



Coláiste Pobail Acla

Relationships and Sexuality Education Policy

Coláiste Pobail Acla,
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Achill,
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1. Background

Coláiste Pobail Acla is a co-educational designated community college in Polranny, Achill Island, Co Mayo. Our school operates under the patronage of Mayo, Sligo, and Leitrim Education and Training Board. It serves the catchment area of Achill, Mulranny, Currane, Ballycroy and Newport. Coláiste Pobail Acla is a designated DEIS school offering the new Junior Cycle Programme, Junior Cycle Schools Programme (JCSP), Transition Year and Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP). We have an Autism Spectrum Continuum Unit attached to our school that caters for students with such a diagnosis and deemed eligible for enrolment in our catchment area.

2. Mission Statement

We strive to motivate our school community to realise its full potential academically, spiritually, physically and emotionally in a safe, supportive environment.

3. Definition of Relationship and Sexuality Education (RSE)

Relationships and Sexuality Education is a lifelong process of acquiring knowledge and understanding and of developing attitudes, beliefs and values about sexual identity, relationships and intimacy. In the school setting, RSE is an integral part of the general educational provision, which seeks to promote the overall development of the person and which includes the integration of sexuality into personal understanding, growth and development. The RSE Programme provides opportunities for young people to learn about relationships and sexuality in ways that help them to think and act in a moral, caring and in a responsible and inner-directed way.

RSE in Coláiste Pobail Acla aims to support the work of Parents/Guardians, who are the primary educators of their children in this area.

We in Coláiste Pobail Acla also appreciate that parents, peers, adults and the media deliver this education consciously and unconsciously.

4. Rationale for Policy

An RSE policy is a written statement of the aims of the RSE Programme, the relationship of RSE to SPHE, and the organisation and management of RSE within our school.

The Relationships and Sexuality (RSE) Policy has been developed following consultation between staff, Parents/Guardians, students, Principal and the Board of Management. In this policy document the term 'parent' is taken to include guardian.

5. Scope

The policy will apply to all aspects of teaching and learning in relation to 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. The policy will apply to school staff, students, Parents/Guardians, Board of Management and guest speakers.

6. Relationship of RSE to SPHE/Wellbeing

The Department of Education and Skills has approved the recommended syllabus for SPHE at Junior Cycle. As a life skills programme, SPHE aims to:

- Enable students to develop personal and social skills
- Promote self-esteem and self-confidence
- Enable students to develop a framework for responsible decision making
- Provide opportunities for reflection and discussion
- Promote physical, mental and emotional health and well being

The RSE Programme forms part of the SPHE Programme. The Draft Guidelines for RSE (NCCA, June 1995, 1.2) states that Social Personal and Health Education is “spiral, 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. The content of the school’s SPHE Programme includes a wide range of topics such as self-esteem, self-identity, assertiveness, motivation, effective communication, decision-making skills, bullying, healthy eating, hygiene and safety; all of which can contribute to the effectiveness of the RSE Programme.

7. Current Provision

In its broadest sense, RSE is a whole-school responsibility and all members of the Coláiste Pobail Acla community share responsibility for modelling relationships that are characterised by justice and respect. At a more formal level, RSE is dealt with in the context of certain subjects; Science, Home Economics, English, CSPE, Religion, and population demographics/social studies within the Geography syllabus. However, to ensure an adequate response to the needs of all students, specific provision for RSE is made within the Social, Personal, and Health Education Programme, to which one class period is apportioned each week for junior cycle, Transition year and senior cycle students.

Topics included in the RSE Programme at junior and senior cycle are outlined in Appendix 1.

8. Guidelines for the Management and Organisation of RSE in Coláiste Pobail Acla

1. Arrangements regarding the teaching of the RSE Programme and the deployment of staff are made by the Principal.
2. Provision of Support, Training and Staff Development:
 - A Coordinator of SPHE has been appointed,
 - Teachers are encouraged and facilitated to attend RSE and SPHE training,
 - Teachers of RSE and SPHE have access to teaching materials and resources,
 - Teachers who express an interest in facilitating SPHE/RSE will be given consideration.
3. Inclusion of Parents/Guardians:
 - Parents/Guardians are consulted on the design and review of the RSE policy. The views expressed by Parents/Guardians will be taken into account when reviewing the policy.
 - Parents/Guardians have a responsibility to inform themselves of the RSE Programme content and to prepare their sons/daughters for the information they will acquire around the sensitive areas covered in RSE.
 - Parents/Guardians of first year students are notified by letter at least one week in advance of the RSE module commencement.
 - The RSE policy is available to download from www.colaiSTEPobailacla.ie or a copy may be requested by a Parent/Guardian from the school office. Parents/Guardians are asked to familiarise themselves with the policy content.
 - While all partners in the school community – staff, students, Parents/Guardians and management – are agreed on the programme, we recognise, nevertheless, the right of any Parent/Guardian who so wishes that his/her son or daughter should not participate in the programme.

9. Withdrawing Students from the RSE Programme

The Education Act [1998; 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 Parents/Guardians or in the case of a student who has reached the age of eighteen years, the student. Parents/Guardians have a right therefore to withdraw their son or daughter from all or any aspect of RSE. Parents/Guardians must notify the Principal in advance of their wish to have their child withdrawn from all or part of the programme. The school may wish to ask the Parents/Guardians to put their request in writing.

Issues such as overpopulation and birth control are met in a minor way in subjects such as Geography and RE. However, as any discussion is limited and set within the context of the other subject concerned, it does not constitute part of the formal RSE Programme.

Parents/Guardians do not have to give reasons for withdrawal, but we respectfully invite them to do so – we aim to resolve misunderstandings if possible. Once a Parent's/Guardian's written request to withdraw is made, that request must be compiled with until revoked by the Parents/Guardians.

If a student is withdrawn from the lessons pertaining to the sensitive elements of the RSE Programme, Parents/Guardians must give notice in writing to the school that they are withdrawing their child. The student may be accommodated in another teacher's classroom in the school.

What we do if a request for withdrawal from the RSE Programme is made by a Parent/Guardian:

- We discuss the nature of the concerns with the student's Parents/Guardians and if appropriate, attempt to reassure them. Initially such discussion takes place at a meeting with the RSE teacher, but the Principal may become involved if necessary.
- We consider whether the programme can be amended or improved in a way that will reassure Parents/Guardians; care is taken not to undermine the integrity of the RSE Programme and the entitlement of the other students.
- We attempt to ensure that where a student is withdrawn from RSE there is no disruption to other parts of their education.
- We point out that students who have been withdrawn may be vulnerable to the observations and comments of others; therefore, we attempt to cause minimal embarrassment to the student and minimal disruption to the programme.
- We also point out that students may sometimes receive inaccurate information from their peers.
- We offer Parents/Guardians access to appropriate information and resources.

10. Ethical/Moral Consideration – Guidelines for Teachers

10.1. 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/Guardians 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 judgement. 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.

10.2. 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 all reporting procedures are complied with.

10.3. 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 17 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/Guardians, in accordance with Children First legislation.

10.4. Out of School Factors

Coláiste Pobail Acla recognises the many out-of-school factors which affect the development of a positive attitude to sexuality during adolescence – the social lives of students, the relationships they form, their behaviour within these relationships, the peer expectations of relationships, the reading material of students, their exposure to sexually explicit material/pornography on video/smart phones, television and through music. The RSE Programme will attempt to heighten the students' awareness of the influences of these forces on the development of their values and attitudes and empower them to make informed decisions and choices.

10.5. 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.

10.6. 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 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 17 years of age for both males and females. The post – primary RSE Curriculum Guidelines state that the subject of family planning should be covered within the Senior Cycle RSE Programme. The RSE Senior Cycle RSE Programme requires that young people are provided with information about methods of contraception. The RSE Senior Cycle Resource Materials includes lessons on both family planning and contraception (p77).

10.7. Practical Issues

- SPHE is an integral part of the Wellbeing/SPHE Programme and is timetabled in all Junior Cycle classes. RSE is timetabled in all Senior Cycle classes.
- The Programme is delivered in a mixed setting of boys and girls.
- Students with Additional Needs: Students who have additional educational needs may need more help than others in coping with the physical and emotional aspects of growing up. They may also need more help in learning what sorts of behaviour are and are not acceptable, and in being warned and prepared against abuse by others.

10.8. Guest Speakers

Outside speakers may be invited into the RSE class to facilitate learning on specific aspects of the programme. It is school policy that most of the RSE Programme is best discussed openly with teachers who are known and trusted by the students. Guest speakers can enhance the quality of provision of particular aspects of the RSE Programme provided they are used in addition to, and not instead of, a planned programme of RSE. The SPHE Coordinator/RSE teacher will gain approval from the Principal prior to any guest speaker being booked to visit the RSE class.

Procedures for Guest Speakers is outlined in Appendix 2

11. Training for Implementation, Monitoring, Reviewing and Evaluating the Policy

1. All teachers involved in this work do not necessarily have to be “experts” on the issues concerned. However, they do require sensitivity to the needs of the group, an ability to deal with questions openly/honestly and preparedness to refer to more expert advice if necessary. The skills acquired in general teaching apply also to health education. Furthermore, many teachers have training in related areas such as counselling. Some teachers have SPHE support services training in the specific areas of health, relationships and sexuality education.
2. Senior Management are committed to ensuring access to CPD opportunities for all teachers involved in RSE and to providing relevant RSE school resources. Senior Management facilitate teachers’ participation in professional development opportunities, with due regard to the school budget and supervision/substitution rota along with the need for the ongoing teaching and learning programme of the school to continue with as little disturbance as possible.

12. Monitoring

Effective policy requires constant monitoring and evaluation to ensure successful implementation and to review what adjustments may be necessary periodically.

This policy is ratified by the Board of Management and is the agreed policy of Coláiste Pobail Acla. All teaching staff will need to be familiar with this policy and aware of any changes implied in curriculum delivery.

13. Reviewing and Evaluating

Ongoing review and evaluation will take cognisance of changing information, guidelines, legislation and feedback from Parents/Guardians, students, teachers and other stakeholders. The policy will be revised as necessary in the light of such review and evaluation and within the framework of school self-evaluation and policy planning.

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 for all relevant students.
- Resource materials are available to teachers.
- The timetable facilitates the implementation of the RSE Programme at Junior and Senior Cycle.
- 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/Guardians are aware of the policy.
- Feedback is received from teachers, other school staff, students, Parents/Guardians, members of the Board of management and any other stakeholders.
- Specifically, important to the review and evaluation of the RSE Policy and Programme are:
- Student feedback: A confidential survey of students is conducted once the RSE lessons are completed. Feedback is also sought from the Student Council.
- Staff review and feedback.
- Parental feedback, including at parent-teacher meetings and Parents' Association meetings.
- Feedback is sought as part of our School Self-evaluation process and helps to inform future planning.

14. Links with Other Policies and Documents

This policy is informed by:

- The Mission Statement of Coláiste Pobail Acla
- 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 Policy
- The Anti-Bullying Policy
- The Pastoral Care Policy
- The Wellbeing Policy
- The Health and Safety Policy

15. Declaration

This Coláiste Pobail Acla Policy was formed following consultation with all staff, members of the Board of Management, Parents/Guardians and the Student Council. It is recommended that this policy be reviewed every three years or whenever it is deemed necessary by School Management. It was adopted by the Board of Management of Coláiste Pobail Acla on:

Signed: _____

Date: _____

Mr. Pat Kilbane

Chairperson of the Board of Management

Signed: _____

Date: _____

Mr. Paul Fahy

Board Secretary & School Principal (Acting)

16. Appendices

Appendix 1: Relationships and Sexuality Education Topics

Topics at Junior Cycle Include:

Human Growth and Development

- An understanding of physical and emotional changes at puberty.
- Fertility, conception, pregnancy and birth.
- Sexually transmitted infections.
- An awareness of the consequences and implications of sexual activity.

Human Sexuality

- Understanding and respecting what it is to be male or female.
- An appreciation of the roles of women and men in society.
- Awareness of discrimination.
- Personal safety.
- Sexual orientation.

Human Relationships

- Developing skills regarding making and maintaining good relationships and friendships.
- Family roles and responsibilities.
- Group behaviour and resolving conflict.
- An understanding of how peer pressure works.

Topics at Senior Cycle Include:

Human Growth and Development

- Fertility and family planning
- A deeper understanding of pregnancy and the developing foetus.

Human Sexuality

- Treating women and men with equal respect.
- Sexual harassment.
- Sexual abuse, rape, legal right: voluntary and statutory agencies.
- Making moral and healthy choices regarding sexual activity.

Human Relationships

- An awareness of what constitutes a loving relationship
- The long-term commitment involved in marriage.
- Parenting and family life.

Appendix 2: Procedures for Guest Speakers/Facilitators

The SPHE Coordinator/RSE teacher 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 the visitor be accompanied by teaching staff?
- iii) Will the staff take an active role in the visitor's activities?
- iv) How will the visitor be prepared for the visit?
- v) How will the visit be built upon and followed up?

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.

In order to inform the visitor of the precise requirements of a group and to make better use of the time of the visitor it is advisable for the group to draw up questions in advance and these should be forwarded to the visitor. This will involve the students in the visit and will make the experience more relevant for them – it also facilitates planning.

The office should be informed of the date and name of the visitor.

Where applicable, refreshments should be arranged.

The visitor should be welcomed at the main entrance.

A written acknowledgement of their contribution should be sent to the visitor and could also appear on the school's social media platforms and/or school newsletter.