



# St. Mary's Diocesan School

Beamore Road, Drogheda, Co. Louth, A92TF24  
Telephone Office: 041 983 7581 • Fax: 041 984 1151 • Email: office@stmarysds.ie  
Principal: Ciarán O'Hare • Deputy Principals: Cerrie Byrne, Catherina McNicholas

## St Mary's Diocesan School Relationship and Sexuality Education Policy Statement

*Enacted after consultation with staff, parents representatives, Principal and Board of Management. In this document all references to gender are taken to be inclusive and the term "parent" is taken to include "guardian".*

### A. School

St Mary's is an all-boys, voluntary secondary school under the patronage of the Diocese of Meath with an enrolment circa 800 pupils.

### B. Our School Philosophy

**Mission Statement:** *St Mary's Diocesan School is a Catholic Secondary School committed to the development of the whole person, offering equal opportunities to all to achieve their full potential in a familial Christian environment. To school aspires to an education based on high ideals and a broad curriculum which will allow our students to confidently play their role in society.*

1. In keeping with its holistic ethos, our school encourages its pupils to consider and assess different viewpoints in relation to issues of morality. Exploring and respecting the needs and values of minority groups and individuals within our school enriches the whole life of our school community.
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 objectives of supporting students in achieving their full academic potential and preparing them for participation in civic society and working life.
3. A Code of Behaviour has been published in consultation with parents, staff and pupils and the following excerpts illustrate how the ethos of the school operates on a daily basis:
  - i. Committed to the development of the whole person offering equal opportunities to all to achieve their full potential in a familial Christian environment
  - ii. To foster in each student a feeling of self-worth and a sense of respect and consideration for others

Respect for others and our pastoral care structure are at the centre of the basis of our Code of Behaviour.

### C. Definition of Relationships and Sexuality Education

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

### D. Relationships and Sexuality Education within Social, Personal and Health Education

The *Draft Guidelines for RSE* (NCCA, June 1995, 1.2) state that SPHE 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 and mandatory 6 class periods 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. What the School Currently Provides**

Arrangement regarding the teaching of the programme and the deployment of staff will be made by the Principal. The mandatory 6 periods of RSE will be provided from 1<sup>st</sup> to 6<sup>th</sup> Year. No element of the curriculum will be omitted. This includes sexual orientation and contraception whilst respecting the ethos of the school.

## **F. The Aims of Our Relationships and Sexuality Programme**

*Relationships and sexuality education within the overall framework of SPHE, has as its specific aims:*

1. To help pupils understand and develop friendships and relationships
2. To promote an understanding of sexuality
3. To promote a positive attitude to one's own sexuality and in one's relationship with others
4. To promote knowledge of and respect for reproduction
5. To enable pupils to develop attitudes and values toward their sexuality in a moral, spiritual and social framework
6. 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.

## **G. Management and Organisation of Relationships and Sexuality Education in Our School**

1. **Advice** - The school's function is to provide a general education about sexual education about sexual matters and not offer individual advice, information or counselling on aspects of sexual behaviour and contraception – however, sources of information and advice will be identified as appropriate. Teachers may provide pupils with information about where and from whom they can receive confidential sexual advice and treatment, e.g. their doctor or other suitable agency. Advice offered should not be directive and should be appropriate to the age of the pupil.
2. **Sensitive Questions** - It may not be appropriate to deal with some questions in class. Teachers may choose to say that it is not appropriate to deal with that question at this time. When deciding their response, the teacher should consider the age and readiness of the students, the RSE programme content and policy and the ethos of the school. If a teacher becomes concerned about a matter that has been raised, he/she should report the matter to the DLP (Designated Liaison Person) in accordance with the school's Child Safeguarding Statement and Procedures.
3. **Confidentiality** – In accordance with the school's Child Safeguarding Statement, it is school policy that in circumstances where a pupil is considered at risk of any type of abuse or in breach of the law, the teacher must report the matter to the DLP. In line with this and point 4, above, teachers must not promise absolute confidentiality. Teachers must indicate clearly to pupils that this is the case.
4. **The Division between Biological and Non-Biological Aspects of Sex Education** – School policy is that the Science Department deals primarily with the biological aspects of reproduction.
5. **Withdrawing Pupils from RSE** – This policy is available on the school website and a hard copy is available on request. Should a parent wish to withdraw their child from RSE they must inform the Principal in writing. Parents do not need to provide reasons for withdrawal but we respectfully invite them to do so. Sometimes misunderstandings can be resolved by engaging in such discourse. Once a parent has made a request to withdraw from the RSE programme, that request must be complied with until revoked by the parent. **See Appendix 1.**

6. **Visiting Speakers** – Circular 43/18 states: *Use of programmes and/or external facilitators can play a role in supplementing, complementing and supporting a planned comprehensive approach to wellbeing promotion.*

Furthermore, it continues: *External facilitators always work under the guidance and supervision of the relevant classroom teacher who remains in the classroom with the students at all times and retains a central role in the delivery of the subject matter. Absence of the teacher may undermine the integrity of the curriculum, and the credibility and professionalism of the teacher. It may also compromise the safety of the students.*

It is therefore to be borne in mind that external facilitators/speakers are useful in the delivery of RSE but are to be used to supplement the work of the classroom teacher. The classroom teacher should bear in mind the school's ethos, the age of pupils, the relevance of the material to be presented and the school's Child Safeguarding Statement when deciding to invite and make use of an external facilitator/speaker.

7. **Homosexuality** – Teachers do not promote any one lifestyle as the only acceptable one for society. Therefore, it is inevitable and natural that homosexuality will be discussed during a programme of sex education. One of the advantages of exploring issues around homosexuality is the opportunity to correct false ideas, assumptions and address prejudice. Discussion of homosexuality should be appropriate to the age of the pupils.
8. **Contraception** – This topic will be dealt with in an age-appropriate, open manner, looking at issues in a non-directive way and in keeping with the ethos of the school.
9. **Special Needs** – Children with Special Needs may need more help than others 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, including being warned and prepared against abuse by others. Supports that are available to Special Needs Students as part of the school's SEN Policy will remain in place during RSE class.
10. **Informing and Involving Parents** - Parents are the primary educators of their children and their role in education concerning RSE is seen by the school as very important. Therefore, this policy has been developed in consultation with Parents' Association representatives and the views expressed by parents will be taken into account when reviewing the policy. A hard copy of the policy will be available on request from the school Office and the policy will be published on the school's website.

#### **H. Provision for Ongoing 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, and ability to deal with questions openly and honestly and a preparedness to refer to more expert advice if necessary. The skills acquired in general teaching apply also to health education. Some teachers will have expert training in the specific areas of health, relationships and sexuality education and will be encouraged to lead training of other teachers.
2. The school will facilitate teachers to obtain expert training in this field bearing in mind the overall needs of the school.
3. Resources and teaching material will be purchased where they have been identified as useful by staff and approved by the Principal.
4. Monitoring, Evaluating and Reviewing the RSE Programme will be undertaken as part of the school's Wellbeing Programme.

**Appendix 1.**

*What to 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(s) and if appropriate attempt to reassure them.*
- b) We consider whether the programme can be amended or improved in a way that will reassure parents. Care will be taken not to undermine the integrity of the RSE Programme and the entitlement of the other pupils.*
- 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. Therefore, we try 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.*

**This policy was ratified by the Board of Management on the 12<sup>th</sup> February 2019**