

St Paul's High School, Bessbrook

Relationships & Sexuality Education (RSE) Policy

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RELATIONSHIPS & SEXUALITY EDUCATION (RSE) POLICY

DRAFT: September 2023

1 Introduction

1.1 School Mission Statement and Vision

St Paul's High School is a Catholic community committed to providing high-quality education in an atmosphere of mutual respect where everyone is valued as an important member of our school family. We value the personal, moral, social, and spiritual development of each student, encouraging respect for self and others including the core values of truth, kindness, integrity, and compassion.

We aim to provide equality of opportunity to a broad and balanced curriculum suited to the interests and needs of all our students. We endeavour to develop skills and capabilities to help our students grow into healthy, mature, and successful adults capable of making informed and responsible choices and having the potential to make a valuable contribution to the world of work and society in general.

1.2 School's aims and objectives

1. To be a community inspired by the Catholic faith, living out the gospel values and reflecting all traditions of our Irish cultural heritage.
2. To enable all students to acquire a sense of purpose and have a good opinion of themselves by giving all access to academic, vocational, religious, moral, social, and physical education, with appropriate provision for pupils with special needs, which celebrates diversity and values inclusivity.

3. To promote professional development through the provision of high-quality resources and sharing of good practices within an ethos of shared school leadership.
4. To involve the church, parents, education bodies, industry, and the wider community in the work of the school.
5. To foster a spirit of cheerful cooperation and provide a safe, child-centred environment that promotes optimum achievement and self-esteem among staff and students.

We, at St Paul's High School, view the development and implementation of a policy in Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) as an important step towards achieving our aim to develop all aspects of a young person's personality and growth. The morals and values of our Catholic ethos are the core principles that underpin the teaching of RSE. Sexuality includes all aspects of the human person that relate to being male and female and develops throughout life. It is a complex dimension of human life and relationships.

As parents/carers are the primary educators of their children, we will endeavour to engage in full consultation with them regarding aims, objectives and the teaching programme of this policy and their views will be considered when implementing and reviewing this policy.

In line with our school's ethos, RSE will provide opportunities that enable pupils to:

- form values and establish behaviour within a moral, spiritual, and social framework consistent with our Catholic ethos.
- learn how to develop and enjoy personal relationships and friendships that are based on responsibility and mutual respect.
- build the foundations for developing more positive personal relationships in later life.

- make positive, responsible choices about themselves and others and the way they live their lives.

1.3 Consultation on the formulation of this policy

Policy development work was completed during Term 1 of 2023/24 academic year. The following stakeholders were consulted in the formulation of the policy.

Stakeholder	Date consultation commenced	Date consultation ended
SLT	8 September 2023	30 September 2023
Board of Governors	13 September 2023	30 September 2023
Parents	13 September 2023	30 September 2023
Pupils	15 September 2023	30 September 2023
Teaching Staff	13 September 2023	30 September 2023

1.4 Implementation and Review of Policy

Implementation of the policy will take place after consultation with the Governors in the Term 1 of 2023/24 academic year.

This policy will be reviewed every year by the Principal, RSE Co-ordinator, the governing body, and staff.

The next review date is **September 2024**.

1.5 Dissemination

The agreed policy will be given to all members of the governing body, and all teaching and non-teaching members of staff.

Copies of the document will be available to all parents through the school's website and a copy is available in the school office.

Details of the content of the RSE curriculum will also be published on the school's website.

2 Relationships & Sexuality Education (RSE)

2.1 Defining Relationships & Sexuality Education (RSE)

Relationships & Sexuality Education (RSE) is about the development of the pupil's knowledge and understanding of himself/herself as a sexual being, about what it means to be fully human, called to live in right relationships with self and others and being enabled to make moral decisions in conscience.

RSE should give young people the information they need to help them develop healthy, nurturing relationships of all kinds, not simply intimate relationships. It should enable them to know what a healthy relationship looks like and what makes a good friend, a good colleague and a successful marriage or other type of committed relationship.

2.2 Rationale

The school is involved in relationships and sexuality education precisely because of our Christian beliefs about God and about the human person. The belief in the unique dignity of the human person made in the image and likeness of God underpins the approach to all education in a Catholic school. Our approach to RSE

therefore is rooted in the Catholic Church's teaching of the human person and presented in a positive framework of Christian ideals.

At the heart of the Christian life is the Trinity; Father, Son, and Spirit in communion, united in loving relationship and embracing all people and all creation. As a consequence of the Christian belief that we are made in the image and likeness of God, gender and sexuality are seen as God's gift, reflect God's beauty, and share in the divine creativity. RSE, therefore, will be placed firmly within the context of relationship as it is there that sexuality grows and develops.

RSE will be firmly embedded in the PD/HE/LLW and the RE Curriculum as it is concerned with nurturing human wholeness and integral to the physical, spiritual, emotional, moral, social, and intellectual development of pupils. It is centred on Christ's vision of being human as good news and will be positive and prudent, showing the potential for development, while enabling the dangers and risks involved to be understood and appreciated.

All RSE will be delivered in accordance with the Church's moral teaching. It will emphasise the central importance of marriage and the family whilst acknowledging that all pupils have a fundamental right to have their life respected whatever household they come from.

2.3 The Centrality of Virtue

Our programme enshrines Catholic values relating to the importance of stable relationships, marriage, and family life. It also promotes those virtues which are essential in responding to the God's call to love others with a proper respect for their dignity and the dignity of the human body. The following virtues will be explicitly explored and promoted: faithfulness, fruitfulness, chastity, integrity, prudence, mercy, and compassion.

3 Aims, Objectives and Skills

Our Mission Statement commits us to the education of the whole child (spiritual, physical, intellectual, moral, social, cultural, emotional) and we believe that RSE is an integral part of this education. Furthermore, our school aims state that we will endeavour to raise pupils' self-esteem, help them to grow in knowledge and understanding, recognise the value of all persons and develop caring and sensitive attitudes.

It is in this context that we commit ourselves:

In partnership with parents, to provide children and young people with a positive and prudent sexual education which is compatible with their physical, cognitive, psychological, and spiritual maturity, and rooted in a Catholic vision of education and the human person.

3.1 Aims of RSE

In line with the school's ethos and CCEA guidelines the Relationships and Sexuality Education Policy of St Paul's High School aims to:

- promote a Catholic vision of sexuality that reflects selfless love, respect, and commitment within a moral, social, spiritual framework.
- help young people appreciate their worth, dignity and uniqueness as children of God.
- enable young people to appreciate sexuality as a gift from God.
- promote an appreciation of the value and sanctity of human life and the wonder of life from the moment of conception to the moment of natural death.
- value the gifts of marriage and the family, and to persevere in a love strengthened by the virtues of generosity, commitment, fidelity, and patience.
- understand marriage as the sacramental sign of God's love for his Church.
- enable young people to grow in holiness by acting responsibly and generously towards others.

- value the concept and qualities of consent in relationships and understand the law in relation to consent.
- recognise that compassion, forgiveness, mercy, and tolerance are essential dispositions to develop within relationships.
- Understand that being single and chaste is a virtuous, positive, and fulfilling option.
- promote respect for all individuals regardless of sexual orientation, race, gender, or creed.
- encourage the young to always witness to human dignity online.
- encourage the young to see social media as another tool to reach people with the message that sexuality is a gift from God, not to be squandered and abused.
- recognise common mental health issues such as anxiety, depression, disordered eating, self-harm, and compulsive behaviours in themselves.

3.2 Objectives of RSE

In line with the school's ethos and CCEA guidelines, the Relationships and Sexuality Curriculum attempts to enable pupils to:

- realise that relationships can cause strong feelings and emotions including sexual attraction.
- know the features of positive and stable relationships (including trust, mutual respect, honesty, equality) and those of unhealthy relationships (including imbalance of power, coercion, control, exploitation, abuse of any kind)
- help pupils cope with the breakdown of a relationship and the effect of change, including loss, separation, divorce, and bereavement.
- develop a positive sense of self-awareness, and the skills for building and maintaining self-esteem.
- acquire and develop an appropriate vocabulary to discuss feelings, sexuality, and development.

- cope with the social, physical, and emotional challenges of growing up.
- understand human physiology with particular reference to the reproductive cycle, human fertility and sexually transmitted infections and diseases.
- value family life and appreciate the responsibilities of parenthood.
- understand different family structures, and the diversity of family life.
- recognise the need for self-control and the importance of the virtue of chastity.
- explore the moral and ethical issues surrounding sexuality.
- recognise peer pressure and have strategies to manage it.
- recognise the need for online safety.
- recognise the impact of drugs and alcohol on choices and sexual behaviour.
- be aware that the media portrayal of relationships may not reflect real life and understand the possible impact of this on people's expectations of relationships.
- help young people to become aware of the pervasive prevalence of pornography on the internet which can destroy and degrade human sexuality and relationship and reduce people to objects for gratification.

3.3 Skills Promoted (including personal and social)

Pupils will develop the ability to:

- form and maintain healthy, positive relationships which reflect the dignity of the human person.
- make sound judgements and good choices.
- manage emotions within relationships and the breakdown of relationships with sensitivity and dignity.
- manage conflict positively and enable pupils to recognise the value of difference.
- critically evaluate a wide range of information, opinions, attitudes, and values
- develop the communication skills of active listening, negotiation, offering and receiving constructive feedback and assertiveness.
- cultivate mercy and compassion, learning to forgive and be forgiven.

- develop skills and strategies to respond appropriately to exploitation, bullying, harassment, and control in relationships (including the unique challenges posed by online abuse and the unacceptability of physical, emotional, sexual abuse)
- recognise when a relationship is unhealthy or abusive (including the unacceptability of both emotional and physical abuse or violence including 'honour' based violence, forced marriage and rape)
- be able to access support for self or others at risk.
- develop the skills to challenge sexist, homophobic, racist, and disablist language, and behaviour.
- evaluate the effect of alcohol and drug use on decision making and personal safety.
- build resilience and the ability to resist unwanted pressures, recognising the influence and impact of the media, internet and peer groups and so develop the ability to assess pressures and respond appropriately.
- develop coping strategies to overcome mental health issues and to recognise when they need to employ strategies to re-establish positive mental health including managing stress and anxiety.

3.4 Inclusion and Special Education Needs (SEN)

We will ensure RSE is sensitive to the diverse needs of individual pupils in respect to pupils' different abilities, levels of maturity and personal circumstances; for example, their own sexual orientation, faith, or culture and is taught in a way that does not subject pupils to discrimination.

Lessons will also help children to realise the nature and consequences of discrimination, teasing, bullying and aggressive behaviours (including cyber-bullying), use of prejudice-based language and how to respond and ask for help.

4. RSE Curriculum

4.1 Key Stage 3

RSE is delivered discretely to all pupils in Key Stage (KS) 3 through the Learning for Life & Work (LLW) curriculum. Cross-curricular input is delivered through other subject areas such as Home Economics, Religious Education and Science.

4.2 Key Stage 4 and Post-16

RSE provision at KS4 and Post-16 is at a nascent stage of development. KS4 provision will be delivered during whole-group assemblies and special programmes which are delivered by third-party organisations.

Post-16 provision is being piloted by the delivery of a taught single period (40 minutes) per week delivered over ten weeks. The programme will be in carousel across the academic year to allow access to all pupils. The programme will be taught by senior members of staff and the Head of LLW and will follow the 'Living Love' programme, a resource developed by the Council for Education of the Irish Episcopal Conference for use in Catholic post-primary schools in Ireland.

Feedback from staff who will deliver this pilot programme and pupils who receive the lessons will inform the further development of this policy.

4.3 Class organisation

Classroom teaching arrangements may be single-gender classes or mixed gender classes. It is important that within the RSE programmes, activities are included to allow young people to talk about their interests, concerns, and feelings. If boys/girls have respect for themselves then ultimately, they will have respect for others. It may be appropriate to facilitate the delivery of specific topics of the RSE programme to boys/girls in single-gender groups.

4.4 Resources

The school will review and quality-assure all the resources chosen before the pupils use them to ensure that they are inclusive and consistent with the school's moral and value framework.

4.5 Teaching strategies

RSE aims to develop personal and social skills and clarify attitudes and values within a moral framework. RSE seeks to promote behaviour which will allow pupils to take increasing responsibility for themselves as they grow and develop. Teaching methods which involve pupils actively in the process of their own learning is most beneficial.

Specifically, in terms of organising the learning environment, the teacher will be careful to create an atmosphere which respects the privacy of each individual student and treats all pupils with due sensitivity and care. Some important considerations might be:

- the degree of trust, respect, and positive regard for pupils.
- the relationship between the teacher and the pupils and among the pupils themselves.
- the need for clear expectations, goals and learning objectives.

4.6 Assessment of RSE

The nature of RSE is strongly orientated towards Personal Development which does not necessarily lend itself to summative assessment. RSE is not easily measurable as it is qualitative rather than quantitative.

When required, RSE will be assessed and reported on in Years 8 – 12 by the teacher who delivers the module at that level.

4.7 Use of Outside Agencies

Where appropriate, the skills and expertise of outside agencies and professionals may be accessed. Where this occurs, the school should be satisfied that to contributions from informed outsiders are an integral part of the whole programme and in harmony with the aims and ethos of the school. They will ensure that all teaching is rooted in Catholic principles and practice.

It is essential that all outside visitors/speakers be approved by the Principal/RSE co-ordinator.

A preliminary visit to the school to discuss ethical/practical considerations is advised. Appropriate follow up in relation to guest speakers is also advised.

The RSE co-ordinator and teachers involved in the delivery of RSE should ensure that resource materials obtained from other agencies and presentations by outside speakers are in harmony with the ethos of the school.¹

It is essential that all external agencies supporting RSE should sign a service agreement agreeing with the RSE policy of the school and the underpinning ethos of the school and that this record is kept in a safe place as part of the delivery of RSE and for authenticity.

It is vital that any outside agency/individual delivering a support session in a school.

- receives a copy of the school's Relationships & Sexuality Education Policy.
- is made aware of and adheres to the school's Child Protection Policy.
- receives a copy of the school's policy on the use of outside agencies/visitors.
- agrees to respect the ethos of the school.

¹ See the criteria established on the use of external agencies as outlined in CCMS Circular 2013/19 Guidelines on Relationships and Sexuality Education, 13 and CCEA RSE Guidance for Post-Primary Schools, 2015, Section 2, 11.

- is made aware of the issues around confidentiality.
- is vetted as appropriate.
-

Parents/carers should be made aware in advance of the use of outside agencies.

The school will explain the type of activities which will take place to ensure that parents and carers can raise any concerns they might have before the visit.

During the session, the teacher(s) should be always present. Afterwards the teacher(s) should provide pupils with the opportunity to discuss their experiences and honestly evaluate the session. The school will use student feedback to inform future planning and provision along with any evaluation carried out by the outside agency/individual.

5. Parents and Carers

It is important that St Paul's actively promotes the implementation of RSE and that parents/carers are fully informed of the content, timing, and the delivery of the programme to enable them to support the work of the school and to enable parents to discuss the topics and issues raised by the programme with their children. This will be achieved by sending an outline of programme home either (a) at the beginning of school year or (b) just prior to the commencement of the programme.

5.1 Face to Face Meetings

Meeting parents either at the beginning of the school year or prior to the commencement of the programme to inform them of their rights and responsibilities. This meeting will allow the parent to learn about and discuss the content, the teaching methods, and the timing of the programme, and to voice any concerns they might have regarding the programme and its delivery.

5.2 Induction Literature

An Induction Pack for incoming Year 8 pupils which will contain information on the content and timing of the RSE module. This will give parents/carers an opportunity to participate in the programme alongside their children and in so doing build positive relationships.

5.3 School Website

The school has published this policy in its entirety on the school website and has made it available for parents/carers to download.

5.4 Ensuring the curriculum is balanced

While promoting Catholic values and virtues, we will ensure that pupils are offered a balanced programme by providing an RSE programme that offers a range of viewpoints on issues.

Pupils will also receive clear scientific information as well as covering the aspects of the law pertaining to RSE relating to forced-marriage, female genital mutilation, abortion, the age of consent and legislation relating to equality. Knowing about facts and enabling young people to explore differing viewpoints is not the same as promoting behaviour and is not incompatible with our school's promotion of Catholic teaching. We will ensure that pupils have access to the learning they need to stay safe, healthy and understand their rights as individuals and to relate to other individuals in a mature and respectful way.

6 Roles and Responsibilities

6.1 Responsibility for teaching the programme

The programme, across all key stages, will be led by the RSE Co-ordinator, a role which is part of the job description of the Head of Learning for Life & Work (LLW). It

will be taught by teachers of LLW, as well as teachers who have a cross-curricular input (e.g., RE, PE, Science specialist teachers).

6.2 Other Roles and Responsibilities

Trustees

The Trustees are responsible for the strategic direction, organisational nature, and ethos of their respective schools. The Archbishop of Armagh is responsible for all Catholic schools in his Archdiocese, as evidenced by Canon Law 806§ which states that,

“The diocesan bishop has the right of supervision, visitation, and inspection of Catholic schools in his diocese, even those established or directed by members of religious orders. He also has the right to issue directives concerning the general regulation of Catholic schools.”

Board of Governors

Every School a Good School - The Governors' Role: A Guide for Governors outlines the role and responsibilities of Governors.

Section 13.40 states:

“Boards of Governors should ensure that their schools have a Relationships and Sexuality Education policy and curriculum linked to their pastoral care/child protection policy. This policy and the associated teaching should be the subject of consultation with staff and parents and endorsed by the Governors.”

The Board of Governors will foster and support the development of an RSE policy and programme by collaborating with teachers and parents. It will also facilitate the consultative process whereby the school community can respond and contribute.

The governors will examine and approve the completed policy and programme prior to their implementation in the school and review the policy at regular intervals.

At all times the governors of the school will seek to accommodate and be sensitive to the religious and cultural beliefs of both teachers and parents while fulfilling their responsibility to ensure the availability of adequate RSE for all young people.²

Principal and Strategic Leadership Team (SLT)

As with all subject areas, it is the role of the Principal to make possible a coherent and co-ordinated approach to RSE in keeping with the ethos of the school. It is the role of the Vice Principals with responsibilities for Curriculum and Care and Welfare to support the work of the Principal and it is their responsibility to ensure that RSE is delivered in a way which is in keeping with the ethos of the school.

The Principal and Senior Management Team co-ordinate the school's approach to RSE and consults the Board of Governors, staff, parent(s)/carer(s), and health professionals, as appropriate.

RSE Co-ordinator/Cross Curricular Working Party

The RSE co-ordinator is a member of staff appointed to be responsible for co-ordinating all issues related to the RSE policy, the Department of Education specifications and the programme designed for the pupils. It is essential that the co-ordinator is respectful and committed to the school's ethos and the aims and direction of RSE within the school.

The RSE Co-ordinator's role includes:

- upholding and ensuring that the programme is taught in accordance with the school's Catholic ethos.

² DENI Circular 2001/15 - *Relationships and Sexuality Education Policy in Schools*.

- ensuring that the programme is taught effectively and is appropriate to the age and maturity of the pupils.
- liaising with the Board of Governors, the Principal, the Vice Principals (Curriculum and Care & Welfare), all staff, parents and health and educational visitors on RSE matters.
- attending in-service training and disseminating appropriate information to other staff members.
- organising training for staff as and when appropriate.
- liaising with outside agencies where appropriate.

Pastoral Team/Designated Teacher/Learning Support Co-ordinator

The Pastoral Team/Designated Teacher and Learning Support Co-ordinator will form part of the cross-curricular team and provide relevant information which will ensure that the needs of all pupils are met.

The Pastoral Team will ensure that the RSE topics delivered through Pastoral Programmes are in line with the Catholic ethos of the school. The Pastoral Team will liaise with the Designated Teacher and Special Needs Co-ordinator where necessary.

Teaching Staff

The staff provide a link through communicating the content of RSE and the relevant programme, possibly through curriculum meetings and by other means. Teachers are of central importance in terms of review of RSE provision. They are also key to identifying their own needs around ongoing professional development in their RSE work.

Chaplain

The role of the chaplain is to:

- support the teaching of RSE where possible.

- meet with the co-ordinator to discuss the RSE programme and its delivery in school.
- witness to Gospel values.

Diocesan Advisor/Diocesan Advisor Support Service

The Diocesan Advisor supports schools in the development and delivery of an RSE policy and programme which reflects the Catholic ethos and respects the wishes of parents.

7 Relationship to other Policies and other Curriculum Subjects

The RSE policy is developed to be consistent and coherent within the framework of the overall school development plan and, in this context, shares links with the following policies:

- Religious Education
- Teaching and Learning
- Child Protection/Safeguarding Children
- Personal Development
- Anti-Bullying
- Positive Behaviour
- Drugs
- Internet Safety/E-safety
- Homework
- Use of outside agencies and vetting arrangements.

7.1 Links to other taught subject areas

Teachers of supporting subject areas are informed of the content and timing of the delivery of RSE, and in so far as possible Relationships and Sexuality Education will

be taught in a cross-curricular way. The following subject areas contribute to a cross-curricular approach:

- Child Development
- Drama
- English
- Home Economics.
- Health and Social Care
- Learning for Life and Work
- Physical Education
- Religious Education
- Science & Technology

A school audit of subject content across supporting subject areas is maintained and informs the development of this policy and the taught provision.

7.3 Responding to Pupils' Questions and Sensitive Areas

While it is important to create an environment in which pupils can discuss issues openly, teachers may not always be able to answer all questions about issues and should set appropriate boundaries. Teachers should use their professional judgement, guided by the age of the pupils, the RSE curriculum and the RSE policy. Any advice provided and the way teachers respond should support the role of the pupils' parents or carers and reflect the ethos of St Paul's High School.

All staff teaching RSE related issues should use the proper biological names for body parts and sexual acts, where appropriate and relevant to the RSE programme. The use of common slang should be avoided.

Teachers should remember that, as they are not medical professionals, they must not give personal medical advice to any pupil. Teachers must advise pupils to seek advice from parents or carers and health professionals. If any question asked raises

child protection issues, this should be referred to the designated teacher for child protection.

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7.4 Boundary Setting

It is essential to set parameters for the teaching of sensitive issues.

The school has developed a Code of Conduct, at an age-appropriate level for each class/year group, which will ensure that the right to privacy for both student and teacher is always respected.

In terms of such a Code of Conduct, it is important that staff teaching RSE:

1. Teach the fundamental principle of respect for human persons.
2. Challenge any discriminatory remarks.
3. Deal firmly with any acts of bullying, including homophobic, transphobic, and cyberbullying.
4. Follow school procedures for accessing outside support for any student requiring additional help.
5. Support the parents. Parents may want to speak to someone at the school about one or more of these issues.
6. Arrange a meeting with the parents and relevant support agencies to consider any appropriate measures of support that may be needed to ensure the needs of the student are met.
7. Follow school procedures for monitoring the well-being of student(s)
8. Provide time and safe spaces for young people, in an age and stage appropriate way, to engage at a deep level with these issues, to dialogue with their peers and their teacher around them and to be invited into a rich understanding of the Church's teaching in these areas.

8 Specific Issues

8.1 The Status of the Family

In keeping with the right of Catholic schools to present RSE within its own ethos, the school supports the Sacramental vision of marriage and family, while being sensitive to other family situations.

The Catholic understanding of marriage will be presented, and sexual intimacy will be taught in the context of a God-given gift that enables married men and women to express and deepen their love for each other, a love that should unite the couple as well being open to the gift of new life. The Church's teaching on Sacramental Marriage as a permanent, exclusive union between one man and one woman open to the transmission of new life will be presented as the Catholic understanding of the context for sexual intimacy.

8.2 The Virtue of Chastity

In line with the ethos of the school and Christian morals, sexual abstinence before marriage and fidelity within it, will be presented as a positive, desirable, and achievable option. The ideal context for sexual intimacy is a committed, permanent heterosexual relationship between a man and a woman.

8.3 The Sanctity of Life

In keeping with the right of Catholic schools to present RSE within its own ethos, the value and sacredness of life will be actively promoted. From the moment of conception, the embryo is a human being and must be recognised as having the rights of a person. The most fundamental right for every human being is the right to life. This belief is one of the foundation stones on which the RSE programme is built. Life is sacred from conception to the moment of natural death.

8.4 Sexual Orientation

In accordance with the Catholic ethos of St Paul's High School, we uphold the Church's teaching that the meaning and purpose of sexual intimacy is fully realised in

the sanctity of marriage between a man and a woman, faithful to one another for life and open to the possibility of transmission of new life, while recognising and respecting the different views of others.

All pupils have the right to learn in a safe environment, to be treated with respect and dignity and not be treated any less favourably or isolated in any way on the grounds of their sexual orientation. Antagonism/bullying or other forms of abuse against pupils who reveal that they are homosexual will not be tolerated by the school.

Respect for all people regardless of sexual orientation will be promoted in line with the school ethos – no pupils should be isolated on the grounds of their sexual orientation. Pupils have the right to hold different views/lifestyles in a peaceful manner.

The Catholic ethos of the school ensures that gospel values, inclusivity, equality and respect for all and the right of everyone to learn in a safe and secure environment where all are treated with respect and dignity. The ethos of a Catholic school supports the guidance produced by the Equality Commission on eliminating sexual orientation discrimination. This guidance relates to the Equality Act (Sexual Orientation) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2006 and the guidance from the Equality Commission (NI) in March 2009.

In the school anti-bullying policy, specific reference is made to homophobic bullying, transgender bullying, cyber bullying, sexual harassment and bullying for other reasons relating to sex, gender, or relationships.

‘Bullying on the grounds of sexual orientation is as unacceptable as it is in any other situation where someone is mistreated or bullied because of their differences from those who are perceived to be the majority. All issues relating to bullying on the grounds of sexual orientation will be dealt with appropriately in line with the school’s anti-bullying policy.’

8.5 Pastoral Care of Young People with Gender Dysphoria

The disclosure of gender dysphoria by a child or young person is first and foremost a pastoral and welfare issue. As such, the priority of the school is to create a safe environment in which the vulnerable child can receive the support that they require.

8.6 Family Planning

In *Familiaris Consortio* (1981:14) Pope John Paul II spoke of God's plan when he said that marriage is '*the foundation of the wider community of the family,*' and that the '*institution of marriage and conjugal love are ordained to the procreation and education of children.*'

In accordance with this, Catholic teaching places sexual intercourse within the Sacrament of Marriage and the use of any artificial means of preventing procreation is not acceptable.

Catholic teaching on family planning will be presented and pupils will also be provided with accurate information about methods of artificial contraception in an age appropriate and sensitive manner.

8.7 Sexually Transmitted Infections

It is important that pupils are provided with accurate, information about sexually transmitted infections, their transmission, the inherent dangers of risk-taking behaviour and how to obtain appropriate advice if they are concerned about their sexual health. Information on how to prevent the spread of infections should take note of the fact that the best way to prevent infection is to practice sexual abstinence before marriage and monogamy (inside marriage).

8.8 Digital Safety

The RSE Programme will teach pupils how to safely navigate the digital world. Technology plays an integral role in the lives of pupils which poses both opportunities and risks. The RSE Programme will raise awareness of potential threats or dangers posed by the Internet such as sexting, cyber-bullying, pornography, abuse, and exploitation. Pupils will explore the implications of the law, the strategies they can use to protect themselves and where they can access advice and support if they are at risk.

9 Supporting Children and Young People at Risk

Children will need to feel safe and secure in the environment in which RSE takes place.

Effective RSE will provide opportunities for discussion of what is and is not appropriate in relationships. Such discussion may, at times, lead to disclosure of a safeguarding issue. Teachers will need to be aware of the needs of their pupils and not let any fears and worries go unnoticed. Where a teacher suspects that a child or young person is a victim of or is at risk of abuse, they are required to follow the school's safeguarding policy and immediately inform the designated senior member of staff responsible.

While pupils should not be encouraged to disclose personal or private information in 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 young person is at risk, in which case the appropriate action should be taken e.g., follow the procedures set down in Child Protection Procedures and Guidelines for Post Primary Schools or the Schools Substance Use Policy, and notify parents/carers.

Where disclosure to parents/carers may place a young person in a potentially harmful situation, the school must follow the Child Protection procedures as laid out in the Department of Education **Circular 2017/04 Safeguarding and Child Protection in Schools: A Guide for Schools.**

The student's right to privacy should always be respected by both the teacher and the other pupils in the class but staff cannot give a guarantee of confidentiality to pupils on issues relating to Child Protection.

e.g.,

- We understand that the child's right to privacy must always be respected by the teacher and other pupils. Children will not be expected to answer any personal questions.
- Teachers will not promise confidentiality. A child does not have the right to expect incidents in the classroom or school to go unreported.
- The Principal or designated teacher must be informed of any disclosures which might suggest a child is at risk from physical or sexual abuse.

10 Monitoring and Evaluation

The RSE Co-ordinator will monitor the provision of the various dimensions of the programme by examining plans, schemes of work and samples of pupils work at regular intervals.

The programme will be evaluated annually by means of questionnaires, response sheets, needs assessment given to pupils, and by discussion with pupils, staff, and parents.

The results of the evaluation will be reported to these groups of interested parties and their suggestions sought for improvements. Governors will consider all such evaluations and suggestions before amending the policy. Governors remain ultimately responsible for the policy.

11 Staff Development and Training

Training will be organised by the RSE co-ordinator, in consultation with the Principal, Vice-Principals for Curriculum and Care & Welfare, Senior Leader for Staff Development and Senior Leadership Team.

Where it is deemed necessary the Diocesan Education Advisors, the Education Authority Advisors and other outside agencies may be consulted.

Dissemination of training can take place during school in-service days.

It is essential that training be provided both for (a) new staff to the programme and (b) new teachers to the school.

It is recognised that no teacher should have to undertake delivery of the RSE programme without adequate training.

12 Withdrawal from RSE

The NI Curriculum Relationships and Sexuality Education Guidance 2015 states that,

*'Whilst Relationships and Sexuality Education is a statutory component of the Northern Ireland Curriculum, parents or carers have a right to have their children educated in accordance with their wishes. Therefore, whilst 'there is no legislative provision permitting parental withdrawal from sex education', schools can grant these requests on an individual basis.'*³

The school will consider how it can support parents or carers who choose to withdraw their child from all or part of the Relationships and Sexuality Education programme. This may require the student going to another class for the duration of the lesson. The school will take account of parental/carers concerns and treat issues

³ CCEA RSE Guidance for Post-Primary Schools, 2015, Section 2, 11.

on an individual basis and support and allay concerns. Pupils can be provided with the teaching materials for home use on request and with the proper guidance.

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