



St. Leo's College
Relationship and Sexuality Education Policy

Mission Statement

Inspired by the vision of Catherine McAuley, St. Leo's College is committed to the holistic development of each student. As a Catholic school, we pursue excellence in an inclusive, caring, and respectful environment.

Introductory Statement

St. Leo's College is an all-girls Catholic School under the trusteeship of CEIST.

Within the context and parameters of Department of Education and Science regulations and resources, as well as the ethos of Catherine McAuley, St. Leo's College supports the principles of inclusiveness, equality of access and participation, parental choice in respect of enrolment and a respect for diversity of traditions, values, beliefs, languages, and ways of life.

St. Leo's College is a voluntary secondary school and as such the financial and teaching resources of the school are provided by a combination of Department of Education and Science grants, fund-raising, and Voluntary contributions. School Policy is implemented with due regard to resources and funding available.

St. Leo's College operates within the regulations laid down from time to time by the Department of Education and Science.

The College follows the curricular programmes prescribed by the Department of Education and Science, which may be amended from time to time, in accordance with sections 9 and 30 of the Education Act 1998.

The RSE programme will be delivered by teachers as appointed by the Principal to all our student body. The organisation and delivery of the RSE programme has the support and approval of the Board of Management and Trustees.

1.1 Scope:

This policy will apply to all aspects of teaching and learning about relationships and sexuality. Discussion about Relationships and Sexuality also takes place in classes other than SPHE/ RSE; it is therefore important that all teachers are familiar with the RSE Policy. This policy will apply

to school staff, students, Board of Management, Parents/Guardians, visiting speakers and external facilitators.

1.2 Rationale:

Sexuality is a key element of healthy, social and personal development and it is, therefore, necessary to provide health, sexual, social and personal education for all girls in our school. 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 SPHE programme and at senior cycle it is part of the SPHE/Religious Education/Guidance programme.

Circulars M4/95 and M20/96 request schools to commence a process of RSE policy development. In terms of RSE, these policies cite 'support' from church bodies, and the 'need' for same from 'educational groups such as the NCCA, teacher unions, national parental representative bodies' and 'aspects of contemporary life'.

Circular M20/96 requires that schools teach RSE for six class periods in each year.

Circular 0023/10, issued by the Dept. Of Education and Science, outlines 'Best Practice Guidelines for Post-Primary Schools' in the mandatory implementation of SPHE/RSE in the junior cycle and RSE in the senior cycle.

2.0 Our School Philosophy and the relationship of the RSE Programme to the characteristic spirit and Ethos of the school:

RSE will be taught within the framework of the Catholic Ethos within our school. The programme will be delivered in full and in keeping with national guidelines as outlined by the Department of Education.

However, it's delivery will be underpinned by our distinctive Catholic vision and ethos which transcend the pragmatic and utilitarian philosophies of education that understand the educational enterprise as merely an instrument for the acquisition of information. This is an essential element of the teaching of RSE within our school as we aim to not only deliver the programme in a thorough and comprehensive manner but to also equip our students with an understanding of the core values inherently provided within the framework of the Catholic ethos and of the relevance of those values to their individual development and lived experiences as morally mature, well informed and responsible adults.

St. Leo's College is a Catholic, Mercy Girls' Secondary School with over 840 students.

Our aim is to develop the personal, academic, and spiritual potential of each student in a caring and disciplined environment.

We foster a sense of self-esteem, honesty, and respect among all members of the school community.

We provide a welcoming environment for parents/guardians, who are partners in the education of their daughters. We create ongoing opportunities for staff and parents that enable them to understand their role as educators.

We are very much influenced by the desire of Catherine McAuley to cherish equally all students in our care. We, like her, recognise and welcome the co-operation and support of the wider community in achieving this.

The Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) Programme reflects, in its aim, the school Mission Statement and the school's policy on Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE).

“Let us fit the children for Earth without unfitting them for Heaven.” (Catherine McAuley)

3.0 Definition of Relationships and Sexuality Education:

“Relationship and Sexuality Education (RSE) is a lifelong process of acquiring knowledge and understanding and of developing attitudes beliefs and values about sexual orientation, relationships, and intimacy. This education is delivered consciously and unconsciously by parents, teachers, peers, adults, and the media”. (DES Guidelines for developing an RSE Policy 1997).

RSE is a developmental process through experiential learning in which students participate to help cultivate a healthy attitude towards themselves and others, particularly in the area of sexuality and relationships.

3.1 Relationships and Sexuality Education within Social Personal and Health Education:

The Draft Guidelines for RSE (NCCA, June 1995, 1.2) state that Social Personal and Health Education is “developmental in nature and age appropriate in content and methodology”.

The RSE programme is designed to follow this principle and pattern. Apart from the specific lessons of RSE, SPHE covers other areas which would be pertinent to the development of a healthy attitude to sexuality in oneself and one's relationship with others. SPHE deals with issues such as self-esteem, assertiveness, communication, and decision-making skills -all of which can contribute to the effectiveness of the RSE programme.

In this school we teach aspects of RSE in any subject in which they form part of the syllabus as laid down by the Department of Education and Skills.

4.0 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES:

Aims:

- To enable our students to develop attitudes and values towards their sexuality in a moral, spiritual, social and personal framework.
- To help young people to understand and develop the skills necessary to form healthy friendships and relationships.
- To promote an understanding of sexuality and intimacy.
- To develop a positive attitude to one's own sexuality and to one's relationships with others.

- To promote a knowledge of and respect for reproduction.

Objectives:

- Acquire the understanding and skills necessary to form healthy friendships and relationships.
- Explore personal thoughts, values, attitudes, and feelings about relationships.
- Develop a positive sense of self-awareness, and the skills for building and maintaining self-esteem.
- Become aware of the variety of ways in which individuals grow and change especially during adolescence and to develop respect for difference between individuals.
- Understand human physiology with reference to the reproductive cycle, human fertility and sexually transmitted infections.

- Understand sexual development and identity and explore aspects of sexuality including sex role stereotyping, gender issues and cultural influences on sexuality.
- Develop students' understanding of sexuality and sexual orientation and the importance of an inclusive environment
- Promote empathy with others who have diverse cultural values, attitudes and beliefs about family, relationships, sex and sexuality
- Value family life and appreciate the responsibilities of parenthood.
- Develop strategies for decision making consistent with personal and moral integrity and strategies to promote respect for the rights and dignity of others.
- Develop skills for coping with peer pressure, conflict, and threats to personal safety.
- Develop personal and interpersonal skills which support beginning, maintaining and ending relationships.

5.0 KEY MEASURES

A- Provision of Training and Staff Development:

- A Senior and a Junior RSE Co-ordinator with clear guidelines about their role and what it entails has been appointed in this school.
- Teachers will be released to attend SPHE/RSE training as required.
- SPHE/RSE training may also be provided in the school setting.
- Teachers will be consulted prior to being timetabled to teach SPHE/RSE.
- All teachers of SPHE/RSE will have access to relevant teaching materials.

B - Parental Involvement:

Circular M4/95 acknowledges 'the right and duty of parents to provide for the religious, moral, intellectual, physical and social education of their children'. It also highlights that 'most parents look to schools for support in fulfilling their obligations to this area of development'.

Parents are, therefore, a vital part of our programme and have been involved in the formulation of this policy through the workings of the policy committee.

Inclusion of Parents/Guardian

- The Parents Council are involved in the process of drafting the RSE policy and of its review and development.
- All parents/guardians of incoming students can view a copy of the RSE Policy on the website.
- Parents are informed in the School Journal of the content of the RSE/SPHE programme for each year group. We would encourage parents to look at the curriculum and let us know if there is anything they would like further information on. We notify parents, in advance of talks on RSE by visitors/guest speakers.
- The school recognises the right of any parent to withdraw her daughter from the RSE programme, or from talks by outside speakers. The school must be informed of such a decision in writing from the parents/guardians.

It will be necessary for parents opting out of RSE to make suitable arrangements with the school management for the welfare of their child at these times. Parents must meet with the Principal/Deputy Principal in person to discuss their decision to withdraw their child from the RSE module in September of each year.

C - Ethical/Moral Considerations

The RSE programme shall reflect the Catholic ethos of the school's mission statement. Spiritual, moral, and ethical issues that arise in the delivery of the RSE programme shall be dealt with within the school's overall mission statement.

- In answering questions, teachers of RSE shall use their professional judgement and be guided by the age, maturity, and background knowledge of the students.
- The teacher shall promote openness in the classrooms and confidentiality in relation to matters discussed. However, students will be made aware that where a teacher feels that a student is at risk, appropriate action will be taken.

This could include referral to the Principal and/or Student Support/Care Team/DLP. Where deemed appropriate a parent will be contacted by the Principal/Guidance team. The teacher will be guided by the Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools as set down by the Department of Education and Skills.

D – Practical Issues

Currently, SPHE is timetabled for all students and RSE is delivered in 1st, 2nd and 3rd year through the SPHE programme.

The Religion Department/SPHE teachers/Guidance deliver the RSE programme to the senior cycle students.

Student voice

Prior to delivery of the RSE programme students will be asked to indicate topics they would like focused on as part of their RSE class.

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. Teachers may refer students to the Guidance Counsellors if the need arises.

Explicit Questions:

Teachers may take up written questions from students during one class and return to these questions at the next class. It may not be appropriate to deal with some explicit questions in class. 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 or the Deputy Principal or 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.

Confidentiality:

It is school policy that in circumstances 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 DLP/DDLP. Teachers must not promise absolute confidentiality and students must be made aware that any incident may be conveyed to the DLP/DDLP and possibly to parents if the DLP/DDLP decides that it is in the best interests of the student to notify parents. In all cases, best practice in relation to Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post Primary Schools 2017 must be always followed.

Visiting speakers and others:

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 if they are used in addition to, not instead of a planned programme of RSE. Workshops may be delivered by a qualified Nurse on aspects of the RSE programme e.g. sexually transmitted diseases, etc. Workshops on Consent may be delivered by the Rape Crisis centre/Nurse.

Sexuality, Gender Identity and Gender Health:

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 will be discussed during a programme of sex education. One of the advantages of exploring issues concerning sexual

orientation/LGBT+ is the opportunity to correct false ideas, assumptions and address prejudice. Discussions of sexual orientation must be appropriate to the age of the student and addressed in an atmosphere of respect, understanding and inclusion.

Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs):

While awareness of STIs is one of the objectives of the Second Year SPHE/RSE syllabus, STIs are mainly addressed in Senior Cycle.

Contraception:

This topic will be taught within an age appropriate, open manner, looking at all sides of the issues in a non-directive way. This topic is also taught in Science classes.

Special Needs:

It is the responsibility of the class teacher to make themselves aware of students with special educational needs in their classroom. They must differentiate the lesson to allow all students to access the RSE curriculum and seek advice from the Special Educational Needs Coordinator if unsure how to best support these students. The SEN department will work with small groups or on a one-to-one basis appropriate to their needs. The LCA programme provides RSE for students in Social Education.

6.0 How our programme will be delivered

All Junior and senior cycle students are timetabled for one period of SPHE a week (1 hour class). As part of the Junior SPHE programme six timetabled periods will be assigned to RSE during each academic year.

As part of the Senior SPHE/Religion/Guidance programme six timetabled periods will be assigned to RSE during each academic year.

At Junior Cycle, the 'b4udecide.ie' 'Resource Materials for Teachers' handbook, issued by the HSE in 2011 and the SPHE textbook, 'Health and Wellbeing SPHE 1, 2, 3' are used and other resources as deemed appropriate by the teachers to keep the programme up to date. Each year group in Junior Cycle has a copy of this textbook. At Senior Cycle, the TRUST pack is the key text. It includes the TRUST pack and DVD. In addition, there are the 'Resource materials for RSE –Senior Cycle 1999', available on the website www.education.ie and other resources as deemed appropriate by the teachers to keep the programme up to date.

Our RSE policy will be included in our schedule of policies and will be posted on St. Leo's College website www.stleoscarlow.ie. It is available to all parents through normal information channels.

7.0 Links to other policies and curriculum delivery. e RSE policy is linked to the following policies:

- Child Protection Policy.
- Child Safeguarding Statements.
- Guidance Plan.
- Anti-Bullying Policy.
- Substance Use Policy.
- Acceptable Usage Policy.
- SPHE. Aspects of RSE are delivered across the curriculum, through subjects such as Religious Education, Science, Biology, Home Economics, SPHE and Wellbeing

8.0 Teaching Methodologies

Teaching methods must be of an experiential nature with the emphasis on discussion, reflection and classroom participation. These teaching methods will be student centred and appropriate to the age and development of the student. The class atmosphere must be one of respect and privacy of the individual teacher and student hallmarked by sensitivity and care; where the student feels that they are participants in a safe environment. A respectful code of conduct is expected from all participants. Every class group establishes ground rules which are referred to throughout the classes.

Teaching Methodologies may include:

- Group work
- Role play
- Brainstorming
- Icebreakers
- Simulation
- Narrative expression
- Walking debates
- Project work
- Artwork
- Multi-media materials
- Case studies
- Visiting speakers

9.0 Content of the Programme

The following is the content of our RSE programme.

The RSE programme at Junior level

The following themes are discussed in a spiral manner in the provision of RSE as outlined by the NCCA Guidelines:

Human relationships

This theme focuses on the importance of relationships for health and wellbeing. It examines how one relates to self and others – family, friends (significant and incidental) – and stresses the importance of self-esteem as a basis for worthwhile friendships and relationships. It looks at rights and responsibilities and how patterns and expressions of relationship change with time. It addresses issues such as communication, influence, intimacy, sexual attraction, and sexual expression in relationships consistent with personal and moral integrity.

Human growth and development

This theme consists of an age-appropriate understanding of the biology and psychology of the human life cycle from conception through birth and growth to death. This is accompanied by a rationale for responsible behaviour in relationships and sexual activity. It includes insights into physical wellbeing, infection, and disease. The theme of human growth and development provides a vocabulary for understanding the functioning of all parts of the human body and psychological understanding of feelings and their appropriate expression.

•Human Sexuality

This theme deals with human sexuality as including all aspects of the human person that relate to being male and female and being subject to change throughout life. Sexuality is an integral part of the human personality and has biological, psychological, cultural, social, and spiritual dimensions. The theme offers opportunities to develop a holistic understanding of sexuality as contribution to the development of personal wellbeing, enhancing personal and family relationships and contributing to the wellbeing of society.

1st Year Topics:

- Me as unique and different
- Friendship/Relationships
- Changes at puberty/Adolescence
- Male and female reproductive systems
- Images of male and female
- Consent

2nd Year Topics:

- Managing Relationships
- Peer pressure and other influences

- Recognising and expressing feelings and emotions
- Health and personal safety
- Making decisions
- From conception to birth
- Consent

3rd Year Topics:

- The Egg Project
- Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity
- Consent and Healthy Relationships
- Body Image
- Media Influences on Relationships and Sexuality
- Sexually Transmitted Infections

Senior Cycle modules

The TRUST programme is divided into three strands which will be delivered over the three years of Senior Cycle:

- Relationships
- Taking time to think
- Sexual health

These strands are supported by the Trust DVD.

TY Topics

These are drawn from lessons 1, 2, 3, 14 and 16 from the TRUST pack and supported by other resources as deemed appropriate by the teachers to keep the programme up to date.

- What We Value in Relationships
- Healthy Relationships
- Self-Esteem
- Communication
- The Influence of Self-Esteem

- When We Feel Hurt
- Understanding Boundaries
- Communicating Our Boundaries
- Intimacy
- Human sexuality
- Consent

5th Year Topics

These are drawn from lessons 4, 6,7,9,10,18 and 19 from the TRUST pack. They may also be supported by other resources as deemed appropriate by the teachers to keep the programme up to date.

- Human Reproduction and Fertility
- Understanding Female Fertility
- Contraceptive Methods 1
- Contraceptive Methods 2
- Unplanned Pregnancy
- STIs – What's What
- STI Transmission
- Consent

6th Year Topics

These are drawn from lessons 5,8,11,12,13,17 and 20 from the TRUST pack. They may also be supported by other resources as deemed appropriate by the teachers to keep the programme up to date.

- Loving relationships and intimacy
- Marriage
- Influences, values, and decisions
- Contraceptive methods ☐ Responsible parenthood
- STI transmission
- Sexuality, Gender identity and Sexual Health
- Growing up LGBTG+
- Consent

11.0 Ratification and Communication

Ratified by the Board of Management 7th January 2026

This policy is circulated among the school community. All stakeholders are consulted.

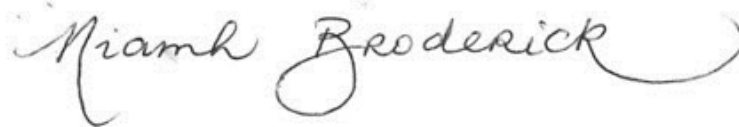
12.0 Review and Evaluation of the Policy/Programme

We are committed to monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of the RSE programme. The RSE policy will be reviewed and evaluated every three years by the SPHE, RE, Guidance and RSE teams in light of feedback from parents, students and staff and changes will be made where appropriate.



Signed:

Chairperson of the Board of Management



Signed:

Principal

Appendix 1: Student Journal Insert

SPHE & Relationships and Sexuality Education

In adherence with the Children First: National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children 2017, Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) including Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) is a mandatory part of the curriculum for all students in Junior Cycle and is fully implemented. Furthermore, St. Leo's College fully implements a Relationships and Sexuality Education programme in Senior Cycle.

The RSE programme is one module within the SPHE curriculum and will be delivered in full and in keeping with the national guidelines as outlined above. However, RSE will be taught within the framework of the Catholic Ethos of our school. SPHE teachers will inform students in advance of commencing the RSE aspect of Junior Cycle SPHE. In Senior Cycle, RSE is delivered on a modular basis and students will receive notice in advance of beginning the RSE module. Parents/guardians are asked to familiarise themselves with the outline of the Relationships and Sexuality Programme below. If a parent/guardian **Does Not** wish for their daughter to participate in these RSE lessons, they must contact their daughter's Deputy Principal in writing.

Relationships & Sexuality Education		
Junior Cycle		
First Year	Second Year	Third Year
Changes at Adolescence	Relationships	Relationships
Sexuality	Health & Safety	Sexual Orientation
Gender Identity	From Conception to Birth	STIs
Sexual Health	Gender Identity	Sexuality & Sexual Health
	Sexual Orientation	
Senior Cycle		
Transition Year	Fifth Year	Sixth Year
Relationships	Relationships	Sexuality
Sexuality	Conception	Sexual Orientation
Peer Pressure & Consent	Contraception	Influences & Values
Reproduction	STIs	Decision Making
Contraception		Responsible Relationships
STIs		

The RSE programme will be taught in my class beginning on _____.

Please sign to indicate that you have familiarized yourself with the information above pertaining to the RSE programme of this school.

Signed – Parent/Guardian _____