

**BALLYMAKENNY**  
**COLLEGE**



**RELATIONSHIPS AND SEXUALITY EDUCATION (RSE)**  
**POLICY**

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## 1. 1 Introductory Statement

Ballymakenny College is an equality based, co-educational, child-centered, democratically run post primary school located in Drogheda since 2014. The school is under the joint trusteeship of LMETB and Educate Together. We, as a school, strive to prepare students for living morally and ethically.

This Relationship and Sexuality Education (RSE) policy was developed in accordance with:

1. Our Mission statement
2. Guidelines as set out in Circular M4/95, M20/96, C23/10 *Social and Personal Health Education (SPHE) and Relationships and Sexuality Education-Best Practice Guidelines for Post Primary Schools* and C37/2010.
3. Consultation with the Guidance Department & Wellbeing Team
4. Consultation with the SPHE Department

## 1.2 Our School Philosophy

Ballymakenny College is committed to the holistic development of all its students. Students who attend Ballymakenny College will be encouraged to reach their full potential mentally, physically, spiritually, emotionally and socially, in an atmosphere in which they feel safe, valued and secure and in which respect for themselves and one another is the standard.

Ballymakenny College is committed to the delivery of a quality experience in RSE as part of the SPHE course in each year group. The programme delivered will provide students with the unique opportunity to develop the skills and competences to learn about themselves and others. It will also equip them with the skills needed to make informed decisions about their physical and mental health, personal lives and social development.

The school recognises that the home is the natural environment where children grow, develop and mature into adults. However, it also accepts as outlined in paragraph 9 Sub Section (d) of The Education Act 1998, its own role in supporting parents in this work and in fostering the social, moral, spiritual and personal development of the students in our care.

The RSE policy recognises that spiritual, moral and ethical issues will arise in the teaching of RSE. The policy is intended as a guide to teachers in the treatment of these issues in accordance with the ethos of the school.

It is noted that schools are required to deliver all aspects of the RSE curriculum, including those in relation to sexual identity, contraception, sexually transmitted infections etc. It is also noted that, in providing RSE, teachers are not conveying their own personal views on sensitive issues but are rather facilitating students in discussing a wide range of views in relation to topics within the RSE programme in a manner respectful of the school ethos.

### 1.3 Rational

It is necessary to have an RSE policy as RSE is a key element of healthy social and personal development.

Young people are exposed to a wide variety of messages about sexuality and sexual activity. Schools in consultation with parents/guardians need to reflect on how to provide for the needs of their students.

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 Programs 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 the overall Wellbeing Programme.

Circulars M4/95, M20/96, C23/2010, C37/2010 and C42/2018 request schools to commence a process of RSE policy development.

We also refer to Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post Primary Schools 2017, Section 8.4, sub section 8.4.1, 8.4.2, 8.4.3, pg. 65.

The effectiveness of an RSE programme is dependent on a collaborative policy process involving teachers, parents/guardians, members of the Board of Management and Students.

Spiritual, moral and religious issues will arise when teaching RSE. The RSE policy will guide teachers in the treatment of such issues in accordance with the ethos of the school. 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.

## Aims and Objectives of RSE In Ballymakenny College

### 2.1. Aims of the RSE Programme

RSE which is located in the overall framework of Social, Personal and Health Education, has its own specific aims:

1. To help young people understand and develop friendships and relationships.
2. To promote an understanding of sexuality.
3. To promote a positive attitude to one's own sexuality and in one's relationship with others.
4. To promote knowledge of and respect for reproduction.
5. To enable young people to develop attitudes and values towards their sexuality in a moral, spiritual and social framework.

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

### 2.2 Objectives of the RSE programme

RSE should enable the students to:

1. Develop a positive sense of self-awareness, and the skills needed for building and maintaining positive self-esteem.
2. Understand and develop the skills needed to form healthy relationships.
3. Develop skills for dealing with peer pressure, conflict as well as their own personal safety and the safety of others.
4. Be aware of the variety of ways in which individuals grow and change with a focus on the adolescent years and to develop respect for these individuals.
5. Understand sexual development and identity while exploring aspects of sexuality such as sex role stereotyping, gender issues and cultural influences on sexuality.
6. Value family life and understand the responsibilities of parenthood.
7. Develop strategies for decisions and actions consistent with personal moral integrity and respectful of the rights and dignity of others.

### 2.3 Aims of the RSE Policy

This RSE policy intends to achieve the following:

Aims:

- Promote knowledge and respect for reproduction.

- Provide an opportunity to learn about relationships and sexuality.
- Encourage students to think and act in a moral, caring and responsible way.
- Help students understand and develop friendships.
- Help students' understanding of sexuality.
- Develop a positive attitude towards one's own sexuality.

#### 2.4 Objectives of the RSE Policy :

- The policy will ensure clarity and consensus on how RSE is taught in Ballymakenny College.
- It will articulate the relationship of RSE to SPHE.
- It will articulate the aims of the RSE programme.
- It will clarify the rights, roles and responsibilities of all within the school community in relation to the RSE programme with particular reference to school staff, students, parents/guardians and the Board of Management.
- It will ensure that teachers, parents/guardians and students understand how the teaching of RSE is linked to the school ethos.
- It will provide information on the practicalities of delivering the programme.

### Links to Other Policies and to Curriculum Delivery

#### 3.1 Links to related school policies

Within the framework of the overall School Plan, the relevant school policies that are already in place, have been examined with reference to this RSE Policy. The following policies have been taken into consideration in the development of this policy:

- Child Protection Policy
- SPHE Policy
- Anti-Bullying Policy
- Wellbeing Policy
- Additional Educational Needs policy

#### 3.2 Links to Curriculum delivery:

Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) is timetabled as part of the Junior Cycle core curriculum and across all years in Senior Cycle. SPHE provides students with opportunities to develop the skills and competencies to care for themselves and others and to make informed

decisions about their health, personal lives and social development. This includes providing information on relationships and sexuality. Aspects of RSE are delivered across the curriculum, through subjects such as Ethics, Science, Biology, Home Economics and Social Education. Ballymakenny College endeavours to ensure that all students receive a full and balanced RSE programme from First Year through to Sixth Year.

## **Key Measures**

### **4.1 Curriculum Provision of RSE**

Both Junior Cycle and Senior Cycle classes are obliged to receive at least six classes of RSE a year.

### **4.2 Timetabling**

SPHE/RSE is timetabled in all Junior Cycle classes and Senior Cycle classes. Class groups for SPHE/RSE are mixed gender of no more than 30 pupils in compliance with guidelines issued by The Department of Education and Skills.

### **4.3 Guest speakers**

In relation to guest speakers and facilitators who may be delivering RSE related content, the coordinating teacher will direct the visitor to the school website, well in advance of the visit, to source a copy of the RSE policy. After gaining approval from the Principal for the visit, the organiser will make the visitor aware of the ethos of the school and the manner of delivery of the RSE programme. The organiser must also request to review all material which the visitor will be sharing with the students to ensure it is age appropriate and in line with our schools' ethos.

### **4.4 Children with additional educational needs**

Children with additional educational 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 deeper understanding of what sorts of behaviour are and are not acceptable, and in being aware of and prepared against abuse by others. Therefore, provision for children with special needs in RSE class will be catered for with this in mind.

#### 4.5 Provision of Training and Staff Development.

Coordinators of SPHE will be appointed.

- The school will promote and encourage staff to engage in RSE related CPD.
- The school encourages and welcomes a gender balance among the teachers assigned to SPHE/RSE.
- All teachers of these subjects have access to the resource materials on SharePoint

#### 4.6 Inclusion of Parents/Guardians

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.

Parents are invited to participate in the process of drawing up a school policy on RSE.

Ordinarily, parents will be informed of the RSE programme at the Information Evening for First Year Parents. They may request to withdraw their child from the RSE programme/class, should they so wish. Parents do not have to give reasons for withdrawal of their child from RSE. However, we respectfully invite them to communicate their concerns either in person or by phone so that the school management can resolve any misunderstandings.

The request to withdraw students from RSE should be communicated in writing to the school Principal.

Through the school website, parents will be made aware of the content of the SPHE/RSE programmes and the schools' ethos and of the other school policies which relate to these subjects. Parents will be provided with a copy of this policy following a request to do so.

If a parent wishes to withdraw a student from the RSE lessons they must make provisions to collect and supervise their child at this time as the school will be unable to provide supervision.

## **Guidelines for the Management and Organisation of RSE in Ballymakenny College.**

### **5.1 Ethical/Moral Considerations**

All of these topics will be dealt with in an age appropriate, open manner, looking at all sides of the issue in a non-directive way.

### **5.2 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 by students and will set appropriate limits. Students may ask questions that are not appropriate to a classroom setting. On these, and on all questions, teachers should use their professional judgement, be guided by the age of the students, the RSE curriculum and the RSE policy for the school. Reference should also be made to the "Ground Rules," which are drawn up with the SPHE/RSE class at the beginning of each year.

### **5.3 Confidentiality:**

While students should be encouraged not to disclose personal or private information in SPHE/RSE classes, there may be times when they do talk about personal issues. It is important that students are made aware of the limits of confidentiality from the beginning and that teachers do not give an unconditional guarantee of confidentiality. Confidentiality should be respected unless a teacher becomes aware that a child is at risk, in which case the appropriate action should be to notify the Designated Liaison Person, the Principal, who will then follow the procedures outlined in the Child Protection Procedures and Guidelines for Post-Primary Schools

Students should also be aware they too might need to make judgements regarding confidentiality when friends disclose sensitive information indicating risk to them. They will be reminded of the Child Protection Policy of the school and encouraged to seek support if they have any concerns.

### **5.4 Sexual Activity:**

The RSE policy statement gives teachers a framework related to morals and values within which the issue of sexual activity should be addressed. These are to be found within the SPHE RSE Programme and resources are referenced in the earlier section of 'Our School Philosophy'.

Teachers will give young people information on the age of consent, which is 17 years of age for both males and females. Teachers who become aware that a student is sexually active under the age of consent, as a mandated person, must bring this information to the Designated Liaison Person, the Principal, who will then inform the parents.

### **5.5 Contraception & Family Planning:**

The post-primary RSE Curriculum Guidelines state that the subject of family planning should be covered within the Senior Cycle RSE programme. The RSE programme requires that young people are provided with information about methods of contraception, including Natural Family Planning. This topic will be dealt with in an age appropriate, open manner, looking at all options in a non-directive way. Schools can use their discretion with regard to the age at which students receive any aspect of the RSE programme.

### **5.6 Abortion:**

This topic will be dealt with in an age appropriate, sensitive, open manner, looking at all aspects of the issues in a non-directive way referring to HSE Guidelines.

### **5.7 Sexuality and Gender Identity:**

The post-primary RSE Curriculum Guidelines include the subject of sexual orientation. We celebrate Stand- UP Awareness week in which lessons on sexual orientation are provided throughout the school. RSE training courses delivered by the SPHE Support Service provide teachers with further materials.

The school may decide if the topic needs to be addressed before Senior Cycle. It is inevitable and natural that different sexualities will be discussed during the RSE programme. The Equal Status Act 2000 and the Equality Act 2015 prohibit discrimination across ten grounds, including sexual orientation.

It is important that any student who is coming to terms with their sexual identity should not experience any harassment, embarrassment or isolation which may impact on their mental and emotional health and they should be offered support from the Guidance Department, or other supports, as appropriate.

Teachers do not normative any one identity as the only acceptable one for society. One of the advantages of exploring issues concerning gender and sexual identities is the opportunity to correct false ideas, assumptions and address prejudice.

### **5.8 Sexually Transmitted Infections (STI's)**

It is important that the subject of STI's is addressed in school. Awareness of STI's is one of the objectives of the Senior Cycle SPHE/RSE syllabus.

### **5.9 Consent**

Elements on the topic of consent will be delivered to all year groups in an age appropriate manner. 5<sup>th</sup> year students engage with the Active Consent Program which is delivered in collaboration with the Guidance and wellbeing departments.

### **5.10 Pornography**

The topic of pornography will be addressed in an age-appropriate, sensitive, and non-judgmental manner as part of the RSE programme.

### **5.11 Relationship & Gender Based Violence**

The topic of Relationship & Gender Based Violence will be delivered to students following the guidelines of the SPHE specification.

## **Implementation Arrangements, Roles and Responsibilities regarding SPHE & RSE Policy**

### **6.1 Implementation**

The Principal on behalf of the Board of Management will co-ordinate implementation of the SPHE/RSE policy.

Ballymakenny College will offer ongoing training for teachers and the policy committee where necessary to help them implement the SPHE/RSE programme. Information regarding courses or training for parents may be offered and organised by the Parents' Association/BOM/school. Relevant SPHE/RSE school resources will be sourced, stored and updated by the school SPHE Coordinators.

## 6.2 Ratification & Communication

This policy will be available to parents, teachers and the BOM and amended when all parties have reached consensus. The final agreed policy will be presented to the BOM, to be ratified and then circulated to all parties involved. Parents/Guardians will be informed of the SPHE/RSE Policy from the time of enrolment of the student.

## 6.3 Implementation Date

It will be implemented in the school year beginning September 2024.

## 6.4 Monitoring the implementation of the policy

The SPHE coordinators in association with the school management will monitor the implementation of this policy and evaluating the effectiveness of this programme.

Specifically important to the RSE programmes are:

- a) Pupil feedback.
- b) Staff review and feedback.
- c) Parental feedback.
- d) Career Guidance feedback.

## 6.5 Reviewing and evaluating the policy

The policy will be reviewed and evaluated every three years under the direction of the Board of Management. This process will be co-ordinated by the SPHE Coordinators and Policy Committee, in consultation with the wider school community. On-going review and evaluation will be cognisant of changing information, guidelines, legislation and feedback from parents/guardians, students, teachers and others. The SPHE co-ordinators will have the role of monitoring aspects of the policy. This policy will be revised as necessary in the light of such review and evaluation and within the framework of school planning. The following indicators may be used to gauge the impact and effectiveness of the policy, at review.

- Resource material is available to teachers.
- Appropriate in-service for teachers is available and relevant teachers are availing of it.
- Students are aware of the policy.
- Parents/guardians are aware of the policy.
- Positive feedback is received from teachers, other school staff, students, parents/guardians, members of board of management and trustees.

- A confidential survey of students, staff and parents will be carried out.

The following may be considered to support the process of review and evaluation:

- Feedback from student council or the student body.
- Parent/guardian feedback, including at parent/teacher meetings
- A comment/suggestion box.

Approved by the BOM of Ballymakenny College on 26<sup>th</sup> of September, 2024

Signed by Chairperson: *Maire Ní Bhroíthe*