaching staff in November 2020.

## **Evaluation**

- We are committed to monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of this programme. Specifically important to our R.S.E. policy is:
  - Pupil feedback.
  - Staff feedback.
  - Parental feedback.

## **Ratification**

- This policy was ratified by the Board of Management on the 8/12/2020.

## **Review and Development**

- We are also committed to the review and development of our school policies. As part of our ongoing review process, this policy will be examined to reflect feedback from our evaluation practices and also to ensure legal compliance and the maintenance of best practices.