



Mercy Secondary School
Thomas Davis Street, Inchicore D8
RSE Policy
2024/2025

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School Context:

Name: Mercy Secondary School, Inchicore

Category: DEIS

Enrolment 24/25: 330

Mercy Secondary School is a Co-ed school under the trusteeship of CEIST

Introduction and Rationale:

Relationship and Sexuality Education (RSE) is a lifelong process of acquiring knowledge and understanding while developing positive attitudes, beliefs and values about sexual identity, relationships and intimacy. RSE is a developmental process through experiential learning where students participate in order to promote a healthy attitude towards themselves and others, particularly in the area of relationships and sexuality.

Our RSE programme will provide structured opportunities for students to engage and acquire knowledge and an understanding of human relationships and sexuality through processes which will enable them to form values and establish behaviours within a moral, spiritual and social framework. This approach will give an opportunity for our students to learn about relationships and sexuality in a way that will encourage them to think and act in a moral, caring and responsible manner.

Our Mission Statement:

Mercy Secondary Inchicore is a co-educational Catholic school in the heart of Inchicore, Dublin 8, under the trusteeship of CEIST. Just as our founder Catherine McAuley imagined and created a world, in which education empowered and provided opportunities for all; we continue that vision of realising all that our students and our learning community can become.

Definition of RSE (Relationship and Sexual Education):

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

Relationship of RSE to SPHE:

The RSE programme will be delivered within the context of our SPHE programme. This programme provides students with the unique opportunity to develop the skills and competencies to learn about themselves, to care for themselves and others and to make informed, responsible decisions about their health, personal lives and social development.

The Draft Guidelines for RSE (NCCA, June 1995, 1.2) state 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. SPHE deals with many issues such as self-esteem, assertiveness, communication and decision making skills - all of which can contribute to the effectiveness of the RSE programme.

Circular 0037/2010 requires that all second level schools must develop an RSE policy and implement an RSE programme as an element of SPHE at Junior Cycle and as an RSE programme at Senior Cycle, even in a absence of a timetabled SPHE class. Under this circular, schools are required to teach all aspects of the RSE programme, elements of the programme cannot be omitted on the grounds of the school ethos, however all aspects can and should be taught within the ethos and value system of the school as expressed in the RSE policy.

The Aims of the Mercy Secondary School RSE Policy:

Relationships and sexuality education which is located in the overall framework of Social, Personal and Health Education, has as its specific aims:

- To enhance the personal development, self-esteem and wellbeing of the young person
- To help students to develop healthy friendships and relationships
- To foster an understanding of, and a healthy attitude to, human sexuality and relationships in a moral and social framework
- To promote a positive attitude to one’s own sexuality and in one’s relationship with others
- To provide opportunities for pupils to learn about relationships and sexuality in ways that helps them think and act in a moral, caring and responsible way.
- To facilitate the opportunity for students to reflect on the values at the core of positive relationships and as a consequence to develop a capacity for better decision making in line with these principles.
- To develop an awareness in students about the meaning of consent and the law around sexual relationships.

Current Provision in Mercy Secondary School

Junior Cycle:

RSE is currently taught to 1st, 2nd and 3rd years in accordance to the provisions of the SPHE curriculum. Each class is timetabled once per week as a one hour period.

Senior Cycle:

RSE is delivered to Transition year, 5th and 6th year students through Religious Education class and SPHE classes.

The division between biological and non-biological aspects of sex education:

The school policy is that the Science Department deals primarily with the biological aspects of reproduction.

Cross-Curricular:

The RSE policy applies to all aspects of teaching and learning about relationships and sexuality. While it is a structured module within the SPHE programme at Junior Cycle and Religious Education at Senior Cycle, in order to be effective the RSE programme at Mer Secondary School must be supported in a school environment that promotes a healthy and respectful attitude towards sexuality. Information and discussion regarding RSE can also take place in other classes. The RSE programme is supported by the wider curriculum in areas such as Science, Physical Education; Civic, Social, Political Education (CSPE) and Wellbeing. It is therefore important that all stakeholders are familiar with the RSE policy.

Teaching council code of professional conduct for teachers:

Mercy Secondary School's teachers comply with the Teaching Council's Code of Professional Conduct, and Section 1.3 Professional Values and Relationships is especially relevant to SPHE and RSE: Teachers should be committed to equality and inclusion and to respecting and accommodating diversity including those differences arising from gender, civil status, family status, sexual orientation, religion, age, disability, race, ethnicity, membership of the travelling community and

socio-economic status, and any further grounds as may be referenced in equality legislation in the future.

Guidelines for the management and organisation of Relationships and Sexuality Education in Mercy Secondary School:

Prevision of Training and Staff Development:

The value placed on SPHE by the school will be evident by the commitment on the part of management to develop a core team of trained SPHE teachers and an appointed SPHE co-ordinator. SPHE is enhanced by appointing teachers who show a keen interest in the area of SPHE and who are confident and supported in the classroom.

CPD (Continuous Professional Development) is an integral part of the programme. Management are responsible for responding to the relevant and perceived training needs of SPHE and RSE teachers as well as the whole staff.

Teachers of SPHE and RSE are encouraged to work together and receive the necessary training available to them.

Informing and Involving Parents and Guardians:

Parents and guardians are the primary educators of their children and their role in education concerning relationships and sexuality is seen by the school as very important. Each parent/guardian of incoming first year students is informed of the contents of the S.P.H.E curriculum and parents will be notified annually regarding the commencement of the R.S.E component of the course – via a note in the school journal. If a parent/guardian has a concern about any aspect of the curriculum they are invited to contact the S.P.H.E Co-ordinator to discuss the concern. With regards to R.S.E, each parent has a right to withdraw her/his son/daughter from the Relationships and Sexuality Education (R.S.E.) module; however, parents must make an appointment to meet with the S.P.H.E Coordinator and/or Principal of the school in advance to discuss the specific content which is the source of concern before making this decision. A child cannot be withdrawn from class if this meeting does not take place before the initiation of RSE. An appointment can be made by contacting the school office.

It will be necessary for the parents of any student opting out of RSE to make suitable arrangements with school management for the welfare of their child at these times. Where students are withdrawn from RSE the school cannot take responsibility for any versions of class content passed on to them by other students.

Recommended actions before withdrawal of a student from RSE lessons are confirmed:

- a) Discuss the nature of the concerns with the child's parent and if appropriate attempt to reassure them (initially such discussion takes place at a meeting with the Class teacher and S.P.H.E Co-ordinator, the Principal may become involved if necessary) and offer the parents access to appropriate information and resources.
- b) Consider whether the programme can be amended or improved in a way that will reassure parents - care is taken not to undermine the integrity of the RSE programme and the entitlement of the other pupils.
- c) Ensure that where a pupil is withdrawn there is no disruption to other parts of their education
- d) It is important to highlight that pupils who have been withdrawn may receive inaccurate information regarding RSE from their peers

Provision of Advice:

The school's function is to provide a general education about sexual matters and issues and not to offer individual advice or information. However sources of professional information and advice may be identified if appropriate, upon consultation with our Guidance Counsellors or Principal. We follow Department of Education curricula at all time in these matters.

Explicit Questions:

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 and seek the advice of the SPHE co-ordinator or another member of the SPHE team. If a teacher becomes concerned about a matter that has been raised, in particular if they feel a child's welfare or child protection issues are at risk he/she should seek advice and report this to the DLP immediately. 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 and the RSE policy.

Confidentiality:

An atmosphere of trust is a pre-requisite of RSE, however the following limits of confidentiality must be observed:

- Child abuse- physical, emotional, sexual, neglect
- Substance misuse
- Intention to self-harm self or others
- Concerns around mental health and suicidal thoughts
- Under age sexual intercourse

It is school policy and in line with Child Protections Procedures 2017 that in circumstances where a student makes a disclosure or is considered at some risk of any type of abuse or in breach of the law, the teacher must refer this immediately to

the Principal as the DLP or in the event of the Principal being unavailable they must report to the Deputy Principal as the deputy DLP. The Principal or Deputy Principal will decide whether to inform the parents and/or appropriate authorities and may arrange for additional school support.

RSE teachers will inform students of the limits of confidentiality at the beginning of the year, remind them at necessary points throughout the year and where possible before making a disclosure.

The following is also school policy:

- a) Teachers must not promise absolute confidentiality;
- b) Pupils must be made aware that any incident may be conveyed to the Principal and possibly to parents if the Principal decides that it is in the best interests of the pupil to notify parents.

The Child Protection Guidelines for Post Primary schools 2017:

- 4.1.1. If a member of staff receives an allegation or has a suspicion that a child may have been abused, or is being abused, or is at risk of abuse he/she should, without delay, report the matter to the Designated Liaison Person in that school. A written record of the report should be made and placed in a secure location by the Designated Liaison Person. The need for confidentiality at all times, as previously referred to in Chapter 1 Paragraph 1.2 of these guidelines, should be borne in mind. The supports of the school should continue to be made available to the child.
- 4.2.1 If the Designated Liaison Person is satisfied that there are reasonable grounds for the suspicion or allegation he/she should report the matter to the relevant health board immediately – i.e TUSLA.

Visiting speakers and Guests:

To ensure the efficient running of the school, the principal and deputy principal must be consulted when the extension of an invitation to a visiting speaker is being considered. All visiting guests must be signed in at the school office and wear a visitor pass for the duration of their visit.

Presentations which are relevant to SPHE and RSE should be coordinated with the teachers of the subject to ensure an integrated approach involving introductory and follow up work is completed in line with subject and department plans.

As is recommended practice, it is the preference of the school that RSE be delivered primarily by the teaching staff that have been trained in this area.

Mercy Secondary School adopts the following guidelines to good practice and supplementary material as set out in Circular 43/18, Dept. of Education and Skills:

- Visitors to the classroom or school, particularly those engaging directly with students, should be aware of relevant school policies including the school's child protection policy, RSE policy and substance misuse policy. Any such visit must be carefully planned in advance in line with the relevant whole-school SPHE/RSE programme(s) and policies.
- Talks/programmes delivered by outside agencies or speakers must be consistent with and complementary to the school's ethos and SPHE/RSE programme. Visits should be planned, researched and implemented in partnership with school personnel.
- Relevant teachers need to liaise with and be involved with all visitors and external agencies working with the school and the whole staff needs to be made aware of the same.
- It is strongly recommended that parents should be consulted and made aware of any such visiting people/agencies to classrooms / schools.
- The school's SPHE/RSE coordinator may also help in the process of whole-school planning and coordination to support the effective implementation of SPHE/RSE.
- It is of the utmost importance that classroom teachers remain in the classroom with the students and retain a central role in the delivery of the core subject matter of the SPHE/RSE programme. The presence of the classroom teacher should ensure that the school follows appropriate procedures for dealing with and issue(s) that may arise as a result of the external input(s).

LGBTQ+:

Teachers do not promote any one life-style as the only acceptable one for society and therefore it is inevitable and natural that homosexuality will be discussed during a programme of sex education. One of the advantages of exploring issues concerning homosexuality is the opportunity to correct false ideas, assumptions and address prejudice. Discussion of homosexuality should be appropriate to the age of the pupils.

Contraception:

This topic will be dealt with in an age appropriate, open manner, looking at all sides of the issues in a non-directive way.

Provisions for Students with Special Educational Needs:

Students with special 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.

At Mercy Secondary School the SPHE department teachers will work with the members of the SEN department to ensure students' with SEN needs are fully integrated and aware of the aspects of RSE that concerns them and is age appropriate.

For learning activities to be made meaningful, relevant and achievable for all students, it is important for teachers to find ways to respond to students' diversity by using differentiated approaches and methodologies. Teachers are asked to consult with the SEN department and to be aware of the individual needs of SEN students in their classroom when developing lessons for RSE.

On-going monitoring, support, development and review:

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 a willingness to refer to more expert advice if necessary.
2. The skills acquired in general teaching apply also to SPHE and RSE education. Furthermore, many teachers have training in related areas such as science, guidance and ethics. Some teachers have expert training in the specific areas of SPHE and RSE. It is important to encourage peer mentoring across these areas in order to promote a positive and open RSE programme in our school.
3. The school will facilitate teachers to obtain expert training in this field when possible.
4. We are committed to monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of this programme on an annual basis by the SPHE team.
5. Consultation with all stakeholders is vital to the success of the RSE programme. Students, staff, parents, management and the Board of management's feedback regarding the effectiveness of the programme will be considered and discussed as part of our on-going review.

