

ROYAL SCHOOL, ARMAGH



Relationships & Sexuality Education Policy

March 2022

Introduction

The Department of Education requires all grant-aided schools to develop their own policy on how they will address Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) within the curriculum. A school's policy should reflect the school's ethos and should be subject to consultation with parents and pupils and endorsed by the Board of Governors.

Ethos & Mission

The Royal School, Armagh Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) Policy is written within the context of our Mission Statement and should be read and implemented in a manner consistent with the school ethos.

The Board of Governors has adopted the following Mission statement for The Royal School, Armagh.

“The Royal School Armagh aims to provide its pupils with an education which in its wholeness will enable them to achieve their full potential in academic, social, moral and spiritual terms. The values of the School, both implicitly and explicitly, reflect and are informed by the reformed tradition of the Christian faith. The School warmly welcomes the presence of pupils and staff of other Christian traditions, other world faiths and those with no religious convictions.”

The school ethos places an emphasis on respect for self and others, individual responsibility and harmonious community.

Context & linked documents

The Policy sits within the context of:

- The School's Pastoral Care, Safeguarding & Child Protection policies
- DENI Circulars 2010/01 and 2015/22
- CCEA Guidance for Post-Primary Schools: Relationships and Sexuality Education
- CCEA Personal Development NI Curriculum 2007
- DHSS Sexual Health Promotion: Strategy and Action Plan 2008 – 2013 December 2008
- Equality Commission's Eliminating Sexual Orientation Discrimination in N Ireland March 2009
- Sexual Offences (Northern Ireland) Order 2008 – revised February 2009
- Department of Education: Post-Primary School Experiences of 16–21 Year Old People Who Are Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and/or Transgender (LGBT)
- CCEA (non statutory) guidance: Teaching Controversial Issues at KS3 (2015)

Definition

“Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) is a lifelong process which encompasses the acquisition of knowledge, understanding and skills; and the development of attitudes, beliefs and values about personal and social relationships and gender issues”

“Sexuality includes all aspects of the human person that relate to being male or female and is subject to change and development throughout life. Sexuality is an integral part of the human personality and has biological, cultural, psychological, social and spiritual dimensions. It especially concerns affectivity, the capacity to give and receive love; procreation and the aptitude for forming relationships with others”

CCEA Guidance for Post-Primary Schools: ‘Relationships and Sexuality Education’

“Our sexuality is a central and significant part of who we are and how we see ourselves in relation to other people. It is part of our overall health and contributes to our physical, mental, emotional and spiritual well-being”.

CCEA Personal Development NI Curriculum

Rationale

The Royal School, Armagh offers a broad and balanced curriculum which promotes the academic, social, moral and spiritual development of our pupils through education of the whole person and assisting the development of sound character. All pupils have a right to educational provision that prepares them for the experiences, opportunities and responsibilities of adult life.

Relationships and Sexuality Education is an integral part of that provision, one aspect of a lifelong process that encompasses the acquisition of knowledge, understanding and skills; and the development of attitudes, beliefs and values about personal and social relationships and gender issues.

This Policy acknowledges that Relationships and Sexuality Education is a statutory component of both Personal Development and Home Economics within the Northern Ireland Curriculum.

This Policy also acknowledges the modern social context which informs the delivery of Relationships and Sexuality Education:

- earlier maturation of young people;
- increased independence of young people;
- greater freedom of young people;
- decreasing age of first sexual activity;
- Northern Ireland having one of the highest teenage pregnancy rates in Europe;
- continuing rise in incidents of sexually transmitted diseases and HIV infection;
- increased exposure to mixed media messages re. gender and sexuality issues.

Values

Relationships and Sexuality Education 'must not be value free'.

DENI Circular 2001/15

This Policy promotes the values of The Royal School, Armagh. The RSE programme aims to present facts in an objective, balanced and sensitive manner, set within a clear moral framework with appreciation of the existing legislative framework. It is a progressive programme that is tailored to the age, maturity and understanding of our pupils.

Pupils are encouraged to view their relationships in a responsible and healthy manner and explore their rights and responsibilities within those relationships.

The RSE programme encourages pupils to appreciate that friendships and relationships are based on self and mutual respect, empathy, honesty, loyalty, trust and commitment; and promotes the development of acceptance, tolerance, care, forgiveness and compassion within all relationships.

Pupils are also encouraged to appreciate the value of family stability, marriage, permanent loving relationships and the responsibilities of parenthood; and to develop the skills involved in creating and sustaining stable relationships and the personal and social benefits they bring. As they mature, pupils are enabled to understand the moral, psychological and health risks to themselves and other people of certain types of sexual behaviour and to develop appropriate decision making skills in relation to relationships and the acceptance of responsibility.

Pupils will be helped to understand the essential importance of consent with regards to all forms of sexual activity.

The following guidelines are offered within the moral framework of The Royal School, Armagh's values and ethos:

- the deferment of sexual activity until young people are physically and emotionally mature enough to understand the inherent responsibilities and the consequences of their actions;
- an appreciation of the value of permanence and love in relationships, marriage, stability in family life and the responsibility of parenthood;
- a recognition of the positive benefits of seeking sexual fulfilment within a permanent, committed relationship with one person;
- abstinence as a positive option;
- the importance of respecting the sexual choices of others.

Aims

The RSE programme seeks to:

- enhance each pupil's personal development, self esteem and wellbeing;
- promote positive attitudes towards sexuality, personal health and relationships within a moral, social and spiritual framework;
- encourage healthy friendships and relationships based on acceptance, tolerance, sensitivity, honesty, trust and mutual respect;
- develop pupils' knowledge and understanding of themselves and others as individuals;
- develop positive attitudes of self respect, self confidence and self discipline;
- promote relationships based on responsible behaviour and informed decision making;
- develop positive and informed attitudes towards committed relationships, family life and the responsibilities of parenthood;
- promote an appreciation of the value of human life;
- prepare pupils for adult life;
- identify and understand risk taking behaviours.

Objectives

The RSE programme gives to pupils valuable experiences that will enable them to:

- understand human physiology in relation to puberty, fertility, sexual intercourse and reproduction;
- understand contraception, abortion and sexually transmitted diseases;
- understand sexual development and identity including gender issues, stereotyping and cultural influences including the media;
- appreciate differing family structures and patterns;
- explore their own and others' feelings and emotions;
- acquire and develop appropriate vocabulary to discuss sexual feelings;
- develop strategies to make decisions, solve problems and implement actions in various personal, social and health contexts;
- know and understand the essential importance of consent in all forms of sexual conduct;
- explore the nature and development of relationships within families and friendships;
- develop personal and interpersonal skills which will help to establish and sustain healthy relationships;
- develop personal skills to cope and protect oneself from peer pressure and threats to personal safety;
- develop an awareness of morals and values;
- develop skills to protect oneself from and/or deal with sexual abuse;
- develop a critical understanding of external influences on decision making re lifestyle choices;
- develop an awareness of the rights and responsibilities involved in relationships;
- acquire knowledge of the services and support available from relevant agencies;
- understand family issues re parenting, childcare and lifelong responsibility.

Relationships and Sexuality Education in the Curriculum

The RSE Programme is delivered primarily through the Personal Development strand of the Revised Curriculum at Key Stages 3 and 4. At Key Stage 3 guidance materials for teaching are provided through the CCEA 'In-Sync' programme. Trained staff deliver this programme. Opportunities for RSE also arise across the curriculum. In subjects such as English, Science, Home Economics, Physical Education and Religious Education relationships and sexuality issues are explored from a variety of perspectives.

Teaching methodologies are in accordance with the collaborative and active thrust of the Revised Curriculum. Aspects of the RSE programme are delivered by a range of external agencies. These programmes supplement and complement internal provision.

The programme of Relationships and Sexuality Education is kept under review.

The programme meets the needs of boys and girls and is generally taught in mixed groups to enable boys and girls to work alongside one another, thus promoting positive relationships with each gaining an understanding of the other's perspective. However, in certain circumstances, single sex groups may be deemed more appropriate to teach specific issues.

School acknowledges that the implementation of RSE cannot be considered in isolation and encourages parents to support the School programme. Parents will be informed in the event of external agency involvement and are presented with a brief synopsis of proposed content.

External Agencies

All activities presented by external agencies complement the internal curricular programmes in RSE. Care is taken to ensure that external agencies comply with the School Policy and that there is collaboration between internal and external staff regarding the content and also follow-up and progression. At least ONE teacher is always present when an external agency is delivering an aspect of the RSE programme.

- All agencies are issued with School's RSE Policy and are asked to adhere to it in terms of ethos, morals and values;
- All resources used by external agencies are vetted before use to ensure that they are consistent with the School Policy;
- All agencies are asked to complete and present an evaluation report of their programmes
- The RSE Coordinator monitors the effectiveness of the external agency;
- All agencies are informed of School's Child Protection procedures regarding pupil confidentiality and disclosure.

Responsibilities

In The Royal School the responsibility for Relationships and Sexuality Education is appropriately shared with contributions from teachers, male and female, parents and external agencies. Each of the partners has a distinctive contribution to make and the effectiveness of the RSE programme depends on regular communication and collaboration.

- **The Board of Governors**

It is the responsibility of the Board of Governors to ensure that they adopt and maintain an RSE policy and that it is interpreted appropriately and monitored and reviewed regularly.

- **The Headmaster**

It is the responsibility of the headmaster to ensure the development and implementation of an RSE Policy and a planned, coherent and progressive programme that meets the needs of all pupils. The headmaster consults with Governors, staff, parents, pupils and relevant professionals to ensure the implementation of the programme.

- **The Vice Principal**

The Vice Principal Pastoral/ Head of Pastoral Care has overall responsibility for the RSE programme; and is responsible for coordinating all issues related to the RSE Policy and programme development. He is also responsible for its monitoring and evaluation.

- **Personal Development Coordinator**

The Personal Development Coordinator's role encompasses (but is not confined to):

- I. planning and coordination of curricular provision;
- II. liaison with external agencies re. curriculum provision;
- III. liaison with headmaster, Designated Teacher for Child Protection, LLW Coordinator and Vice Principal Pastoral/ Head of Pastoral Care on RSE matters;
- IV. attendance at in-service training /TPL and dissemination of appropriate information to relevant staff;
- V. organisation of training for staff as appropriate;
- VI. liaison with [LLW] Coordinators regarding RSE as part of Personal Development (Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4).

- **Members of Staff** (teaching and non-teaching)

All members of staff should be familiar with RSE Policy and the outline of the RSE curriculum. Where appropriate departments should make links between subject specifications and the RSE curriculum. All staff should be familiar with the procedures around Child Protection disclosures and the values and approach promoted by this policy.

Monitoring and Evaluation

The Vice-Principal Pastoral / Head of Pastoral Care (in conjunction with the Personal Development Coordinator and other appropriate senior staff) is responsible for evaluating the provision of RSE within School, including appropriate consultation with governors, teachers, pupils and parents.

The aim of the evaluation process is to ensure that:

- the RSE Policy continues to comply with legislation and guidelines;
- classroom practice continues to reflect the Policy and the needs of pupils;
- teaching resources are appropriate and are regularly reviewed and updated;
- external agency input is evaluated regularly;
- the views of pupils are respected;
- external agencies are informed of School procedures re. pupil disclosures etc.

Safeguarding

While most issues dealt with in RSE do not give rise to safeguarding concerns per se it is possible that a safeguarding concern may be identified through exploration of some of the issues. No member of staff can give a guarantee of confidentiality to pupils concerning child protection issues. If details are disclosed, during either internal or external delivery of RSE, the teacher/facilitator must follow the procedures as outlined in the Safeguarding & Child Protection Policy.

Confidentiality in the Classroom

A pupil's right to privacy will be respected at all times and no pupil will be expected to ask or answer any personal questions in an RSE classroom.

Personal medical advice will not be given by a teacher to any pupil. There will be an acknowledgement that only doctors and health professionals should give medical advice to pupils.

LGBT+

“All pupils have the right to learn in a safe environment; to be treated with respect and dignity; and not to be treated any less favourably on the grounds of their actual or perceived sexual orientation”

Equality Commission

While heterosexual relationships will be presented in teaching programmes as the main context for sexual intimacy, respect for all people, regardless of sexual orientation, will be promoted in line with the School's ethos. Schools are places of learning where free thinking and free speech are to be encouraged and pupils therefore have the right to hold and articulate different views in a respectful manner. Bullying or any other form of abuse based on any aspects of a pupil's sexual orientation or gender identification will not be tolerated. Sexual orientation and gender identity will be handled in a sensitive manner and all teachers have a responsibility to actively counteract prejudice and support the development of self-esteem and personal responsibility in all pupils.

Effective RSE can help to promote a positive view of sexual orientation and gender identity, which can then help to raise the self-esteem of young people who may feel different.

In accordance with the School mission statement and ethos we regard pupils as individuals with agency. At the Royal School, Armagh that agency should be respected. Pupils who seek help or support with any matter related to RSE will be accepted and treated as individuals on a case by case basis in a manner consistent with good practice, this policy and the school's values, mission and ethos.