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St. Angela's School, Waterford. Relationships and Sexuality Education Policy

A. Mission Statement

St Angela's School is a girls' Catholic school which aims to cherish the uniqueness of each individual and develop her to her full potential, in the spirit of the Ursuline ethos.

In this policy document all references to gender are taken to be inclusive and the term "parent" is taken to include "guardian".

B. Our School Philosophy

1. Our Philosophy is..." One will achieve more with gentleness and kindness". As a Catholic School the primary objective is to participate in the evangelizing mission of the church by fostering a school community where gospel values are lived and taught. Ursuline Education strives to nurture a community where Christian values are respected, lived and taught.
2. The school encourages pupils to consider and assess different viewpoints in relation to issues of morality. The experience gained through writing this policy and through respecting the needs of minority groups and individuals enriches the whole life of the school.
3. The school gives 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 participation in civic society and working life.

C. Definition of Relationships and Sexuality Education

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.

Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) is teaching and learning about the cognitive, emotional, physical and social aspects of relationships and sexuality. It aims to equip children and young people, in an age-appropriate manner, with the knowledge, skills, attitudes and values that will enable them to develop self-awareness and self-esteem; realise their health, wellbeing and dignity; develop positive and respectful, social and intimate relationships; consider how their choices affect their own wellbeing and that of others; and understand their rights and responsibilities in relation to themselves and others.

D. Relationships and Sexuality Education within Social Personal and Health Education

The New Specification outlines the following: This course aims to build students' self-awareness and positive self-worth; to develop the knowledge, understanding, skills, dispositions and values that will support them to lead fulfilling and healthy lives; empower them to create, nurture and maintain respectful and loving relationships with self and others; and enhance their capacity to contribute positively to society.

Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) is an integral part of, and connects with, aspects of SPHE. It is of particular importance for young people at this stage of their lives as they reflect on questions such as 'what kind of person am I?' and 'what matters for me in relationships?' As they continue to form their identity, they are making sense of life experiences, information, images and messages about relationships and sexuality from a range of informal sources such as their peers, family, the media, online world. Having the opportunity to think about and discuss relationships, sexuality and healthy sexual expression within a safe classroom setting and with a skilled teacher is vitally important.

E. Aims and Objectives

Aims

Relationships and Sexuality Education, which is in the overall framework of Social, Personal and Health Education, 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 in keeping with the ethos of the school
- 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.

Objectives

Strand 3 of Junior Cycle SPHE: Relationships and Sexuality

Students should be able to:

- 3.1 Reflect on the values, behaviours and skills that help to make, sustain and end relationships respectfully with friends, family and romantic/intimate relationships
- 3.2 Examine benefits and difficulties experienced by young people in a range of relationships - friendships, family relationships, and romantic/intimate relationships
- 3.3 Identify signs of healthy, unhealthy and abusive relationships
- 3.4 Appreciate the importance of setting healthy boundaries in relationships and consider how to show respect for the boundaries of others
- 3.5 Consider the importance of taking care of their reproductive health
- 3.6 Appreciate the breadth of what constitutes human sexuality, and how sexual orientation and gender identity are experienced and expressed in diverse ways
- 3.7 Explore the pressures to become sexually intimate and discuss ways to show respect for people's choices
- 3.8 Appreciate the importance of seeking, giving and receiving consent in sexual relationships, from the perspective of building caring relationships and from a legal perspective
- 3.9 Explain the importance of safer sexual activity with reference to methods of contraception and protection against sexually transmitted infections (STIs)
- 3.10 Discuss the influence of popular culture and the online world, in particular, the influence of pornography, on young people's understanding, expectations and social norms in relation to sexual expression
- 3.11 Demonstrate how to access and appraise appropriate and trustworthy advice, support and services related to relationships and sexual health.

Strand 2 of Senior Cycle SPHE: Relationships and Sexuality

Strand outline:

Within this strand students will explore the wide range of relationships that are important for their lives with a particular focus on gaining the awareness, knowledge and skills to support them in creating and nurturing respectful, caring and healthy relationships.

This strand also supports students to recognise and be empowered to respond to instances of abuse or violence in relationships. Note: Each of the learning outcomes below should be taught in a way that LGBTQ+ identities, relationships and families are fully integrated and reflected in teaching and learning, as opposed to being addressed within stand-alone lessons.

- 2.7 Investigate the possible influence of pornography on attitudes, behaviours and relationship expectations and what supports are available for those impacted by pornography
- 2.8 Discuss image-based abuse, sexual harassment, sexual assault and rape, and what to do and how to seek support if they or someone they know has experienced any of these.

2.9 Understand the components of sexual health including fertility across the life-cycle, reproductive choices, sexual functioning, safer sexual practices, possible responses to an unplanned pregnancy, and how to access sexual health information and services.

F. Guidelines for the management and organisation of Relationships and Sexuality Education in our school

1. School Arrangements:

Arrangements regarding the teaching of the programme and the deployment of staff will be made by the Principal.

Selecting teachers to deliver the RSE course may be a difficult task and every effort will be made to select teachers who are willing and have an interest in delivering this programme. Generally, the Senior Cycle Religious Education teachers deliver the course within Religious Education.

2. 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.

Parents sign a note in the school journal giving their daughter permission to attend RSE classes.

Parents may make themselves aware of the materials covered by the RSE class by looking at the resources listed in Appendix 2; many of these are available online and are approved for use in the RSE classroom.

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 behavior and contraception, 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. If any explicit issues are raised or if a teacher has concerns, the matter in question may be referred on to the Guidance Department.

4. Explicit Questions:

At times students may ask explicit or personal questions. While it may not be appropriate to deal with some explicit questions in class, care must be taken to ensure a safe and inclusive environment is maintained. 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, Guidance Department or the Principal. When deciding whether 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. A teacher may direct a student to appropriate channels to seek information on explicit or personal topics. Teachers may encourage a student to discuss the matter with their parent(s) if they have not done so already.

5. Confidentiality:

It is school policy that in circumstances where a pupil is considered at risk of any type of abuse or in breach of the law, the teacher must refer this immediately to the DLP (Principal). The Principal will decide whether to inform the parents and/or the appropriate authorities and may arrange for counselling.

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 support 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 suspicion or allegation, he/she should report the matter to Tusla immediately.

6. Delivery of RSE

In St. Angela's School, the RSE Programme is delivered within SPHE in 1st, 2nd, 3rd and 4th Year. It is delivered in Religious Education classes throughout 5th and 6th Year. There must be at least six lessons of RSE delivered over the course of each year, but more may be delivered.

7. 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 in addition to the planned programme of RSE.

b) The SPHE Co-ordinator will provide the visitor, well in advance of the visit, with a copy of this RSE policy. 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. Issues to consider are:

- i) the degree of explicitness of the content and presentation;
 - ii) will staff take an active role in the visitor's activities?
 - iii) 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) In order to inform the visitor of the precise requirements of a group and to optimise the visitor's time, it is advisable for class questions to be forwarded in advance.
- e) The class teacher **MUST** remain with the class while there is a visiting speaker present. There is no exception. If this is not in line with the visiting speakers practice, the visit will not proceed.

8. LGBTQI+

Teachers do not promote any one life-style as the only acceptable one for society. It is inevitable and natural that LGBTQI+ relationships and identities will be discussed during a programme of sex education. One of the advantages of exploring issues concerning LGBTI+ is the opportunity to correct false ideas, assumptions and to address prejudice. Discussion regarding LGBTI+ should be age appropriate and sensitive to the students.

9. Special Education Needs

Children with special needs may need more help in coping with the physical and emotional aspects of growing up, learning about appropriate and inappropriate behavior of others.

10. Assessment

There is no formal assessment of RSE. Assessment of learning is done in an informal and ongoing manner by the class teacher through oral and short written questions and reflections. Teachers should make students aware when they are being assessed.

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, teachers are to be sensitive to the needs of the group, an ability to deal with questions openly/honestly and prepared to refer to more expert advice if necessary. The skills acquired in general teaching apply also to health education. Some teachers have expert training in specific areas of health, relationships and sexuality education and will be encouraged to train other teachers.

2. The school will facilitate teachers obtaining 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 disruption as possible.
3. A full list of the CPD/courses/qualifications/training undertaken by teaching staff in the area of RSE is contained in Appendix 1 and will be updated regularly.

Resources:

The school will 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 and as general school resources allow.

List of appropriate and approved resources is contained in Appendix 2.

Monitoring, evaluating and reviewing the RSE Programme:

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

Specifically, important to the RSE Programme are:

- a) pupil feedback;
- b) staff review and feedback;
- c) parental feedback.

Appendix 2 - Resources

- NCCA toolkit – Focus on learning – Booklet 4 – Reflection
- JC SPHE Specification <https://www.curriculumonline.ie/getmedia/2780c6c6-993c-46fb-8ba6-b647188337c9/JC-SPHE-Short-Course-2023-EV-FINAL.pdf>
- JC SPHE Toolkit <https://www.curriculumonline.ie/junior-cycle/short-courses/sphe/sphe-2023/sphe-toolkit/>
- LC SPHE Toolkit <https://www.curriculumonline.ie/senior-cycle/sphe/sphe-toolkit/preparation-for-teaching/>
- Preparation for teaching LC SPHE <https://www.curriculumonline.ie/senior-cycle/sphe/sphe-toolkit/preparation-for-teaching/>
- B4Udecide
- Busy bodies booklet
- www.healthpromotion.ie
- www.sphe.ie
- www.sexualwellbeing.ie
- www.yoursexualhealth.ie
- www.belong2.org
- Growing up LGBT
- You can talk to me
- Lockers
- Be in CTRL
- www.webwise.ie
- www.scoilnet.ie
- On my own two feet
- Relationships and Sexuality

- https://www.education.ie/en/Circulars-and-Forms/Active-Circulars/cl0037_2010.pdf
- circular 37/2010
- https://www.education.ie/en/Circulars-and-Forms/Active-Circulars/cl0043_2018.pdf
- circular 43/2018

Date of ratification by the Board of Management: 26-3-2026

Signed: Aidan McCreath
Chairperson of Board of Management