
ST. COLUMBAN'S COLLEGE, KILKEEL.
RELATIONSHIPS, SEXUALITY EDUCATION POLICY

1. Introduction

At St. Columban's we recognise and fully respect that parents have the primary duty and right to be the first and principal educators of their children. We see ourselves as supporting and helping parents to fulfil this responsibility. The attitude, beliefs and behaviour of pupils in all their relationships are primarily formed and greatly influenced by their experiences within the family and the relationship they have with their parents/carers.

We will endeavour to continually assess how the school can help and support parents in this important area of education. RSE in school is intended to supplement and complement what goes on at home. We are fully aware that an RSE programme in school, no matter how well written, resourced and taught, is greatly diminished in its effectiveness, if it does not have parental input and support at all stages. Parents will be given an explanation of the RSE Programme by letter prior to pupil participation in any RSE classes. Parents will be offered the opportunity in this letter to contact the school to discuss all aspects of the programme with the staff.

a) Rationale

(i) St. Columban's is a mixed sex Catholic school committed to the education of the whole person. We, as a Catholic Community, care for the faith and personal development of each student. Like all Catholic schools we try to develop young people who are responsible and capable of making informed decisions, inspired by Christian values. Education at St. Columban's College prepares young people to open themselves up to life as it is and to create in themselves a positive attitude to life as it should be.

(ii) N. Ireland has one of the highest rates of teenage pregnancy in Europe, with approximately 1,700 babies born each year to young women under 20 years. The incidence of Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs) continues to rise.

Recent research has shown that almost one third of Year 12 pupils in the Catholic school system have experienced sexual intercourse.

(iii) We believe that much of the media's treatment of sexuality and relationships, in music, TV soaps, films and magazines, is contrary to, and often in direct conflict with Catholic Church teaching.

(iv) *We have reassessed the Pastoral Curriculum within our school in light of new curriculum proposals. This has incorporated the use of the Catholic Council's Educational Authority In Sync resource Years 8 – 10 and also the 'Love for Life' programme. Currently the work in the area of Relationships, Sexuality Education is being fulfilled by a cross curricular approach, led by RE and supported by Science and Personal Development Strand.*

(v) *The Dept of Education NI Circular 2001 states that, "RSE is included on a statutory basis within the NI Curriculum through the Science programme of study and the Health Education cross-curricular theme." This Circular acknowledges that important contributions in RSE come from; Physical Education, English, Home Economics, PSHE and Religious Education.*

(vi) *Generally, RSE will be taught in mixed gender groups.*

b) Definitions

i) Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE)

RSE is a lifelong process of acquiring knowledge and understanding, and developing one's beliefs, attitudes and values, about sexual identity, relationships and intimacy. RSE seeks to provide young people with formal opportunities to acquire knowledge and understanding of human sexuality and how to develop the skills and values they need to initiate and sustain, healthy, mature, Christian, relationships.

ii) Sexuality.

*People are sexual beings. Every human being is either male or female. Sexuality is about much more than its biological aspects, it concerns the innermost being of the human person. We believe sexuality is a gift from God. It is the drive within every person to give and receive love and affection. Our sexuality shapes and permeates **all** our relationships.*

RSE in St. Columban's is taught within the moral, social and spiritual framework that reflects the beliefs and ethos of a Catholic school.

iii) Morality

Morality is essentially linked with behaviour and what we actually do. It is also directly connected with experience and faith.

iv) Ethics

Ethics refers to a systematic structure such as the “Christian Tradition”, which provides a particular lifestyle with corresponding and inherent values.

v) **Values**

Are the attitudes, beliefs, virtues and principles which spring from within the person and inform his/her behaviour e.g. respect for self, honesty with self and others.

vi) **Personal Morality**

Is about each of us taking responsibility for the choice we make. We endeavour to ensure our pupils make moral decisions with an “informed conscience”.

c) **Aims**

The Relationships and Sexuality Education Programme aims to:

- *help young people to appreciate their uniqueness and dignity as sons and daughters of God.*
- *help young people understand and develop friendships and relationships.*
- *promote a Christian vision of sexuality i.e. a vision that promotes unselfish love, respect and commitment.*
- *help young people understand that sexuality is a gift from God that encompasses the whole person, body, mind, emotions and soul.*
- *promote a positive attitude to one’s own sexuality and in one’s relationships with others.*
- *promote knowledge and understanding of, and respect for, human reproduction.*
- *help young people understand that marriage is a sacrament and that sexual intercourse is an expression of married love.*

SPECIFIC ISSUES

A. The Status of the family

We believe men and women should pledge their love for each other in a lifelong mutual commitment, and it is within marriage that couples should seek to bring children into the world. We promote this idea of the Christian family while remaining sensitive to, and being aware of, the different types of family backgrounds from which our pupils come.

B. Sacredness of Life

We believe that 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.

C. Confidentiality and Child Protection Issues

- *The pupil's right to privacy must be respected at all times by both the teacher and all other pupils in the class. A key rule agreed in advance of any discussion in class is that no one will be expected to ask or answer any personal questions.*
- *Teachers cannot promise absolute confidentiality. Pupils should be made aware that a teacher has a moral and legal responsibility to inform the Principal or Designated Teacher for Child Protection, if a pupil discloses information that suggests he/she is at risk of, or is actually suffering from any kind of abuse, e.g. physical, sexual, emotional or neglect.*

D. Homosexuality.

Sex is a God-given gift that enables married people to express and deepen their love for each other, a love that should unite the couple as well as the opportunity to be open to the gift of new life. The belief that homosexual acts are against the nature and purpose of human relationships will be presented to pupils in years 11 and 12. Teachers will deal with the issue of homosexuality in a sensitive and respectful manner. The ideals of respect and dignity for every person regardless of their race, creed, or sexual orientation are recognised.

E. Withdrawal from class and supervision

St. Columban's College, in compliance with the advice offered by DENI Circular 2001/15, will make alternative arrangements for any pupil whose parent wishes him/her to be excused from particular, or all sex education classes.

Puberty

Emotional and physical changes during adolescence are interlinked and are caused by hormonal activity. Through the RSE programme we hope to help our pupils to identify, understand and accept the emotional and physical changes they are experiencing.

Time Issues for Programme

The head of RE will prioritise the issues to be dealt with for each Year Group. Teachers will deliver the RSE programme within the context of the R.E. timetable and within other appropriate learning areas e.g. Science and PSHE.

Special Educational Needs (SEN)

Materials will be adapted to meet the SEN of individual pupils and, where necessary, the particular needs of groups of pupils.

Awkward Questions

We are confident in the professional judgement and skill of our teachers to deal with awkward questions that may arise during the course of class discussions. Establishing boundaries and dealing with difficult or sensitive questions, is an area we will continually address **through continuous staff development and dissemination of pastoral information.**

F. RSE for boys/girls (*see under heading Rationale – vii*)

H. Terminology

We encourage the use of the proper biological terms during RSE lessons. We point out to pupils that the use of slang words, or offensive words, often indicates embarrassment, lack of knowledge, and/or lack of respect for self and others.

I. Use of Visitors and Other Resources

St. Columban's College encourages the involvement of outside agencies to complement the delivery of the RSE programme namely 'Love for Life' and 'life'. It is normal practice to ensure that these outside agencies have been appropriately vetted prior to any school visit. A member of school staff will always accompany outside agency representation in a classroom setting. There will also be adequate preparation and appropriate follow-up lessons in relation to all guest speakers. The Personal Development Strand Leader will ensure that resource materials obtained from other agencies, and presentations by outside speakers, are in harmony with the ethos of the school.

3. IMPLEMENTATION

A. Monitoring and Evaluation

- i) *Key Staff which includes the principal, Vice Principal and Head of RE, in partnership with all teachers delivering the RSE programme, will be involved, on an on-going basis, in monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness and relevance of the programme. This group will take into account feedback received from pupils, teachers and parents. This feedback will be obtained from evaluation sheets completed by our students. These will be scrutinised and evaluated by 'love for Life'. The findings are passed*

back to us to study. Any necessary changes to our delivery of the material can then be implemented.

- ii) The aims of the RSE programme, as listed in this policy, will be at the forefront of any monitoring and evaluation in order to ensure the aims are being achieved.*
- iii) Monitoring and evaluation procedures will also correspond with School's KS3 curriculum practice.*
- iv) Evidence of pupils learning might include:
 - Verbal feedback from teachers, pupils and parents.
 - Reviewing a selection of pupils' work.
 - External expression of inherent values*

B. Roles and Responsibilities

- i) **Board of Governors**
Examine and approve policy.
Review policy.*
- ii) **Principal**
Consult governors, staff, parents, pupils and relevant professionals.
Ensure the implementation of the programme.*
- iii) **RSE Team – led by Vice Principal**
Oversee the writing of the policy.
Oversee the development of the delivery of all aspects of the programme in consultation with Personal Development Co-ordinator and HOD R.E.*

C. Programme.

The programme in use contains resource materials developed by CCEA and 'love for Life', in addition to in-house resource texts and materials. Furthermore,

- i) the programme will be evaluated to meet the specific needs of the pupils of this school,*
- ii) the programme will be monitored continually to ensure it is appropriate to the age and maturity of our pupils,*

D. Where Will It be Taught in the Curriculum?

Currently it is being taught through the auspices of RE in Years 8 – 12, and is supported across Learning for Life and Work (LLW) and in Science in years 8 – 12.

E. Who Will Teach It?

The programme will be delivered by R.E., LLW, Science and relevant external agencies.

F. Informing the Wider School Community

Parents and Board of Governors.

A copy of the RSE Policy will be posted on the school website. Parents/carers will be notified and if they wish to have a hard copy, this will be made available. The policy will also be given to each member of the Board of Governors.

G. Review Policy

Policy will be reviewed every two years.