St. Mary's Secondary School




# Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) Policy, 2026

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## ST. MARY'S HOLY FAITH, GLASNEVIN

### MISSION STATEMENT

'Under God it began, through God it has grown'
Margaret Aylward

Situated within the beautiful surroundings and steeped in the heritage of the Holy Faith Congregation, St. Mary's Holy Faith Secondary School is a Catholic school under the trusteeship of Le Chéile.

Our central purpose is the religious, spiritual, moral, academic, human, social and physical-recreational education of each student.

As a community, we aim to form integrated and self-reliant people who are eager to build a better world.

We are committed to the growth of the whole person, by word and action, in a safe, welcoming, inclusive and creative environment.

We encourage our students to lead with care and act as guardians of our common home.

**2. Introductory Statement**

St. Mary's is committed to providing our students with a holistic education that prepares them for life and that aids them in growing into independent and mature young adults. Healthy social and personal development are key elements of Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE), and the school is committed to providing this education in line with our Mission Statement.

RSE aims to build on the primary school programme and provides students with opportunities to learn about relationships and sexuality and to acquire knowledge, skills and understanding to evaluate critically the wide range of information offered to them. The provision of RSE enables students to make responsible and informed decisions about their sexuality and relationships and is an integral part of their growth and flourishing as a person.

In keeping with our Mission Statement and Code of Behaviour, we are committed to ensuring that RSE classes take place in an inclusive and respectful environment.

The RSE Policy has been adopted in line with the following guidance from the Department of Education:

- 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 Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE).
- Circulars M4/95 and M20/96 request schools to commence a process of RSE policy development.

The RSE Policy has been developed in collaboration with the Principal, Deputy Principal, the SPHE Coordinator, and in consultation with students, parents, teachers and the Board of Management.

The policy applies to all students, teachers and staff within the school and to any visiting speaker or external facilitator.

**3. Definition of Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE)**

Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) is a lifelong process of acquiring knowledge and understanding of beliefs and values about sexual identity, relationships, (sexual) health and intimacy. This education is delivered consciously and unconsciously by parents, teachers, peers, adults, and the media. The RSE class gives pupils formal opportunities, through experiential

learning, to cultivate healthy attitudes and values towards themselves and others, promoting the overall development of the person, and the integration of sexuality into personal life.

Building on the work completed in Primary School, RSE at Post-Primary level seeks to provide age-appropriate opportunities for young people to learn about relationships and sexuality in ways that will enable them to think and act in a healthy, caring, informed and responsible way in line with their personal values and beliefs.

**4. Rationale: Relationship of RSE to SPHE**

The adoption of an RSE policy allows for every student to have the opportunity to develop the skills and self-confidence necessary to make informed decisions in their lives. This policy is underpinned by recent curriculum updates and frameworks developed by the Department of Education and Skills. It was reviewed by students, staff, parents and the Board of Management.

Section 9 of the Education Act, 1998 requires that every school use its available resources to promote the social, emotional, personal, safety and health of students in consultation with parents/guardians and having regard to the characteristic spirit of the school.

In 2023, the Junior Cycle SPHE Framework was updated. This document provides a flexible framework within which schools can plan a three-year SPHE programme to meet students' needs. The framework comprises of the following four strands:

- Understanding Myself and Others
- Making Healthy Choices
- Relationships and Sexuality
- Emotional Wellbeing

At Senior Cycle, the SPHE Curriculum will incorporate the following three strands: 2024 UPDATED

- Health and Wellbeing
- Relationships and Sexuality
- Into Adulthood

In accordance with Department of Education and Skills Circular 0037/ 2010 *Relationships and Sexuality Education*, post-primary schools are obliged to develop an RSE policy to implement a programme in this area for all students from first to sixth year.

## 5. Current Provision of RSE in our School

- RSE is provided at Junior Cycle as part of the SPHE programme. Students receive 100 hours of SPHE over the course of 3 years.
- The SPHE Coordinator liaises with teachers of SPHE regarding sharing of resources and best practice in delivering these lessons.
- RSE is currently taught as a 6-week module during Religion class to Senior Cycle students.
- Aspects of RSE are already delivered across the curriculum in Science, Biology, Home Economics, and Religion.
- In TY SPHE is taught for 1 period a week and comprises topics such as emotional wellbeing, mental health, sexual and reproductive health, healthy relationships, female health conditions.
- As per Department of Education guidelines SPHE at Senior Cycle will be introduced in 2027.
- The wellbeing of the school community is promoted and enhanced through themed weeks such as Mental Health Awareness Day, Stand-Up Week, Multicultural Week and Friendship Week. These whole school initiatives foster inclusivity and understanding of the diverse identities within our community.
- A variety of speakers are invited to the school to underpin the key messages of safety and wellbeing for students. These can include:
    - A talk on cyber safety and Coco's Law delivered to junior students by the community Guards
    - A speaker from the Marie Keating Foundation to talk to senior students and staff about breast health
    - The Wellness Hub delivers a workshop to TY students about the links between nutrition, sleep and general health.
    - Guest speakers from ISPCC, Barnardos and Pieta House.

## 6. Aims and Objectives of our RSE Programme

### Aims

- To build students' self-awareness and positive self-worth
- To develop the knowledge, understanding, skills, dispositions and values that will support them to lead fulfilling and healthy lives
- To empower them to create, nurture and maintain respectful and loving relationships with themself and others
- To enhance their capacity to contribute positively to society

### Objectives

RSE should enable students to:

- develop the knowledge, understanding, skills and values that will support students to lead fulfilling and healthy lives
- create, nurture and maintain respectful and loving relationships with themselves and others
- enhance their capacity to contribute positively to society
- explore personal thoughts, values, attitudes and feelings about relationships
- develop an understanding of the different types of relationships, what is important in them and the skills to enhance relationships
- develop empathy with others who have different cultural values, attitudes and beliefs about family, relationships, sex and sexuality
- develop their knowledge and understanding of sexual reproductive health
- develop personal and interpersonal skills which support beginning, maintaining and ending relationships
- develop skills for coping with peer pressure, conflict, and threats to personal safety with a full understanding of what it means to give consent in every aspect of life
- develop an awareness of the risks associated with the consumption of pornography specifically its addictive nature and negative impacts on relationships
- acquire the understanding and skills necessary to form healthy friendships and 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
- develop an understanding of sexuality and sexual orientation and the importance of an inclusive environment
- understand sexual development and identity and explore aspects of sexuality including sex role stereotyping, gender issues and cultural influences on sexuality
- value family structures (in all their forms) and appreciate the responsibilities of parenthood/ guardianship/ caregiving and develop an appreciation of family life and its challenges

## 7. Guidelines for the Management and Organisation of Relationships and Sexuality Education in our School

### Timetabling

Arrangements regarding the teaching of the SPHE/RSE programme and the deployment of staff will be made by the Principal. Where practicable, teachers who express an interest in teaching

SPHE/ RSE will be timetabled and will have continuity with their class groups to ensure a comfortable and secure environment.

The content of the RSE programme will be in line with the NCAA Curriculum and Guidelines.

Whole school staff training on gaining an understanding of the LGBTQ+ community will be facilitated by the school and delivered by *Belong To.* A core group of staff are engaged in applying for the *Belong To Quality Mark* for our school. All school staff have received training from *Belong To*.

In delivering the programme, teachers will show sensitivity to the needs of the group and the school. The methodologies used are expected to be child-centred and appropriate to the age and stage of development of all students. Active learning methods are favoured in SPHE and RSE to encourage engagement and learning.

**Delivery of Curriculum**

All aspects of the RSE curriculum must be taught in line with the subject specification.

**Involving and informing parents**

Parents are the primary educators of their children and their role in education concerning relationships and sexuality is seen by the school as very important. We recognise the right of any parent who so wishes to request that his/her child should not participate in the programme. The school must be informed of such a decision in writing.

**Confidentiality**
At the beginning of each academic year and at regular intervals throughout the year students are informed that complete confidentiality cannot be guaranteed.

As mandated persons, and in line with our Child Protection Safeguarding Statement, information may have to be passed on to the D.L.P. (Designated Liaison Person). Any welfare concerns will be passed on to the Student Support Team.

**8. Ongoing Support, Development and Review**

All teachers involved in RSE 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 preparedness to refer to more expert advice if necessary. The skills acquired in general teaching apply.

The school will encourage and facilitate teachers to obtain training in this field, bearing in mind the overall budgetary framework and the need for the ongoing teaching and learning programme of the school to continue with as little disturbance as possible. Whole school staff training will be facilitated by the school.

We are committed to monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of this programme in conjunction with the school community. Any necessary amendments will be undertaken.

This policy was ratified by the Board of Management on: 20th October 2026

Signed:





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| Audrey Doyle | Paul Clarke |
| Chairperson of the Board of Management | Principal |