

Our Lady of Mercy College Beaumont



Relationships and Sexuality Policy

1 Introductory Statement

Our Lady of Mercy College, Beaumont, is a voluntary second-level, co-educational school with a Catholic ethos under the trusteeship of CEIST. The Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) Policy has been developed following consultation between staff, parents, students, Principal and the Board of Management. In this policy document the term ‘parent’ is taken to include ‘guardian’.

2 Mission Statement

The core value of Our Lady of Mercy College Beaumont is respect for all and the nurturing of individual potential, academically, spiritually and culturally as a member of the school and wider community in the spirit of the Mercy Ethos.

3 Policy Context and Rationale

This policy is informed by:

The Mission Statement of Our Lady of Mercy College

The SPHE Policy

The Code of Behaviour

The Child Protection Policy / Child Safeguarding Statement

The Internet Acceptable Use Policy

The Special Educational Needs Policy

The Guidance Plan

Wellbeing Policy Statement and Framework for Practice

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) and at Senior Cycle, part of Health Education.

Circulars M4/95 and M20/96 request schools to commence a process of RSE policy development.

Circular 15/2017 ‘Arrangements for the Implementation of the Framework for Junior Cycle with particular reference to school years 2017/18 and 2018/19’

The school adopts and adheres to the DES Child Protection Procedures, Children First Legislation (2017) and has a Child Protection Policy / Child Safeguarding Statement, with the Principal as Designated Liaison Person (DLP) and the Deputy Principal as the Deputy DLP. The RSE Policy is cognisant of all aspects of our current Child Protection Policy / Child Safeguarding Statement. Where a child protection concern is raised, the procedures outlined in the school’s Child Protection Policy / Child Safeguarding Statement are followed. Sexuality is a key element of healthy social and personal development. Young people are exposed to a wide variety of messages about sexuality and sexual activity. Schools, in consultation with parents, need to reflect on how to provide for the needs of the students.

The effectiveness of an RSE programme is dependent on a collaborative policy process involving teachers, parents, members of The Board of Management and students.

4 Relationship to Characteristic Spirit of the School

The RSE policy acknowledges the importance of RSE being taught in the context of Wellbeing/SPHE/Health Education and a whole school climate that is inclusive and respectful.

The RSE policy reflects the educational philosophy of the Mercy Sisters, CEIST and the core values and ethos of the school, as outlined in the school's Mission Statement below:

The core value of Our Lady of Mercy College, Beaumont is respect for all and the nurturing of individual potential, academically, spiritually and culturally as a member of the school and wider community and in the spirit of the Mercy Ethos.

Achieving Quality in teaching and learning we are committed to excellence and to continually improving the quality of teaching and learning. The school, through its academic, pastoral and spiritual undertakings strives to provide for the holistic development and welfare of each of the students in its care. Spiritual, moral and ethical issues will arise when teaching RSE. The school's RSE policy guides teachers in the treatment of such issues in accordance with the ethos of the school. 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 the context in which the teaching of the programme is informed by the school 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.

5 Scope

The policy will apply to all aspects of teaching and learning about friendships and sexuality. Discussion about relationships and sexuality also takes place in classes other than RSE/SPHE/Health Education. It is therefore important that all teachers are familiar with the RSE policy. The policy will apply to school staff, students, Board of Management, parents, visiting speakers and external facilitators.

6 Aims of the RSE programme

To build on the primary school programme which strives to help young people learn at home and at school about their own development and about their friendships and relationships with others.

To promote an understanding of sexuality.

To promote a positive attitude towards one's own sexuality and one's relationships with others.

To enable students to develop attitudes and values towards their sexuality in a moral, spiritual and social framework.

To promote knowledge of and respect for human reproduction.

To provide young people with information and skills to evaluate critically the wide range of information, opinions, attitudes and values offered today, in order that they will make positive, responsible, moral, caring and responsible decisions about themselves and the way they live their lives, while also respecting the dignity of others. The school recognises that

parents are the primary educators and home is the natural and primary environment in which RSE should take place.

7 Objectives

The policy ensures clarity and consensus on how RSE is taught in the school.

It articulates the relationship of RSE to SPHE.

It articulates the aims of the RSE programme.

It clarifies 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 and the Board of Management.

It ensures that teachers, parents and students understand how the teaching of RSE is linked to the school ethos.

It provides information on the practicalities of delivering the programme.

8 Time Allocation

Access to Sexual and Health education is an important right for students under the terms of Article 11:2 of the European Social Charter (1961, 1996). This article requires that health education 'be provided throughout the entire period of schooling' and that sexual and reproductive health education is not withholding or intentionally misrepresenting information, for example as regards contraception or different means on maintaining sexual and reproductive health'. Presently, one timetable period per week is allocated to SPHE in first, second and third year. Within the SPHE programme 5/6 periods per year will be assigned to RSE. TY, fifth and sixth years will be allocated 6/8 periods per year for RSE.

9 The Relationship of RSE to SPHE/Wellbeing

SPHE/Wellbeing provide opportunities for students to develop personal and social skills which foster integrity, self-confidence and self-esteem while nurturing sensitivity to the feelings and rights of others.

The Guidelines for RSE state that SPHE is 'spiral, developmental in nature and age-appropriate in content and methodology.' (NCCA, 1995, 1.2). The RSE programme is designed to follow this principle and pattern.

SPHE covers areas such as self-esteem, assertiveness, communication and decision-making skills – all of which can contribute to the effectiveness of the RSE programme.

SPHE adds the dimension to education of empowering people to manage their own lives. By providing RSE through an SPHE programme we teach students personal skills to increase their personal effectiveness so that, in the context of their own lives, they are able to make informed divisions in relation to their sexuality and relationships with others.

Currently, SPHE is part of the Junior Cycle timetable.

The RSE module is taught at Senior Cycle, TY, Fifth and Sixth Year classes participate in the RSE module, which is usually scheduled between October and Christmas.

There is continued emphasis on health and well-being, responsibility and decision-making throughout the RSE programme.

10 What the School Currently Provides

Formal examples of RSE in action can be found in (Appendix 2). This list is not exhaustive.

11 Management and Organisation of RSE

- (i) Arrangements regarding the teaching of the RSE programme.
- (ii) Provision of Support, Training and Staff Development:
- (iii) A Co-ordinator of SPHE will plan a delivery of the RSE programme. Teachers are encouraged and facilitated to attend RSE and SPHE training. Teachers of RSE and SPHE have access to teaching materials and resources,

Inclusion of Parents: The Parents' Association is consulted on the design and review of the RSE policy. The views expressed by parents will be taken into account when reviewing the policy. Parents have a responsibility to inform themselves of the RSE programme content and to prepare their daughters for the information they will acquire around the sensitive areas covered in RSE. Parents are asked to familiarise themselves with the policy content. While all partners in the school community - teaching staff, students, parents and management - are agreed on the programme, we recognise, nevertheless, the right of any parent who so wishes to request that his/her daughter should not participate in the programme.

12 Ethical/Moral Considerations – Guidelines for Teachers

Answering Explicit Questions: It is natural that students should wish to ask questions in the area of RSE. While it is important to create an environment in 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. If any questions asked by students are deemed to be inappropriate, the teacher will refer the student to their parents or state that this information may be available at a later stage of the curriculum. 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 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, the RSE policy and use their professional judgment. With regard to matters of a confidential nature, the school cannot take any responsibility for what is discussed among students outside of the RSE lesson.

13 Confidentiality

Teachers strive to create a safe learning environment for all students. While students should not be encouraged to disclose personal or private information in RSE classes, there may be times when they talk about their own lives. It is important that students are made aware of the limits of confidentiality and that teachers do not give unconditional guarantees of confidentiality. Confidentiality should be respected unless the teacher feels that the child is at risk or where there are reasonable grounds to believe that a law may be broken. In such a case, the appropriate action should be taken in accordance with the procedures set down in the Child Protection Procedures for Post Primary Schools, the school's Child Protection Policy / Child Safeguarding Statement and the Children First legislation (2017) or the school's Substance Abuse Policy, i.e. the teacher must inform the Designated Liaison Person, and ensure that that all reporting procedures are complied with.

Sexual Activity: Teachers should give young people information on the age of consent which, following the passage of Criminal Law (Sexual Offences) Act 2006, is seventeen years of age for both males and females. In all cases where the school becomes aware of

underage sexual activity, the school will take appropriate steps to inform the child's parents, in accordance with Children First legislation.

Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Identities, Sexual Orientations and Related Issues; Teachers do not promote any one life-style as the only acceptable one for society and therefore it is inevitable and natural that sexual orientation, sexual identity and gender identity will be discussed during a programme of sex education. One of the advantages of exploring LGBT+ identities and issues is the opportunity to correct false ideas, assumptions and address prejudice. Discussion of sexual and gender identity and sexual orientation should be appropriate to the age of the students.

Sensitive Issues E.g. Sexual Activity, Abortion and Contraception Sensitive topics will be dealt with in an age-appropriate, open manner, looking at all sides of the issues in a non-directive way, within the context of the school's ethos and DES-NCCA guidelines. RSE teachers give young people information on the age of consent which, following the passage of the Criminal Law (Sexual Offences) Act, 2006, is seventeen years of age for both males and females.

14 Guest Speakers

Outside speakers maybe invited into the RSE class to facilitate learning on specific aspects of the programme e.g. Rape Crisis Centre facilitates the KAS programme with Transition Year & senior students (CL 43-2018). It is school policy that most of the RSE programme is best discussed openly with teachers who are known and trusted by the students. However, 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. The SPHE Coordinator/RSE teacher will inform the visitor, well in advance of the visit, of this RSE policy on the school website, and request that they familiarise themselves with its content. 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.

15 Evaluating

Effective policy requires constant monitoring and evaluation to ensure successful implementation and to review what adjustments may be necessary from time to time. This policy is ratified by the Board of Management and is the agreed policy of Our Lady of Mercy College Beaumont. 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 Senior Cycle for all relevant students. Resource materials are available to teachers in designated area in workroom. The timetable facilitates the implementation of the RSE programme e.g. at Senior Cycle, that all classes at Senior Cycle are taught RSE. Appropriate professional development for teachers is available and relevant teachers are availing of it. Staff are aware of the policy. Students are aware of the policy. Parents are aware of the policy. Feedback is received from teachers, other school staff, students, parents, members of Board of Management etc.

Of specific importance to the review and evaluation of the RSE Policy and Programme are:

- a) Student feedback: A confidential survey of students is conducted once the RSE lessons are completed. Feedback is sought from the Student Council.
- b) Staff review and feedback.
- c) Parental feedback, including at parent-teacher meetings and Parents' Association meetings.
- d) Feedback is sought as part of our School Self Evaluation process and helps to inform future planning.

Ratified by the Board of Management on February 12th 2019

Date of next review: February 2022

Signature:

Chairperson

RSE Policy Appendix 1

MindOut Programme as part of RSE

Background to the Programme

The MindOut programme is a 12 session social and emotional wellbeing programme for students in Transition Year and Fifth Year in secondary school. It takes a positive approach to the promotion of social and emotional health amongst all young people, viewing mental health as a resource for everyday living. The emphasis is on the wide range of strategies available to young people to cope with stressful and challenging situations. The programme was originally developed in 2004 and was updated in 2016.

The content of the programme is summarised below:

Introductory Session: Minding your Mental Wellbeing

- Be introduced to the MindOut programme.
- Establish ground rules for the programme.
- Gain a better understanding of what it means to be mentally well.

Session 1: Boosting Self esteem and Confidence

Identify their personal strengths. • Increase their belief in their abilities.

Session 2: Managing Emotions Identify a range of emotions.

- Explore how their bodies react to their emotions.
- Discuss and learn how they can use the 'Take Five' strategy.
- Learn how to manage their emotions in particular situations.

Session 3: Challenging Thoughts Examine the link between thoughts, feelings and actions.

- Recognise the impact their thoughts can have on their feelings and actions.
- Explore skills to challenge unhelpful thoughts and make them more realistic.

Session 4: Coping with Challenges

Identify different types of coping strategies that can be used to deal with stress. • Discuss and reflect on how people cope differently. • Compare which coping strategies are likely to be more or less helpful in different situations.

Session 5: Support from Others

Notice differences between helpful and unhelpful supports. • Identify and reflect upon their own supports. • Realise the importance of 'One Good Adult'.

Session 6: Walking in Someone Else's Shoes

Become more aware of the thoughts and feelings of others. • Understand that people feel emotions differently and that it is important that they learn to respect each other's feelings. • Reflect on the personal actions they can take in order to show support for other people.

Session 7: Managing Conflict

Learn to appreciate that everyone has different views and perspectives. • Learn how to strengthen their communication skills in conflict situations. • Practise resolving conflict.

Session 8: Connecting with Others

Become more comfortable meeting people. • Enhance team work and group problem-solving skills. • Explore strategies for connecting more with others.

Session 9: Getting and Giving Help

Discuss the barriers to seeking help. • Identify key sources of help, support or advice for young people. • Discuss how to help someone else who confides in you.

Session 10: Making Decisions

Learn a three-step Problem solving and decision-making approach for dealing with difficult situations. • Practise applying this three step approach to specific challenging situations.

Session 11: Happiness and Wellbeing

Explore the importance of promoting happiness and reflect on what makes them feel happy. • Practise appreciating their own personal strengths as well as the strengths of their classmates.

Session 12: Review

Review the previous sessions and identify the core skills and knowledge learned. • Share and discuss with their classmates the most important thing they will take away from the programme.

RSE Policy Appendix 2

Formal examples of RSE in action in Our Lady of Mercy College include the teaching of 'TRUST'

- Teaching relationships, understanding sexuality teaching for Senior Cycle, the 'Growing Up Gay and Bisexual in Ireland' programme (SPHE-PDST) and 'Lockers' (SPHE-PDST). All Junior and Senior classes receive a minimum of six class periods of RSE in each academic year. Some aspects of RSE are approached during subjects such as Biology, CSPE, Guidance and Counselling, Home Economics, Physical Education, Religious Education and Science. Some are taught informally using a cross curricular approach and support what is taught in Junior Cycle SPHE (see SPHE Policy) [e.g. CSPE / RE – values, rights and responsibilities]. Where there are cross-curricular links with SPHE / RSE the school ethos is respected at all times and informs what is taught. The RSE programme is supported by the Pastoral Care system and by the Management and Staff of the school.

Junior Cycle topics covered are those of the SPHE Syllabus and include:

The Circle of Life, Communication and Respect, Feelings and Adolescence, Saying How I Feel, Body Awareness-Body Care, Hygiene Hints, Common Senses, The Image of Me, The Words we Use, Puberty, Human Reproduction, The Miracle of New Life Pregnancy and Birth, How I Relate, Family Ties, You've Got a Friend, Boy/Girl Relationships, Consent Don't Box Me In!, Self-Esteem, Peer Pressure, Take Care!, Time to Reflect, Teenage Pregnancy, Respect and Tolerance for Difference

Senior Cycle

The Mindset Programme. Human Growth and Development. Understanding the structure and function of sex organs. Awareness of fertility. Awareness of the importance and method of family planning. Understanding of pregnancy and development of the foetus. Appreciation of the importance of healthcare during pregnancy. Recognising the range of human emotions and ways to deal with these. An understanding of the relationship between safe sexual practice and sexually transmitted infections. Human Sexuality. Understanding of what it means to be male, female, gender fluid, LGBT+ etc.. Consideration of male and female roles in relationships and in society. Exploration of some of the issues pertaining to equality. Understanding the concept of sexual harassment and its different forms. Awareness of sexual abuse, consent and rape, including legal issues and the identification of help agencies in these areas. The Rape Crisis Centre delivers the KAS programme to students in Transition Year, with an emphasis on issues such as consent, sexual violence and mature, responsible decision-making. Skills for making choices about sexual activity. Exploration of the range of attitudes, values and beliefs regarding sexual behaviour in modern society Human Relationships. Understanding the nature of peer pressure. Developing skills for resolving conflict. Development of an awareness of the complex nature of love and loving relationships. Understanding of marriage as a loving commitment. Deeper awareness of the importance of family life.

Some resources used may include: DVDs: 'Busy Bodies.' produced by the Health Promotion Department, Southern Health Service Executive. 'The Human Body', BBC TV series available on DVD. TRUST programme. 'Growing Up Gay and Bisexual in Ireland' programme (SPHE-PDST). Lockers – (SPHE-PDST). Books: 'Let's Talk About Sex', Walker Books. 'Understanding The Facts of Life', Usborne Books. This list is not exhaustive.

RSE Policy Appendix 3

RSE is covered in the SPHE at Junior Cycle. In addition Human Reproduction is also covered in Home Economics and Science for those that do take these subjects.

Relationships and Sexuality (RSE) Topics to be covered at Junior Cycle	
Parents should familiarise themselves with the topics covered so that they are prepared for discussion and questions at home.	
1st Year	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Me as Unique and Different ○ Friendship ○ Changes at Adolescence ○ The Reproductive System ○ Images of Male and Female ○ Respecting myself and others
2nd Year	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ From conception to birth ○ Recognising and expressing feelings and emotions ○ Peer pressure and other influences ○ Managing relationships ○ Making responsible decisions ○ Health and Personal Safety
3rd Year	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Body Image ○ Where am I now? ○ Relationships-what's important ○ The three R's: respect, rights and responsibilities ○ Conflict.

Themes for Guest Speakers could include:
Sexual Harassment & Abuse
Crisis Pregnancy
Mental Health
Drug Awareness
Mental Health
Eating Disorders

RSE Policy Appendix 4

Relationships and Sexuality (RSE) Topics to be covered at Senior Cycle

Parents should familiarise themselves with the topics covered so that they are prepared for discussion and questions at home.

RSE Senior Cycle is delivered by a combination of Senior Cycle Religious Education (SCRE) class contact and subject classes, Tutor classes, visiting speakers.

Selection and presentation of material used in class takes account of the school ethos.

Senior Cycle Religious Education (SCRE) is taught by qualified Catechists. While students are given every opportunity to explore themes, issues and ideas in class, teachers listen and encourage debate but in their summation they do so by stressing the Catholic teaching on the topic in accordance with the school ethos.

All students take SCRE in 4th, 5th & 6th year (per RE & Faith Formation and Admissions Policies).

Where students do not take subjects such as Biology & Home Economics they may be facilitated by inclusion in class when essential elements of the RSE course are being covered.

A variety of teaching methods are used in the delivery of these themes e.g. case study, audio visual, class debate, student research, visiting speakers.

Theme	Subject Area/Method of Delivery
Preparation for Marriage <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Values ● Relationship ● Love 	SCRE SCRE SCRE
Marriage- Annulment	SCRE Leaving Certificate Home Economics
Family Planning <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Natural Family Planning Methods ● Other Family Planning Methods 	SCRE Leaving Certificate Biology Speakers
Moral Issues <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Abortion 	SCRE

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Rape ● Pornography ● HIV-AIDS ● Prejudice ● Discrimination 	<p>SCRE SCRE SCRE & Leaving Certificate Biology</p> <p>SCRE SCRE</p>
<p>Gender Issues</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Equality 	<p>SCRE and Leaving Cycle Home Economics</p>
<p>Justice Issues</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Personal Rights ● Personal Safety ● Abortion 	<p>SCRE SCRE</p>
<p>Communication</p>	<p>Tutor class LCVP Personal development in TY</p>
<p>Assertive Communication</p>	<p>Tutor class Personal development in TY</p>
<p>Dealing with feelings</p>	<p>Tutor class Personal development in TY</p>
Themes for Guest Speakers could include	
Sexual Harassment	
Sexual Abuse	
Suicide	
Crisis Pregnancy	
Mental Health	
Drug Awareness	
Mental Health	
Eating Disorders	
Consent	