

## **Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) Policy.**

### **Introduction**

The RSE policy is a written statement of the aims of the RSE programme, the relationship of RSE to SPHE, and the organisation and management of RSE within the school.

This policy was enacted in May 2011 after consultation between the RSE committee, the Principal, the Board of Management and the Student Council.

The RSE committee consists of representatives of staff, management, parents and Board of Management:

### **School Information**

Oaklands Community College is a co-educational, multi-denominational, multicultural post primary school located in Edenderry Co Offaly.

We are committed to providing a holistic education with the aim of developing the academic, cultural, sporting, moral and spiritual needs of our students.

This school is a dynamic and vibrant centre of teaching and learning. We have a very inclusive approach to education providing all our students with the opportunity to study academic and practical subjects, participate in a range of extracurricular activities as well as taking programmes in SPHE and PE.

In partnership with our Board of Management, Parents' Association and Student Council we have devised comprehensive policies and procedures which deal with discipline, bullying and other issues affecting the welfare of students.

With this in mind, it is our intention that everyone feels valued and our pupils are encouraged to develop their full potential in a caring and supportive environment.

### **Relationship of RSE to the Schools Mission Statement**

Oaklands Community College is committed to providing the best educational formation possible for all our students, by providing equally for all, a broadly based curriculum. We aim to provide an education for all students which will embrace their full human development: personal, academic, physical, moral and religious. Relationships and Sexuality Education encompasses the development of attitudes, beliefs and values

about relationships, sexual identity and intimacy, contributing towards the full human development of the student. As outlined by the Department of Education and Skills *in Circular 0037/2010*, no aspect of the RSE programme including STI's, family planning, or sexual orientation can be omitted on the grounds of religious ethos. As we seek to promote the overall development of the student, this involves the integration of Relationships and Sexuality into personal understanding, growth and development within the context of our holistic educational ethos.

### **Scope:**

#### ***To what and to whom will the policy apply?***

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

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; it is therefore important that all teachers are familiar with the RSE policy.

### **Definition of RSE**

Relationship and Sexuality Education encompasses the acquisition of knowledge and understanding, and the development of attitudes, beliefs and values about relationships, sexual identity and intimacy.

Relationships and Sexuality Education seeks to provide children with opportunities to acquire knowledge and understanding of relationships and human sexuality, through processes which will enable them to form values and establish behaviours within a moral, spiritual and social framework.

(Pg 7, Interim Guidelines).

### **Goals/Objectives;**

#### ***1. Relationship of RSE to SPHE***

The Education Act (1998) emphasises that schools are obliged to promote the social and personal development of students and provide health education for them. As part of the SPHE programme students are encouraged to develop their own self confidence and build relationships with others. The aim of the SPHE programme is to promote physical, mental and emotional health and well being. It also encourages the development of a healthy attitude to sexuality. Relationships and Sexuality are key elements of healthy social and personal development in all our lives, but particularly in the life of an adolescent. The RSE

programme is designed to specifically deal with these issues and encourage students to deal with their own sexuality and develop relationships. RSE is one of the ten modules to be taught in SPHE at junior cycle and is mandatory for all year groups from first year to sixth year. The course will be developmental in nature and will be age appropriate.

## ***2. Aims of the RSE programme***

Relationships and Sexuality Education Programme will be taught as part of the SPHE Programme. The aims of RSE are

- To help students understand and develop friendships and relationships
- To promote an understanding of sexuality
- To promote a positive attitude to students own sexuality and in their relationships with others
- To promote knowledge of and respect for reproduction
- To enable students to develop attitudes and values towards their sexuality in a moral, spiritual and social framework in keeping with the ethos of the school
- To provide opportunities for pupils to learn about relationships and sexuality in ways that encourage them to think and act in a moral, caring and responsible way

It is acknowledged that these aims are aspirational due to the time constraints of the course.

## **Key Measures**

### **1. Provision of training & staff development**

A number of staff members have attended training in SPHE and RSE and management will continue to support staff training in this area.

### **2. Inclusion of parents/guardians**

It is recognised by the school that the parents/guardians are the primary educators of the children and their role in education concerning relationships and sexuality is seen by the school as very important.

There will be information provided for parents about the content and the timing of the RSE module, in the induction pack for first years, or at the start of the academic year. Informing parents/guardians of when these topics are being taught in school will enable them to discuss any further issues at home. Each parent/guardian will also be provided with a copy of the booklet 'Going forward together' as part of our induction pack. The RSE policy will be available to download on the school's website for parents/guardians.

The RSE policy has been designed in consultation with a parent representative of the school and the views of the parents/guardians have been taken into account before ratification of this policy. Parents/guardians views may also be taken into account when reviewing the policy.

### **3. Ethical/Moral considerations:**

**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 limits. It may not be appropriate to deal with a student's explicit questions in a classroom situation e.g. questions on oral sex or abortion. The teacher may say that it is inappropriate to answer the question in class and may exercise his/her professional judgement, guided by the age of the students, in deciding whether to answer the question privately after class has finished. If a teacher becomes concerned about a matter that has been raised, he/she should seek advice from the Principal.

**Confidentiality:** Students should be asked not to disclose personal information in SPHE/RSE class. It is important that students are made aware of the limits of confidentiality. Teachers must **not** guarantee confidentiality. Pupils must be informed that if a teacher becomes aware that a pupil is at risk of abuse, or in breach of the law, this information will be conveyed to the Principal and the appropriate action will be taken, as set down in the *Child Protection Guidelines for Post-primary Schools (2004)*.

**Sexual Activity:** Students should be made aware that, following the passage of the *Criminal Law (Sexual Offences) Act 2006*, the age of consent for sexual activity for both males and females is 17 years of age in the Republic of Ireland. In circumstances where a teacher becomes aware that a pupil is engaging in underage sexual activity, the teacher must refer this immediately to the designated liaison person (DLP) i.e. the Principal.

**Offering Advice:** The school's function is to provide a general education about sexual matters and not to offer individual advice or counselling on aspects of sexual behaviour. However, 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. Advice offered should not be directive and should be age appropriate to the student.

**Family planning/Contraception:** The subject of family planning is covered within the senior cycle RSE programme. However, the topic may need to be addressed before senior cycle. Students will be 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.

**Homosexuality:** The subject of sexual orientation is included in the RSE curriculum at senior cycle. The topic may need to be addressed before senior cycle. Discretion will be used with regard to the age at which students discuss homosexuality and it should be discussed in a clear and open manner and in a non-directive way.

**Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs):** While awareness of STIs is one of the objectives of the second year SPHE/RSE syllabus, STIs are mainly addressed in senior cycle. This topic will be dealt with in an age appropriate, open manner.

#### **4. Practical issues:**

SPHE is timetabled once a week for Junior Cycle students. RSE is taught as a module over six class periods within the SPHE programme. Senior cycle students receive RSE lessons as part of the Religion programme. With the introduction of Transition Year it is intended to also introduce SPHE/RSE within the Transition Year programme. RSE will then be included in senior cycle SPHE instead of senior cycle Religion.

RSE/SPHE class groups may be as many as 30 students. Boys and girls will be taught together in their class groups. It may be appropriate and desirable to have single sex classes for some sections of the RSE programme.

If there is a student who may be pregnant in a class, then relevant topics e.g. family planning etc. will be dealt with sensitively and with the student in mind.

#### **Withdrawing pupils from the RSE programme:**

The school recognises that the parent/guardian has the right to withdraw their child from the RSE class if they wish to do so. The Principal may wish to ask the parents/guardians to put their request in writing or the parent/guardian may be invited to discuss this with the Principal. We respectfully invite the parent/guardian to give reasons for withdrawal as sometimes this can resolve misunderstandings. Parents may be offered access to appropriate information or resources.

**Special Needs:** Students with special needs may need more help than others in coping with the physical and emotional aspects of growing up: they may also need help in learning what behaviours are and are not acceptable, and in being warned and prepared against abuse by others. They may need to be withdrawn from an RSE lesson if the material is deemed inappropriate for the individual student. Each individual student will be considered separately depending on his/her needs.

#### **Using visiting speakers**

The RSE programme will be delivered openly by teachers who are known and trusted by pupils. However visitors may enhance the quality of the provision as long as they are used in addition to, not instead of a planned programme of RSE. The visitor will be provided with a copy of the RSE

policy prior to the visit. A member of teaching staff will be present with the visitor during the talk to ensure that our RSE policy is strictly adhered to.

### **Resources:**

Resources are available to teachers of SPHE/RSE in the form of textbooks, workbooks, appropriate DVDs, brochures etc. Supplementary resources are stored in the SPHE storage area in the staff room and are available for teachers who wish to use them. Students are supplied with an SPHE textbook supplemented by other materials and activities.

### **Links to other School Policies**

It is imperative that all school policies are consistent with one another and cohesive within the framework of the overall school plan. The RSE policy is developed in this context and takes into consideration the following policies

- SPHE Policy
- Guidance Policy
- Substance Use Policy
- Anti-Bullying Policy
- Child Protection Guidelines

Teachers of the relevant subject areas, such as Science, Home Economics and Religious Education will be informed of the content, and the timing of the delivery of RSE, and in so far as possible, RSE will be taught in a cross-curricular way.

### **Roles and responsibilities in implementing policy**

All partners, including Board of Management, Parents/Guardians, School Management and teaching staff, have roles and responsibilities in ensuring the implementation of the RSE Policy in our school. Teachers delivering the RSE programme will attend training provided by the SPHE support service.

## **Ratification by the Board of Management**

The RSE policy was ratified by the Board of management on \_\_\_\_\_

## **Reviewing and Evaluating the RSE Policy:**

We are committed to monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of this policy. A review of the RSE policy will take place on a regular basis and may include:

- (a) Pupil feedback (i.e. student council, survey of students, suggestion/comment box etc.),
  - (b) Staff review and feedback,
  - (c) Parental/guardian feedback,
  - (d) Feedback from representatives of the Board of Management.
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