

Ballinamore Community School
Draft
Relationships and Sexuality Education Policy Statement

Enacted after consultation between staff, parent representatives, Principal and
Board of Management.
Revised 2013.

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

A. *School*

1. The school is a co-educational, academically non-selective day school, with a fluctuating enrolment of approximately 300 students.

B. *Our School Philosophy*

1. Our mission is the provision of a broad, relevant, curriculum for our students, through which they can develop their full potential. We aim to prepare our students to participate as good Christians and as good citizens in society.
2. Ballinamore Community School aims at helping students develop in the personal, academic, sporting, cultural and spiritual dimensions of their lives. The intention is to help equip our students with the personal and the learning skills, which will assist them in their adult and professional lives.
3. Our school strives to provide the best educational environment, where high quality teaching and learning can take place, in an atmosphere of openness and inclusiveness for all.
4. Our school fosters the promotion of good relationships, focusing on the growth and development of each individual in a unique way, in an atmosphere of firmness and fairness.
5. A code of behaviour has been published after consultation with parents, staff and pupils and the following excerpt illustrate how the ethos of the school operates on a daily basis:
 - *The code of behaviour describes the school's expectations about how each member of the school community (students, staff and parents) will help to make the school a suitable environment for teaching and learning.*

- *The code also describes how the school will respond to behaviour that interrupts, diminishes or prevents teaching and learning in the school.*
- *The code makes it clear that an orderly, harmonious school requires students to behave in accordance with that code.*

C. *Relationship to Characteristic Spirit of School*

Ballinamore Community School is a partnership of Trustees, Board of Management, Parents/Guardians, Students, Staff and Local Community. Relationships within these partnerships are fostered, encouraged and enabled.

Our school is multi-denominational and co-educational, welcoming students and their parents of all Christian faiths, non-Christian faiths and those with no faith.

Ballinamore Community School promotes Christian and human values, respecting and valuing other faith traditions and people with no formal religious background

SPHE and RSE are an integral part of our school that strives to promote inclusiveness and respect. Spiritual, moral and ethical issues will arise when teaching RSE. It is important that teachers of RSE understand that their role is to express the views of the whole school community on these sensitive issues, and not their own personal views. Teachers are required to deliver all aspects of the RSE curriculum, including those in relation to sexual orientation, contraception, sexually transmitted infections etc... This is to be done within a context in which teaching of the programme is informed by the school's ethos. Teachers can express the ethos of Ballinmaore Community School while at the same time facilitating students in discussing a range of views in relation to topics within the RSE programme.

D. *Definition of Relationships and Sexuality Education*

1. 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.

D. *Relationships and Sexuality Education within Social Personal and Health Education*

1. 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 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.

E. The aims of our Relationships and Sexuality Education programme

1. 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 toward 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 help them think and act in a moral, caring and responsible way.

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

F. 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.
RSE will be taught during SPHE at Junior Cycle.
RSE will be taught during Religion at Senior Cycle.
Trained members of staff will work together to facilitate this each over an agreed number of weeks.
2. **Informing and Involving Parents:**
Parents are the primary educators of their children and their role in education concerning relationships and sexuality is seen by the school as very important.
This policy has been designed in consultation with Parents' Association representatives 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 parent on request to the school office.
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.

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 SPHE co-ordinator or the Principal. When deciding whether or not to answer questions the teacher should consider the age and readiness of the students, the RSE programme content, the ethos of the school and the RSE policy.

5. **Confidentiality:**

It is school policy that in circumstances where a pupil is considered at some risk of any type of abuse or in breach of the law, the teacher must refer this immediately to the Principal. The Principal will decide whether to inform the parents and/or appropriate authorities and may recommend counselling.

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 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 Department deals primarily with the biological aspects of reproduction.
7. **Homosexuality**
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.
8. **Family Planning & Contraception**
The RSE programme requires that young people are provided with information about methods of contraception. This topic will be dealt with in an age appropriate, open manner, looking at all sides of the issues in a non-directive way.
9. **Withdrawing pupils from the RSE programme:**
 1. Parents have a right to withdraw their child from sensitive aspects of RSE, following consultation with the RSE/ SPHE coordinator – parents will always be provided with a full copy of this policy following a request to do so.
 2. Issues such as over population and birth control are met in a minor way in subjects such as Geography and Religious Education. However, as any discussion is limited and set within the context of the other subject concerned, it does not constitute part of the RSE Programme.
 3. 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)
10. **Using visiting speakers and others**
 - a) It is school policy that most of the RSE 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 RSE.
 - b) The SPHE Co-ordinator will provide the visitor, well in advance of the visit, with a copy of this RSE 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 RSE programme. Issues to consider are:
 - i) The degree of explicitness of the content and presentation;
 - ii) Will the visitor 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 into the scheme of work.
- d) In order to inform the visitor of the precise requirements of a group and to make better use of the time of the visitor it may be possible for the group to draw up questions in advance and these should be forwarded to the visitor.
- e) The Office should be informed of the date and name of the visitor.

11. **Special Needs**

Children 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.

G. *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 a preparedness to refer to more expert advice if necessary. The skills acquired in general teaching apply also to health education. 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 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 RSE teaching materials which have been identified by staff as useful and which have been approved by the Principal, within the normal budgetary framework and as general school resources allow. They will be left on a shelf in the staffroom for all RSE teachers to access.

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:

- a) Pupil feedback;
- b) Staff review and feedback;
- c) Parental feedback.

1. Appendix 1

What we do if a request for withdrawal from the RSE 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 discussion takes place at a meeting with the Year Head and SPHE Co-ordinator. The Principal may become involved if necessary).
- b) We consider whether the programme can be clarified in a way that will reassure parents - care is taken not to undermine the integrity of the RSE 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 RSE 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) Where possible we advise parents where to access appropriate information and resources.