



**ST. VINCENT'S
CASTLEKNOCK COLLEGE**

Relationships & Sexuality Education (RSE) Policy

1) Introductory Statement:

The RSE Policy of St Vincent's Castleknock College is a structured document that describes the school's provision of Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE). It includes the aims of the RSE programme, the relationship of RSE to SPHE (Social, Personal and Health Education), and the organisation and management of RSE within the school. This policy is an integral part of the College's overall school development plan.

2) Scope of this Policy:

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. Consequently, it is important that all teachers are familiar with the RSE policy.

The policy will apply to school staff, students, board of management, parents/guardians, visiting speakers and external facilitators.

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.

3) Rationale for this Policy:

- Sexuality is a key element of healthy social and personal development. Young people are exposed to a bewildering 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 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 junior and senior cycle. At Junior Cycle, the RSE programme is part of Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE). This obligation is also documented in various Departmental circulars.

4) Roles and Responsibilities:

There are various roles and responsibilities associated with RSE policy development and provision. The list below outlines the particular roles and responsibilities of all those involved in the formulation and implementation of the school's RSE policy.

4.1) Trustees:

The Trustees are responsible for the strategic direction, organisational nature and ethos of their respective schools. They can and often do offer advice and assistance to their schools when required and requested in this and other areas of policy development work within the school.

4.2) The Board of Management:

The Board of Management fosters and supports the development of a RSE policy and programme by collaborating with teachers and parents. The Board also facilitates the consultative process whereby the school community can respond and contribute. The Board of Management should examine and approve the completed policy and programme prior to their implementation in the school and review the policy at regular intervals. At all times the Board of Management seek to accommodate and be sensitive to the religious and cultural beliefs of both teachers and parents while fulfilling their responsibility to ensure the availability of appropriate and educationally excellent RSE for all young people.

4.3) Principal and Senior Management Team:

As with all subject areas, it is the role of the Principal to make possible a coherent and coordinated approach to RSE in keeping with the ethos of the school. Communicating the vision of the human person and human relationships at the heart of a Catholic school's provision for RSE is a key responsibility of the Principal and his/her senior management team. It is the role of the Deputy Principal(s) to support the work of the Principal. The Principal and Senior Management Team coordinate the school's approach to RSE and consult the Board of Management, staff, parents and health professionals as appropriate.

4.4) Chaplaincy Team/Designated Teacher/Special Needs Coordinator:

The Chaplaincy Team ensures that the RSE topics delivered through programmes are in line with the Catholic ethos of the school. Chaplaincy Team will liaise with the Special Needs Coordinator where necessary.

4.5) Teaching Staff:

The staff provide an obvious link in terms of communicating the content of RSE and the relevant programme, possibly through curriculum planning meetings and by other means. Teachers are of central importance in terms of any review of RSE provision.

4.6) Chaplain:

The Chaplain's role is to:

- support the teaching of RSE where possible
- meet with the coordinator to discuss the RSE programme and its delivery in school
- witness to Gospel values

5) Relationship of this Policy to the Characteristic Spirit of the School:

The Mission Statement of St Vincent's Castleknock College is set out as follows:

To have a College which is concerned with the development of the whole person in a Christian atmosphere which encourages involvement in a balance of religious, intellectual, cultural and sporting activities and which promotes the growth of self-worth and respect for others in the spirit of St Vincent de Paul.

The College's Mission Statement guides the College's RSE Policy. The College acknowledges the importance of teaching RSE/SPHE in the context of a whole school climate that is inclusive and respectful.

The school encourages its pupils to consider and assess different viewpoints in relation to issues of morality. The experience gained through the working out of this policy and through respecting the needs of minority groups and individuals enriches the whole life of the school.

The school gives its pupils the opportunity to explore the humanities, sciences, arts, business studies and technical subjects. In addition it provides religious, moral and physical education in order to meet its founding objectives of supporting pupils in achieving their full academic potential and preparing them for participation in civic society and working life.

A code of conduct has been published after consultation with parents, staff and pupils and the following excerpts illustrate how the ethos of the school operates on a daily basis:

- Discipline is founded on the principles of respect for people, environment, property and safety. All rules follow from these basic principles which are intended to create and maintain a happy and stable community.
- The best way in which the school can operate with the maximum happiness and fulfilment for everybody is if the maximum courtesy and respect is shown for other people. Pupils at the school are expected to respect the dignity of other pupils, teachers and other staff in the school and have the right to expect that their own dignity will be respected.
- Spiritual, moral and ethical issues arise when teaching RSE. The RSE Policy guides teachers in the treatment of such issues in accordance with the ethos of the school. 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. In this regard, it should be noted that:
 - The policy acknowledges that schools are required to deliver all aspects of the RSE curriculum, including those in relation to sexual orientation, contraception, sexually transmitted infections etc. This is achieved within a context in which teaching the programme is informed by the school's ethos.
 - While the school expresses its ethos, at the same time it facilitates students in discussing a range of views in relation to topics within the RSE programme.

6) Goals/Objectives of this Policy:

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.

Please see Appendix II for a full list of skills and objectives of the RSE curriculum.

Specifically, this policy will

- ensure clarity and consensus on how RSE is taught in S Vincent's Castleknock College.
- articulate the relationship of RSE to SPHE
- articulate the aims of the RSE programme
- 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/trustees
- ensure that teachers, parents/guardians and students understand how the teaching of RSE is linked to the school ethos
- provide information on the practicalities of delivering the programme

7) Provision of Training and Staff Development:

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. 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.

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.

- A co-ordinator for SPHE/RSE has been appointed from the teaching staff
- A clear role description has been agreed for the co-ordinator
- Teachers are informed prior to being timetabled to teach SPHE/RSE
- All such teachers are released to attend RSE training
- Gender issues are considered in the allocation of teachers and in the teaching of SPHE/RSE
- All teachers of SPHE/RSE have access to the SPHE and RSE teaching materials

8) 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. This policy has been designed in consultation with Parents' Representative Association and the views expressed by parents will be taken into account when reviewing the policy.

Parents/Guardians are given information on the content of the SPHE/RSE programme. This is achieved by

- involving parents/guardians fully in the process of policy development
- inviting parents/guardians to talks from time to time
- publishing the RSE policy on the school website
- at the start of the school year, providing parents/guardians for each year group with a summary of those aspects of the SPHE/RSE programme which will be covered during the year
- giving parents/guardians access to the SPHE/RSE teaching materials

Note: The Education Act, 1998 (section 30, subsection (2)(e)) provides that a student is not required to attend instruction in any subject which is contrary to the conscience of the parent or in the case of a student who has reached the age of 18 years, the student. Hence, parents have a right to opt their child out of the sensitive issues in RSE if they wish to do so. 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 I)

9) Confidentiality:

While students should not be encouraged to disclose personal or private information in SPHE/RSE classes, there may be times when they do talk about their own lives. Confidentiality should be respected unless a teacher becomes aware that a student is at risk, in which case the appropriate action should be taken e.g., follow the procedures set down in the Child Protection Procedures and Guidelines for PostPrimary Schools (2017).

It is important that the students must be made aware of the limits of confidentiality and that teachers do not give unconditional guarantees of confidentiality. Teachers may refer back to the ground rules agreed at the start of their SPHE programme. Students must be aware that any incident may be conveyed to the Principal and possibly the parents /guardian if the Principal decides that it is in the best interests of the child. Teachers will inform students when the content of a conversation can no longer be kept confidential.

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.

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.

10) Specific/Sensitive Issues:

RSE is a complex area of the curriculum. This RSE Policy document provides guidelines for teachers, students and parents on the moral and ethical framework within which the programme is taught.

10.1) 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 can set appropriate limits. 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.

Students will be told at the start of the RSE strand (Team Up) that the class group is not the appropriate environment to make a disclosure and they will be advised about the best way to make a disclosure. Child protection guidelines will be outlined. Students may ask questions about issues which are not included in the curriculum. On these, and on all questions, teachers will use their professional judgment, guided by the age of the students, the RSE curriculum and the RSE policy for the school.

Students should be made aware at the beginning of the RSE programme that asking personal questions of staff and peers is inappropriate and unacceptable. If a teacher becomes concerned about a matter that has been raised they should inform/seek advice from the SPHE Co-ordinator or Principal/Deputy Principal(s)

10.2) The Status of the Family:

In keeping with the duty of Catholic schools to present RSE within its own ethos, the school supports the sacramental vision of marriage and family, while being sensitive to other family situations. The Catholic understanding of marriage will be presented and sexual intimacy will be taught in the context of a God-given gift that enables married men and women to express and deepen their love for each other, a love that should unite the couple as well being open to the gift of new life.

10.3) The Virtue of Chastity:

The word 'chastity' may seem quite foreign or may appear removed from the reality of modern life. However, in line with the ethos of the school and Christian morals, sexual abstinence before marriage and fidelity within it, will be presented as a positive, desirable and achievable option. Chastity is about care of self and care of others; it is also about respecting marriage as a vocation that seeks to protect the love between spouses and the faithfulness they promise to one another.

10.4) The Sanctity of Life:

The value and sacredness of life will be actively promoted. From the moment of conception, the embryo is a human being and must be recognised as having the rights of a person. The most fundamental right for every human being is the right to life. This belief is one of the foundation stones on which the RSE programme is built. Life is sacred from conception to the moment of natural death.

10.5) Sexual Activity:

The pace of social change in Ireland over the last number of years has been rapid. Parents, students and teachers can experience a sense of confusion in relation to sexual mores. For example, in the Criminal Law (Sexual Offences) Act, 2006, the age of consent is 17 years of age for both males and females.

The religious ethos of the College may seem to be in conflict with the lived experience of the students. The RSE policy statement is designed to give teachers, students and parents guidance on the moral and values framework within which the issue of sexual activity will be addressed.

10.6) Family Planning:

The RSE programme requires that young people are provided with information about methods of contraception. Consideration will be given to the moral and values framework within which this is taught. The College exercises its discretion with regard to the age at which students receive this aspect of the RSE programme. Family planning, including methods of contraception, will be covered within the Senior Cycle RSE programme. This topic will be dealt with in an age appropriate, open manner, looking at all sides of the issues in a non-directive way.

10.7) Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender (LGBTQ+):

The post-primary RSE 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. Section 4 of this RSE Policy document sets the parameters within which a discussion on LGBT will take place.

Teachers do not promote any one life-style as the only acceptable one for society and therefore it is inevitable and natural that LGBT issues will be discussed during a programme of sex education. One of the advantages of exploring issues concerning LGBT is the opportunity to correct false ideas, assumptions and address prejudice. Discussion of LGBT should be appropriate to the age of the pupils.

The topic may need to be addressed before Senior Cycle, especially if homophobic bullying is an issue. Consequently, the subject of homosexuality will be discussed in a clear and open way within the parameters of the RSE Policy document.

10.8) Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs):

Awareness of STIs is one of the objectives of the SPHE/RSE syllabus and the topic is mainly addressed in Senior Cycle. Given that rates of STI transmission are increasing, it is important that the subject is addressed in schools.

11) RSE and Special Education 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.

12) Practical Issues:

12.1) Timetable:

- SPHE will be timetabled for all class groups in First, Second and Third Year.
- RSE is timetabled in Fourth, Fifth and Sixth Years.

12.2) Visiting teachers:

a) 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/RSE 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 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) A teacher will be present throughout the talk.

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.

Please see Appendix III for Checklist Template for Visiting Teachers

13) Links to Other Policies:

The RSE Policy of St Vincent's Castleknock College is a detailed expression of key elements of the Mission Statement and the Ethos Document of the College. Other relevant policies issued by the Board of Management include the Anti-Bullying Policy, the Child Protection Policy, the College Code of Behaviour, the Crisis Response Policy, the Learning Support Policy and the Substance Use Policy.

14) Links to Curriculum Delivery:

Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) is a core curriculum component of the Junior 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.

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.

Aspects of RSE are delivered across the curriculum, through subjects such as Religious Education, Science, Biology, and Physical Education. The school policy is that the Science Department deals primarily with the biological aspects of reproduction.

15) Ratification & Communication:

The policy is subject to periodic review after the date below and approved by the Board of Management.

Date of policy adoption:

This policy was ratified by the Board of Management on 25 October 2022

Signed: 
Chairperson of BoM

Date: 25 October 2022

Signed: 
Headmaster

Date: 25 October 2022

Appendix I: Withdrawal from the RSE Programme

What we do if a request for withdrawal from the RSE programme is made (in writing) by a parent?

- a) We discuss the nature of the concerns with the child's parent and if appropriate attempt to reassure them.
- 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 RSE programme and the entitlement of the other students.
- c) We attempt to ensure that where a student is withdrawn there is no disruption to other parts of their education.
- d) We point out that students who have been withdrawn are vulnerable to being asked about this by their peers or being singled out - we therefore attempt to cause minimal embarrassment to the student and minimal disruption to the programme.
- e) We also point out that students may receive inaccurate information from their peers.
- f) We offer the parents access to appropriate information and resources.

Appendix II: Skills and Objectives of the RSE Programme

Students will be helped, in cooperation with their parents, to develop the skills to:

- form and maintain healthy, positive relationships which are a reflection of the dignity of the human person
 - make sound judgements and good choices which have integrity and which are respectful of the individual's commitments
 - manage emotions within relationships and the breakdown of relationships with confidence, sensitivity and dignity
 - manage conflict positively, recognising the value of difference
 - critically evaluate a wide range of information, opinions, attitudes and values
 - develop the communication skills of active listening, negotiation, offering and receiving constructive feedback and assertiveness
 - communicate effectively by listening to others' points of view, presenting one's own view and dealing with conflict constructively
 - make good choices and wise moral judgements and then put them into practice by behaving responsibly as an individual or as a member of a group
 - develop interpersonal skills for managing healthy relationships with confidence and with effectiveness
 - cultivate humility, mercy and compassion, learning to forgive and be forgiven
 - develop skills and strategies to respond appropriately to exploitation, bullying, harassment, and control in relationships (including the unique challenges posed by online abuse and the unacceptability of physical, emotional and sexual abuse)
 - recognise when a relationship is unhealthy or abusive (including the unacceptability of both emotional and physical abuse or violence including 'honour' based violence, forced marriage and rape)
 - develop strategies to manage the situations mentioned above and be able to access support for self or others at risk
 - develop skills and strategies to manage being bullied and/or witnessing others being targeted
 - develop the skills to challenge sexist, homophobic, racist and disablist language and behaviour
- evaluate the effect of alcohol and drug use on decision-making and personal safety
- evaluate the impact of alcohol on road safety, work-place safety, legal safety, reputation and career
 - build resilience and the ability to resist unwanted pressures, recognising the influence and impact of the media, internet and peer groups and so develop the ability to assess pressures and respond appropriately
 - develop the skills and strategies to manage being bullied or targeted or witnessing others being bullied or targeted in any way
 - develop coping strategies to overcome mental health issues and to recognise when they need to employ strategies to re-establish positive mental health including managing stress and anxiety and seeking help when it is needed

Appendix III: Checklist/Procedures for Visiting Teachers

Introduction

St Vincent's Castleknock College is a post-primary school providing post-primary education to pupils from First Year to Leaving Certificate Year.

In accordance with the requirements of the Children First Act 2015, Children First: National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children 2017, the Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post Primary Schools 2017 and Tusla Guidance on the preparation of Child Safeguarding Statements, the Board of Management of St Vincent's Castleknock College has agreed the Child Safeguarding Statement set out in this document.

To whom do these procedures apply?

This appendix to the main Child Safety Statements and RSE Policy refers to policy and procedures relating to the following categories of personnel:

1. external persons to supplement delivery of the curriculum
2. external sports coaches
3. people involved in one-to-one teaching activities
4. students undertaking work experience in the school

The guidelines outlined in this appendix may also be of relevance to people involved in one-to-one counselling and to PME teachers on placements (see separate policy documents)

Guidelines/Checklist:

All personnel in the categories listed above should be fully aware of the contents of the complete College Child Safety Statement and in particular the following procedures and guidelines:

1. All teaching and coaching personnel not registered with the Teaching Council (sports coaches, guest presenters, etc) must provide evidence of Garda Vetting Clearance.
2. Visiting teachers / presenters will be required to identify a permanent teacher / college official as their "point of contact".
3. The contact teacher / college official assumes responsibility for explaining the following:
 - a. Roll calls should be entered using digital technology onto the central register (VShare) where possible.
 - b. Where VShare is not available, a paper rollcall should be completed and filed, either with the co-operating teacher or with the main Reception.
 - c. Usual "Duty of Care" applies in relation to our responsibilities in minimising risk of harm as outlined in the main Safety Statement.
 - d. No "grinds" are permitted at St Vincent's Castleknock College unless in exceptional circumstances permission has been given by the Board of Management.
 - e. Any "one-to-one" interview with a student should be held in a room with window in the door, unobscured.