



Patrician Presentation Secondary School

Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) Policy

www.fethardsecondaryschool.ie

Introductory Statement

Patrician Presentation Secondary School is a Co-Educational, non-selective, and multi-denominational, post primary school with DEIS status in Co.Tipperary with approximately 270 students.

We, at Patrician Presentation Secondary School aim to promote the holistic development of our students in a happy, caring, ordered and inclusive environment. We promote personal and academic excellence together with a strong sense of social responsibility based on the principle of mutual respect.

We seek to promote a happy and caring school climate which offers children and young adults opportunities to develop as good citizens, active and just, proud of their inherited values and beliefs.

In Patrician Presentation Secondary School we recognise the importance of RSE/SPHE being taught in the context of a whole school climate that is inclusive and respectful. We acknowledge the Christian ethos of our school while at the same time facilitating students in discussing a range of views in relation to topics within the RSE programme.

This policy will apply to all aspects of teaching and learning about relationships and sexuality, both in our SPHE/RSE classes and in other areas of the curriculum. It is important that all members of the Board of Management, Parents Association, teaching staff, auxiliary staff, visiting speakers, external facilitators/coaches are familiar with the RSE policy which is available at www.fethardsecondaryschool.ie

Rationale

Sexuality is a key element of healthy social and personal development. Young people are exposed to a bewildering 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 1988 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 and 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).

Circulars M4/M20/96 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.

Goals/Objectives

The policy aims to ensure clarity and consensus on how RSE is taught in the school and the relationship of RSE to SPHE. It also aims to clarify 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/guardians and the board of management/trustees. It will ensure that teachers, parents/guardians and students understand how the teaching of RSE is linked to the school ethos.

RSE as part of a wide programme of Social, Personal and Health Education, has as its specific aims:

- To build on the primary school RSE programme and provide our students with information and skills regarding forming and maintaining healthy relationships in ways that encourage them to think and act in a moral, caring and responsible manner.
- To promote an understanding of sexuality which includes all aspects of the human person that relate to being male or female, and with an awareness that one changes and develops throughout life.
- To encourage a positive attitude to one's own sexuality, and to one's relationship with others. This will contribute to the development of personal wellbeing, and enhance one's relationships with others.
- To create opportunities for pupils to learn about the biological aspects of sex, and to develop respect for the human body of self and others.
- To enable students to establish healthy attitudes and values towards their sexuality, in a moral, spiritual and social context in keeping with our school ethos.

Key Measures

A. Provision of Teaching and Staff Development

PPSS has a voluntary SPHE coordinator for Junior Cycle (Ms. Fogarty) and a voluntary SPHE /RSE coordinator for Senior cycle (Ms Kennedy). In conjunction with a committee their role is to:

- Coordinate the RSE programme
- Register staff for relevant RSE training OR ARRANGE INSERVICE FROM OIDE
- Oversee the reviewing of this policy

Teachers are supported in attending RSE training by management.

Teachers of SPHE/RSE are consulted by management in advance of teaching the subject or may also make a request to be part of the SPHE/RSE team.

All teachers of SPHE/RSE have access to the required teaching materials (see resources section in the shared drive)

B. Inclusion of Parents/Guardians

Relationships and Sexuality education (RSE) is important for young people at this stage of their lives. They are exposed to a lot of information about relationships and sex from informal sources, the media and online. SPHE provides the context within which young people can learn about important physical, social, emotional and moral issues around relationships, sexual health, sexuality and gender identity, including where to get reliable information from trusted sources.

Note: The Education Act 1988 (section 30, subsection (2) (e) provides that a student is not required to attend instruction in any subject which is contrary to the conscience of the parent or in the case of a student who has reached the age of 18 years.

If a parent has any query regarding the RSE programme they should contact the principal directly in writing.

C. Ethical/Moral Considerations

RSE is a complex area of the curriculum. This policy aims to provide guidance for teachers on the moral and ethical framework within which the programme will be taught.

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 appropriate boundaries. Students may ask questions about issues which are not included in the curriculum. On these, and on all questions, teachers should:

- Use their professional judgment
- Be guided by the age appropriateness of their students
- Use the RSE Curriculum
- Use the RSE Policy for the school.

Teachers will adhere to the ground rules set out for each class group. Inappropriate personal questions directed to either the teacher or the students are unacceptable in the RSE classroom.

Confidentiality

While students should not be encouraged to disclose personal or private information in SPHE/RSE classes, there may be times when they do talk about their own lives. Confidentiality should be respected unless a teacher becomes aware that a child is at risk, in which case the appropriate action should be taken e.g. follow the procedures set down in the Child Protection Procedures and Guidelines for Post-Primary Schools or the schools Substance Use Policy, notify parents etc.

It is important that students are made aware of the limits of confidentiality and that teachers do not give guarantees of confidentiality.

School staff are informed and regularly reminded about their responsibilities in relation to Child Protection by the Principal.

Sexual Activity

This policy aims to give teachers guidance on the moral and values framework within which the issue of sexual activity should be addressed. In the delivery of the RSE programme we aim to emphasize the importance of intimate, loving, committed relationships between two people, regardless of sexual orientation.

Our teaching on sexual activity is guided by the resources provided and recommended by the Department of Education & Skills.

It is important that teachers give young people information on the age of consent which, following the passage of the Criminal Law (Sexual Offences) Act, 2006, is 17 years of age for both males and females. Understanding the Harassment, Harmful Communication and Related Offences Act 2020, Coco's Law, and the legal consequences of it for young people are taught in lessons about sexting and staying safe online in second year S.P.H.E.

Contraception

In the new draft junior cycle S.P.H.E. short course curriculum specification 2023, contraception appears in:

3.9. explain the importance of safer sexual activity with reference to methods of contraception and protection against sexually transmitted infections (STIs)

Contraception may be mentioned in year 1 and is discussed further in years 2 and 3. It is revised again at Senior Cycle.

The RSE programme requires that young people are provided with information about methods of contraception within the context of the school ethos.

Homosexuality

In the new draft junior cycle S.P.H.E. Short Course curriculum specification 2023, homosexuality appears in

3.6 appreciate the breadth of what constitutes human sexuality, and how sexual orientation and gender identity are experienced and expressed in diverse ways.

Homophobic bullying is addressed in the Junior Cycle SPHE programme in year 1 with sexual identity and expression discussed in detail.

Our Senior Cycle RSE programme includes the subject of sexual orientation as per RSE Curriculum Guidelines. PPSS partakes in Belong To's annual "Stand Up" week against homophobic and transphobic bullying. It is an opportunity to take make spaces safe and supportive for LGBTQ+ students and staff.

Sexually Transmitted Infections

In the new draft junior cycle S.P.H.E. Short Course curriculum specification 2023, Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs) appears in;

3.9 explain the importance of safer sexual activity with methods of contraception and protection against sexually transmitted infections (STIs).

While awareness of STIs is one of the objectives of the second year SPHE/RSE syllabus, STIs are further addressed in year 3 and again in Senior Cycle.

Pornography

In the new draft junior cycle S.P.H.E. Short Course curriculum specification 2023, pornography appears in:

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. (See appendix 1).

Practical Issues in relation to the implementation of the RSE Policy

All sensitive issues will be addressed in an appropriate manner. We will endeavour to inform students in advance of pertinent sensitive topics.

The sexuality classes of RSE are conducted during the two weeks immediately following February mid-term break to all year groups. Parents are informed that sexuality related classes are happening at this specific time by letter.

The relationship classes are woven into the SPHE programme throughout the year for junior students and at senior cycle they are incorporated into the RE programme.

Parents/guardians have the right to withdraw their children from RSE classes, notice of such withdrawal to be given to the principal in writing.

Parents/guardians are welcome to view the programme content by appointment with the principal.

In Patrician Presentation Secondary School, SPHE is timetabled one period per week as part of the Junior Cycle core curriculum in years two and three. It is timetabled twice a week for year one.

LCA 1 & 2 classes learn about reproductive health, consent, contraception and STIs.

Aspects of RSE are delivered across the curriculum, through subjects such as Religious Education, Science, Biology and Home Economics. This RSE policy is a living document which will be reviewed on an annual basis.

APPROVED BY THE BOARD OF MANAGEMENT ON: _____

IN EFFECT FROM: _____

DATE OF NEXT REVIEW: JANUARY 2026

SIGNED: _____

PRINCIPAL

CHAIRPERSON OF THE BOARD

Appendix 1

In Junior Cycle pornography is described as follows:

People watch pornography for various reasons e.g. sexual arousal, curiosity or to learn about sex. Pornography is not a reliable source of information regarding sexual relationships and safety.

Remember Coco's Law where It is illegal for someone to show pornography to a person under 18.

If you do ever see pornographic videos it is important to recognise the following aspects: Condom use, consent and communication are often not included in pornography.

These are all crucial aspects of healthy sexual interactions.

Editing tools are used in pornography, creating unrealistic standards of how adult bodies look.

A lot of pornography includes aggression, abuse and violence. This is never acceptable.

The sex in pornography is not an accurate representation of sex in real life, as it is being performed by actors.

Some people feel that pornography puts undue pressure on them to engage in sexual activities that they are uncomfortable with or to look like the images in porn films.

Pornography is an industry; it does not portray normal lives of normal people.

[Taken from SHIFT, Sexual Health Information for Teens, Sexual Health Centre Cork]

Receiving such inappropriate imagery can be depressive, confusing and overwhelming.

Pornography exposure does not need to have a long lasting impact. Talking to someone you trust is essential to understand and redirect your thoughts from pornography and eventually forget pornography that you may have seen.

Additional information from Webwise will be used in Year 2, 3 and Senior cycle.

<https://www.webwise.ie/tag/online-pornography/>

- Under no circumstances will examples of pornography, or anything of an explicit nature be shown in school.