RSE Policy



Balbriggan Community College

Principal: Mr. Emmet Sheridan

**Our School**

Balbriggan Community College is a DEIS (Delivering Equality in Schools) school which operates under the patronage of the DDLETB. ETB post- primary schools are state, co-educational, multi-denominational schools underpinned by 5 core values; excellence in education, care, equality, community and respect. We are a multicultural and diverse community.

**Policy Rationale**

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

* 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 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 the Social, Personal and Health Education.
* Circulars M4/95, M20/96, C23/2010 and C37/2010 request schools to commence a process of RSE policy development.
* 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. This RSE policy will guide teachers in the treatment of such issues in accordance with the ethos of the college. 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.
* In this regard, it should be noted 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 can be done within a context in which teaching of the programme is informed by the school’s ethos.
* A school can express its ethos while at the same time facilitating students in discussing a range of views in relation to topics within the RSE programme.
* RSE should be taught in the context of a whole school climate that is inclusive and respectful, and ensuring that the RSE classroom is a safe place for all.

**Definition of RSE**

Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) is a lifelong process of acquiring knowledge and understanding and developing attitudes, beliefs and values about sexual identity, relationships and intimacy. The education is delivered consciously and unconsciously by parents, teachers, peers, adults and the media.

In schools, RSE will provide structured opportunities to students to acquire knowledge and understanding of human relationships and sexuality. They can learn this though processes which enable them to form values and establish behaviours within a moral, spiritual and social framework.

This approach gives opportunities to young people to learn about relationships and sexuality in ways that help them to think and act in a moral, caring and responsible manner.

**Relationship of RSE to SPHE**

In our school, RSE is taught in the context of Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE). The draft guidelines for RSE (NCCA, June 1995, 1.2) state that SPHE is a ‘spiral, developmental in nature and age appropriate in content and methodology’. The RSE programme and lessons are delivered within the schools existing SPHE programme. In accordance with the curriculum, six lessons are delivered to each year group every year.

The SPHE programme promotes the health and wellbeing of young people and addresses issues such as self-esteem, assertiveness, communication and decision making skills. Sexuality is a key area of development in the life of the adolescent.

**RSE Aims:**

* To help students understand and develop friendships and relationships.
* To promote knowledge of and respect for reproduction.
* To give them an understanding of sexuality.
* To enable students to develop attitudes and values toward their sexuality in a moral and social framework.
* To promote a positive attitude to one’s own sexuality and in one’s relationship with others.

**Organisation of RSE in our School:**

Arrangements regarding the teaching of the programme and the development of staff are made by the Principal and Deputy Principals. All classes are of mixed gender and mixed ability.

The teacher will follow the Department of Education guidelines and NCCA teacher guidelines on the content covered and depth of treatment in all areas of the SPHE programme, including the delivery of the RSE lessons.

The delivery of the RSE programme will be done so with the school’s values, philosophy and ethos at its core. Balbriggan Community College is committed to promoting respect, tolerance and understanding while appreciating the diversity of our changing world.

**Informing and Involving Parents:**

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. A copy of this policy will be made available to parents on our school’s website and a hard copy is available on request from the school office. A letter is sent to parents informing them of when the RSE programme will be taught (See also Appendix 1). Parents have the right to withdraw their child from RSE classes.

**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 students 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 (further information is available from the Guidance Department). Advice offered should not be directive and should be appropriate to the age of the student.

**Ethical and Moral considerations when answering questions:**

The teacher can respond to questions and to decide which are most appropriate for the class group. The teacher may exercise his or her own professional judgement in deciding whether to answer questions privately after the class has finished. If a teacher becomes concerned about a matter that has been raised , he / she should seek advice from the Principal.

**Confidentiality:**

While an atmosphere of trust is a pre-requisite of RSE class, the following limits of confidentiality must be observed. These limits are:

* Child abuse – physical, emotional, sexual, neglect.
* Intention to harm self or others.
* Substance misuse.
* Underage sexual intercourse.

Any disclosure will be reported to the Designated Liaison Person (DLP) in compliance with our Child Protection Policy.

RSE teachers will inform students of the limits of confidentiality at the beginning of the year, remind them at necessary points throughout the year, and where possible, before making a disclosure. It is the school policy that where a student is considered at some risk of any type of abuse or in breach of the law, the teacher must refer this immediately to the Designated Liaison Person (Mr. Emmet Sheridan), who will decide whether to inform the parents or appropriate authorities and may arrange for counselling.

**Child Protection**

Child Protection Procedures 2.1.6 state “In all cases where a school becomes aware of underage sexual intercourse, the school should take appropriate steps to inform the child’s parents.” The age of consent is 17 for boys and girls, for heterosexual and homosexual sex. All students of RSE are made aware of the limits to confidentiality, that she should a teacher become aware that a student is at risk, they are obliged to pass this information on to the DLP. However, should a student who is not at risk choose to confide in a teacher about something, the teacher should keep this information to him or herself.

**Withdrawing students from RSE:**

*Note:* The Education Act 1998 provides that a student is not required to attend instruction in any subject which is contrary to the conscience of the parents or in the case of a student who has reached the age of 18, the student. Hence, parents /guardians 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. Once a parent’s/guardian’s request to withdraw is made in writing, that request will be complied with until revoked by the parent or Letter with opt-out form.

**Withdrawal from RSE**

Letter sent to parent at the start of each year / module stating RSE will be taught (Appendix 1) with opt-out consent form included.

Parents (or student aged 18) put in writing if they wish to remove their child if a student is not required to attend instruction in any subject which is contrary to the conscience of the parents

Relevant sections of this policy will be available to parents, together with details about parents’ rights to withdraw their child from any aspects of RSE – parents will be provided with a full copy of this policy following a request to do so.

**Practical Issues:**

* Arrangements regarding the deployment of staff will be made by the Principal and Deputy Principals. Consideration will be given to gender balance. Teachers will be consulted and where practicable, teachers who express an interest in teaching SPHE/RSE will be timetabled.
* All teachers involved in this work do not 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 preparedness to refer to more expert advice if necessary. The skills acquired in general teaching apply also to RSE.
* In service training for the teaching of RSE will be encouraged and facilitated by the school. Available training opportunities will be identified via [www.PDST.ie](http://www.PDST.ie)
* Appropriate teaching resources will be made available to staff subject to budget constraints.
* All students in the Junior Cycle have at least one period of SPHE per week. RSE will be included as a module as part of their SPHE programme.
* Students in senior cycle will receive a minimum of 6 week’s tuition in RSE each year.
* The size of the class groups will be determined by the base class.
* Provision will be made for students with additional educational needs as laid down by the NCCA guidelines. To comply with these guidelines it will be necessary for the class teacher to consult with the AEN co-ordinators, prior to the programme, to discuss any students with AEN and to ascertain how they can be supported throughout the programme.
* This policy is made available to parents and details about the parent’s right to withdraw their child from sensitive aspects of RSE are included in the policy. Parents have the right to withdraw students from RSE but not SPHE. 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 (in writing), that request must be complied with until revoked by the parent. If parents wish to withdraw from the RSE programme this should be done in First year or when the student joins the school initially.
* **Visiting speakers** must be made aware of the schools RSE policy, mission statement and the SPHE visitor guidelines as laid down by the Department of Education in circular 0023/2010 to secondary schools. The Care Team are advised when visiting speakers are in the school. Thus, classroom teachers must remain in the classroom with the students; parents should be consulted and made aware of visiting people and agencies. All programmes and events delivered by visitors and external agencies must use appropriate evidence based methodologies with clear educational outcomes. Such programmes are best delivered by those specifically qualified to work with young people for whom the programmes are designed. Evaluation of the speakers is compulsory.

**Links to curriculum delivery:**

**•** Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) is a Junior Cycle core subject. 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 Religious Education, Science, Biology and Home Economics. In Balbriggan Community College, our aim is to ensure that all students receive a full and balanced RSE programme from First Year through to SixthYear.

**Ongoing support, development and review:**

All teacher involved in teaching the RSE programme 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 preparedness to refer to more expert advice if necessary. The skills acquired in general teaching apply also to health education. Some teachers have expert in the specific areas of health, relationships and sexuality education and will be encouraged to train other teachers.

All staff teaching RSE are encouraged to avail of suitable in-service opportunities, which may arise.

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.

We are committed to monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of this programme. Specifically important to the RSE programme are : pupil feedback, staff review and feedback, and parental feedback.

**Implementation, Ratification and Communication:**

This policy will be ratified by the Board of Management and becomes the agreed RSE policy of Balbriggan Community College. All teaching staff will need to be familiar with the policy and aware of any changes implied in curriculum delivery and will receive a copy of said document promptly after it has been ratified. The Parent’s Council will also receive a copy of the policy.

**Monitoring the implementation of the policy:**

Effective policy requires constant monitoring and evaluation to ensure successful implementation and to review what adjustments may be necessary from time to time.

**Reviewing and evaluating the policy:**

The policy will be reviewed and evaluated at certain predetermined times under the direction of the Board of Management. Ongoing review and evaluation will take cognisance of changing information, guidelines, legislation and feedback from parents / guardians, students, teachers and others. The Wellbeing coordinator will have the role of monitoring aspects of the policy. The policy will be revised as necessary in the light of such review and evaluation and withing the framework of school planning.

**To review and evaluate the policy, it will be necessary to gauge the impact and effectiveness of the policy by examining the extent to which:**

* RSE is being successfully taught through SPHE and RE for all relevant students.
* Where SPHE may not be timetabled, e.g. at Senior Cycle, that these students are receiving RSE.
* Resource materials are available to teachers.
* Appropriate in-service for teachers is available and relevant teachers are availing of it.
* Staff are aware of the policy.
* Students are aware of the policy.
* Parents / guardians are aware of the policy.
* Feedback is received from teachers, other school staff, students, parents / guardians, members of the Board of Management.

There will be a review of the policy periodically by the Policy Steering Committee. Parents’ comments will be considered. Or RSE policy has been written by Balbriggan Community College and reviewed by staff and the Board of Management.

**Appendix 1**

RSE Information and Permission Letter to Parents

Dear Parent / Guardian,

As part of our school’s RSE policy, and in accordance with the Department of Education’s guideline, and RSE programme will be taught during the school year.

Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) is a lifelong process of acquiring knowledge and understanding and developing attitudes, beliefs and values about sexual identity, relationships and intimacy. The education is delivered consciously and unconsciously by parents, teachers, peers, adults and the media. RSE provides structured opportunities to acquire the knowledge and understanding of human relationships and sexuality. They can learn this through processes which enable them to form values and establish behaviours within a moral, spiritual and social framework. Young people are given opportunities to learn about relationships and sexuality in ways that help them to think and act in a moral, caring and responsible manner.

We recognise that parents have the primary responsibility for the personal development of their children, and it is our wish to compliment that role.

The RSE component of the programme will be conducted in Balbriggan Community College in harmony with the ethos of the school. While we assume that all students will want to participate in the classes, if you do have any concern about your child attending these RSE classes, you have the choice to remove your child from the RSE programme.

Below is an opt out consent form. If you do not wish your child to receive Relationship and Sexuality Education in the school, please complete the form below and return it to your child’s tutor, who will forward it to the Wellbeing Coordinator. Parents who chose to opt out of the programme will be contacted by school management, when possible.

Yours sincerely,

not included in DCC policy

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Principal

**Appendix 2**

What we will do if a request for withdrawal from the RSE programme is made by a parent:

1. We will discuss the nature of the concerns with the child’s parent and if appropriate attempt to reassure them (initially such discussion can take place at a meeting with the Year Head and Wellbeing Coordinator, with the principal becoming involved in necessary).
2. We will consider whether the programme can be amended or improved in a way that will reassure parents, with care being taken not to undermine the integrity of the RSE programme and the entitlement of other pupils.
3. We will attempt to ensure that where a student is withdrawn, there is no disruption to other parts of their education.

**Appendix 3**

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 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