

## **The High School, Rathgar, Dublin. 6.**

### **Relationships and Sexuality Education Policy Statement**

Enacted September 1998 after consultation between staff, parent representatives, Principal and governors.

In this policy document all references to gender are taken to be inclusive and the term “parent” is taken to include “guardian”.

#### **A School**

1. The High School, Zion Road, Rathgar, Dublin. 6. Telephone 4922611. The school is a co-educational, academically non-selective day school, with an enrolment varying between 750 and 800 pupils.

#### **B Our School Philosophy**

1. The school was founded by the Erasmus Smith Trust in 1870 as a day school for boys. Originally located in Harcourt Street, it moved in 1971 to its present 23 acre setting in Rathgar. In 1974 the High School amalgamated with the Diocesan School for Girls and became coeducational. It provides education mainly for pupils from Church of Ireland families, while having places available for those of other denominations and faiths. The school encourages its pupils to consider and assess different viewpoints in relation to issues of morality before reaching their own informed decisions. The experience gained through the working out of this policy and through respecting the needs of minority groups and individuals enriches the whole life of the school.
2. The school gives its pupils the opportunity to explore the humanities, sciences, arts, business studies and technical subjects. In addition it provides religious, moral and physical education in order to meet its founding objectives of preparing pupils for the demands of business and professional life, and of attaining high academic standards in the broad range of disciplines required for third level education.
3. A code of conduct has been published after consultation with parents, staff and pupils and the following excerpts illustrate how the ethos of the school operates on a daily basis:
4. *Discipline at the High School is founded on the principles of respect for people, environment, property and safety. All rules follow from these basic principles which are intended to create and maintain a happy and stable community.*
5. *The best way in which the school can operate with the maximum happiness and fulfillment for everybody is if the maximum courtesy and respect is shown for other people. Pupils at the school are expected to*

*respect the dignity of other pupils, teachers and other staff in the school and have the right to expect that their own dignity will be respected.*

### **C Definition of Relationships and Sexuality Education**

1. 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.

### **D Relationships and Sexuality Education within Social Personal and Health Education**

1. 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.

### **E The aims of our Relationships and Sexuality Education programme**

1. Relationships and sexuality education which is located in the overall framework of Social, Personal and Health Education, has as its specific aims:
  - a) To help pupils understand and develop friendships and relationships
  - b) To promote an understanding of sexuality
  - c) To promote a positive attitude to one’s own sexuality and in one’s relationship with others
  - d) To promote knowledge of and respect for reproduction
  - e) To enable pupils to develop attitudes and values toward their sexuality in a moral, spiritual and social framework in keeping with the policy of the school
  - f) To provide opportunities for pupils to learn about relationships and sexuality in ways that help them think and act in a moral, caring and responsible way.

It is acknowledged that in a course of limited duration these aims are aspirational.

## ***F Guidelines for the management and organisation of Relationships and Sexuality Education in our school***

1. Arrangements regarding the teaching of the programme and the deployment of staff will be made by the Principal.

### **2. Informing and Involving 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. Relevant sections of this RSE policy will be included in the school's *Information for Parents* booklet, published annually in August. This policy has been designed in consultation with Parents' Association representatives and the views expressed by parents will be taken into account when reviewing the policy. A copy of this policy will be made available to any parent on request to the school Office.

### **3. Offering Advice:**

The school's function is to provide a general education about sexual matters and issues and not to offer individual advice, information or counselling on aspects of sexual behaviour and contraception - however sources of professional information and advice will be identified when appropriate. Teachers may provide pupils with education and information about where and from whom they can receive confidential sexual advice and treatment, e.g. school nurse, their doctor or other suitable agency (further information is available from the Guidance Counsellor). Advice offered should not be directive and should be appropriate to the age of the pupil. (It is, for example, not appropriate to give pupils a list of abortion clinics.)

### **4. Explicit Questions:**

It is unlikely to be appropriate to deal with a pupil's explicit questions by dealing with it in front of the whole class, e.g. questions on oral sex. In practice this means that teachers should say that it is not appropriate to deal with that question at this time. The teacher may also exercise his or her own professional judgement in deciding whether to answer the question privately after the class has finished. If a teacher becomes concerned about a matter that has been raised he/she should seek advice from the Guidance Counsellor or the Principal.

### **5. Confidentiality:**

It is school policy that in circumstances where a pupil is considered at some risk of any type of abuse (e.g. moral or physical) or in breach of the law, the teacher must refer this immediately to the Principal or the Guidance Counsellor. The Principal will decide whether to inform the parents and/or appropriate authorities and may arrange for counselling. Although there is no legal duty on a teacher, or a Principal, to inform parents of matters which a child has confided to them:

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;
- c) teachers must use their professional judgement to decide whether confidence can be maintained having heard the information;
- d) teachers must indicate clearly to pupils when the content of a conversation can no longer be kept confidential - the pupil can then decide whether to proceed or not.

The pamphlet “Procedures for Dealing with Allegations or Suspicions of Child Abuse” issued by the Department of Education contains the following in paragraph 4.1:

If a teacher receives an allegation or has a suspicion that a pupil is being abused, the teacher should, in the first instance, report the matter to the principal or in exceptional circumstances directly to the Chairperson of the Board.

Where the matter is reported to the principal and he or she is satisfied that there are reasonable grounds for the suspicion or allegation the Chairperson or Manager should be advised.

The Chairperson or Manager, together with the teacher, should report the matter to the local Director of Community Care/Medical Officer of Health. It is essential that at all times the matter be treated in the strictest confidence and not discussed except among the parties mentioned above.

(Note: In the case of this school, the Principal acts also as Manager in this respect.)

## **6. 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.

## **7. Withdrawing pupils from the RSE programme:**

1. Relevant sections of this policy are made available to parents in the school publication entitled *Information for Parents* together with details about the parent’s right to withdraw their child from many aspects of RSE - parents will always be provided with a full copy of this policy following a request to do so.
2. Issues such as over population, birth control and other sexual matters 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 RSE Programme.
3. Parents do not have to give reasons for withdrawal, but we respectfully invite them to do so - sometimes we can then resolve misunderstandings. Once a parent’s request to withdraw is made, that request must be complied with until revoked by the parent. (See also appendix 1)

## **8. Using visiting speakers and others**

- a) It is school policy that most of the RSE programme is best discussed openly with teachers who are known and trusted by the pupils. However visitors can enhance the quality of the provision as long as they are used in addition to, not instead of a planned programme of RSE.

- b) The RSE Co-ordinator 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?
- c) 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.
- d) 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 pupils in the visit and will make the experience more relevant for them - it also facilitates planning.
- e) The Office should be informed of the date and name of the visitor.
- f) Where applicable, refreshments should be arranged with the catering staff.
- g) The visitor should be welcomed at the main door.
- h) At the end of the session a vote of thanks should be given by a pupil and the visitor escorted to the main door after refreshments.
- i) A written acknowledgement of their contribution should be sent to the visitor and could appear in the School Newsletter.

## **9. Homosexuality**

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. Teaching about homosexuality is not avoided although teachers take care not to advocate homosexual behaviour, present it as the norm, or encourage homosexual experimentation by pupils. One of the many 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.

## **10. 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.

## **11. Abortion**

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

## **12. Special Needs**

Children 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.

## **G Ongoing support, development and review**

### **Training:**

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 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 expert training in the specific areas of health, relationships and sexuality education and will be encouraged to train other teachers.
2. The school will facilitate teachers to obtain expert 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.

### **Resources:**

The school will purchase appropriate RSE teaching materials which have been identified by staff as useful and which have been approved by the Principal, within the normal budgetary framework and as general school resources allow.

### **Monitoring, evaluating and reviewing the RSE programme:**

We are committed to monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of this programme. Specifically important to the RSE Programme are:

- a) pupil feedback;
- b) staff review and feedback;
- c) parental feedback.

### **Appendix 1**

What we do if a request for withdrawal from the RSE programme is made by a parent:

- a) we discuss the nature of the concerns with the child's parent and if appropriate attempts to reassure them (initially such discussion takes place at a meeting with the Year Head and RSE Co-ordinator, the Principal may become involved if necessary)
- b) we 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, e.g. it may be appropriate and desirable to have single sex classes for some sections of the RSE programme;

- c) we attempt to ensure that where a pupil is withdrawn there is no disruption to other parts of their education,
- d) we point out that pupils who have been withdrawn are vulnerable to teasing - we therefore attempt to cause minimal embarrassment to the pupil and minimal disruption to the programme;
- e) we also point out that pupils may receive inaccurate information from their peers;
- f) we offer the parents access to appropriate information and resources.