

Relationships and Sexuality Education Policy

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This document was prepared in consultation with Staff, Parents' Association, Student Council, Principal and Board of Management.

Adopted by the Board of Management on 13/06/2017

A. School

Douglas Community School is an inclusive, academically non-selective boy's school.

B. Our School Philosophy

1. The school encourages its pupils to develop their religious, spiritual and moral dimensions through study and reflection. 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.
2. 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 active participation in society and working life.
3. A code of behaviour has been published in consultation with students, parent/guardian and staff:
 - Our Code is founded on the principle of respect for people, property, safety and environment.
 - Pupils, teachers and other staff in 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.

C. 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 contribute to the effectiveness of the RSE programme.

E. The aims of our Relationships and Sexuality Education programme

Relationships and sexuality education is part of the general programme of Social, Personal and Health Education.

RSE 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
- 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.

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 in the normal timetabling process.

2. Informing and Involving Parent/guardians:

Parent/guardians 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 Parent Association representatives and the views expressed by parent/guardians will be taken into account when reviewing the policy. A copy of this policy will be made available to any parent/guardian 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 parent/guardians and/or appropriate authorities and may arrange for counselling.

The following is school policy:

- a) teachers must not promise absolute confidentiality;
- b) pupils must be made aware that any information/event may be referred to the Principal who may decide that it is in the best interests of the pupil to notify parent/guardians, or an appropriate agency.
- 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.

Child Protection Issues

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 Principal is the Designated Liaison Person and the Deputy Principal is the Deputy Designated Liaison Person for this school.

6. The teaching of biological and non biological aspects of sex education:

Science is a core subject in the Junior Certificate Curriculum in the school. In teaching the science syllabus, the Science Department deals with the biological aspects of reproduction.

Issues such as over population and birth control are met in a minor way in subjects such as Geography and RE. 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.

7. Withdrawing pupils from the RSE programme:

1. Relevant sections of this policy are made available to parent/guardians in the student journal together with details about the parent/guardian's right to withdraw their child from sensitive aspects of RSE. Parent/guardians will be provided with a full copy of this policy following a request to do so.

2. Parent/guardians do not have to give reasons for withdrawal, but we respectfully invite them to do so as sometimes we can resolve possible misunderstandings about the programme. Once a parent/guardian's request to withdraw is made, that request must be acted upon. (See also appendix 1)

8. Using visiting speakers

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 where they are used in addition to the planned programme of RSE.

b) The SPHE Co-ordinator will help in identifying possible visiting speakers. Following on approval from the Principal for the visit the organizing teacher 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) it is advisable for the group to draw up questions in advance and these should be forwarded, where possible, 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 School Office should be informed of the date and name of the visitor.
- f) Where appropriate, refreshments should be arranged.
- g) The visitor should be welcomed at the school entrance hall.
- h) At the end of the session the visitor should be thanked by a pupil and escorted to the school door.
- i) A letter of thanks should be sent to the visitor and a report on the visit could be prepared for the School Newsletter.

9. LGBT Issues

It is likely that LGBT issues will be raised during a programme of sex education. One of the advantages of exploring issues concerning sexuality is the opportunity to correct false ideas, assumptions and address prejudice. Discussion of LGBT issues should be appropriate to the age of the pupils.

10. 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.

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 honestly and a preparedness to refer to more expert advice if necessary. The skills acquired in general teaching apply also to health education.
2. 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.
3. The school will facilitate teachers to obtain expert training in RSE.

Resources:

The school has 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 of the school.

Monitoring, evaluating and reviewing the RSE programme:

We are committed to monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of this programme.

Specifically methods of monitoring the RSE 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 RSE programme is made by a parent/guardian:

- a) we discuss the nature of the concerns with the child's parent/guardian 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 amended or improved in a way that will reassure parent/guardians. However care is taken

not to undermine the integrity of the RSE programme and the entitlement of the other pupils,
c) we attempt to ensure that where a pupil is withdrawn there is no disruption to other parts of their education,
d) we inform parents/guardians that pupils may receive inaccurate information from their peers;
f) we offer the parent/guardians access to appropriate information and resources.