

# LORETO BALBRIGGAN



## RSE POLICY

### **Mission Statement**

Loreto Secondary School, Balbriggan, is a Catholic girls' secondary school. In the spirit of Mary Ward we aim to develop all the abilities of our students in order that they realise their full potential and use their talents for the service of others.

We also aim to encourage self confidence and self esteem in a happy atmosphere and structured environment.

The school community, collaborating together in mutual respect strives for holistic excellence.

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

“RSE is a lifelong process of acquiring knowledge, understanding and skills which enable us to develop attitudes, beliefs and values about sexual identity, relationships and intimacy” (DES 1997). Sexuality is a key element of healthy social and personal development in all our lives, but particularly important in the life of the adolescent.

At post primary level RSE aims to provide “young people with information and skills to critically evaluate the wide range of information, opinions, values and attitudes offered today, and so make positive, responsible choices about themselves and the way they live their lives.” (RSE Policy Guidelines, 1997)

As a catholic school we wish to support parents/guardians in this important aspect of their child's education and preparation for life. In keeping with our mission statement and working in partnership with parents/guardians, we believe we have a supporting role in preparing young people for their place in society.

RSE class will provide structured opportunities for students to gain knowledge and 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.

Loreto Balbriggan recognises that ‘Report on the Review of Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) Primary and Post-Primary’ was published in December 2019, outlining key areas of change for implementation at both policy level and in the classroom.

### **The Aims of our RSE Programme**

- To help students to understand and develop friendships and relationships.
- To promote a healthy understanding of sexuality at an age and developmentally appropriate manner.
- To promote a positive attitude to one’s own sexuality and in one’s sexuality with others. This will aid the development of personal wellbeing and enhance relationships with others.
- To promote knowledge of and respect for the human reproductive process.
- To enable students to develop healthy attitudes and values towards their sexuality, in a moral, spiritual and social framework in keeping with our school ethos.
- To provide opportunities for students to learn about relationships and sexuality in ways that help them to think and behave in a moral, caring and responsible way.
- To foster self-esteem, self-respect and a positive sexual identity.
- To provide a programme, curricular and extra-curricular, which develops the whole person.
- To promote a safe and inclusive environment where students can discuss, ask questions and talk about all aspects of relationships and sexuality education. (NCCA Review, 2019)

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

### **The Objectives of our RSE Programme**

The RSE Programme in Loreto Secondary School should enable students to:

- 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 change and grow, especially during adolescence and to develop respect for differences between individuals.
- Understand human physiology with particular reference to the reproductive cycle, human fertility and sexual activity and associated health consequences.
- Understand sexual development and identity and explore aspects of sexuality including gender roles, stereotyping, gender issues, consent and cultural influences on sexuality.
- Develop a Christian value system encompassing respect, responsibility, co-operation, honesty and fairness.
- Value dynamics of families and appreciate the responsibilities of all associated relationships.
- Develop strategies for decisions and actions consistent with personal moral integrity and be respectful of the rights and dignity of others.
- Develop skills for coping with peer pressure, conflicts and threats to personal safety.
- To guide and enable young people to engage safely and ethically with social media and emerging technology to help them understand and manage their digital relationships.

- Loreto Secondary School aims to ensure a positive school climate and culture where difference is welcomed.

### **Relationship of RSE to SPHE**

In Loreto Secondary School, RSE is taught as an integral part of the SPHE programme which is a required part of the Junior Certificate curriculum for all students (Section 4 of the Rules and programme for Secondary Schools, DES RSE Policy Circular 0027/0028 and Report of Review of RSE 2019)

The SPHE programme promotes the health and wellbeing of young people. Throughout all areas of SPHE students are encouraged to act in a moral, caring and responsible way and are given clear information, so that, in the context of their own lives, they can communicate effectively and implement informed decisions. Sexuality is a key aspect of development in the life of the adolescent and therefore along with the specific lessons of RSE, SPHE also covers areas which are relevant to the development of a healthy attitude to sexuality in oneself and one's relationships with others.

### **What we currently provide:**

*The RSE programme as taught in our school is the programme laid out by the NCCA*

The school follows all themes outlined in both Junior Cycle and Senior Cycle RSE syllabi provided by the Department of Education.

RSE at Junior Cycle is delivered as part of the SPHE programme and is allocated a minimum of 6 weeks. At senior cycle, RSE is facilitated as a stand alone programme, separate to the Religious Education curriculum in Religion class and is allocated a minimum of 6 weeks. Students in 6th year have a designated module for RSE that lasts 6-8 weeks.

At present:

- The school encourages parents/guardians to ensure that students participate in this programme as a way of supporting parents as the primary health educators of their children.
- The RSE programme discusses relationships, values, peer pressure, conflict, consent, personal, social and emotional wellbeing and decision-making.
- Student centred pastoral care structure supports include Principal, Deputy Principals, Year Heads, Form Teachers, Student Support Team, consisting of Chaplaincy, Guidance and SEN and Special Educational Needs Team.
- The Student Support Team is available to speak to students having difficulty settling into the school and other issues.
- Our Code of Behaviour emphasises respect for the rights and dignity of others.
- The Anti- Bullying policy is published in the student journal and website.
- Wellbeing and diversity policies are available on the website.
- There is cross-curricular education of human physiology and human reproduction – Science, Biology, Religion (senior cycle) and SPHE (junior cycle)

- Specific subjects discuss the workings of family and friend relationships, maturity, adolescence and dealing with conflict, independence and responsibility.
- Visits by speakers facilitate workshops endorsed by the Department of Education and the HSE on topics such as drugs and alcohol misuse, period health, sexual maturity and relationships.

### **Guidelines for the management and organisation of RSE in our school**

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

Staff are provided opportunities to attend training and in-service in relation to RSE.

The SPHE and the Student Support Team work with RSE Teachers to promote and develop a programme to meet the emerging needs of our students.

### **Involving and Informing Parents/Guardians**

- Parents are the primary educators of their children and their role in education concerning relationships and sexuality is understood as central. Communication between parents and school is therefore essential. A copy of the RSE Policy will be placed on the school website under school documentation for parents to access.
- Parents are informed in advance of the delivery of the RSE programme and its contents via email. This ensures that they are aware of what their daughters are learning and it provides them with an opportunity to discuss with their daughters the topics that are covered in class and by visiting speakers.
- Parents/Guardians of First year students will be invited to an information evening in the school.
- As with all policies, Parents' Association representatives and the views expressed by parents will be taken into account when reviewing the policy.

### **Withdrawal from Class**

- As per DES Circular 0037/2010, parents have a right to withdraw their child from the RSE programme in school and the school will respect this decision.
- The collaborative and supportive role of parents and school is emphasised in all areas of learning.
- Once a parent's request to withdraw is made, that request must be complied with until revoked by the parent/guardian.
- The school may not be able to provide alternative supervision during their RSE class, in which case the school may need the support of the parent/guardian to assist with alternative arrangements for withdrawal from SPHE/RSE class.

## **The role of the RSE Teacher**

The relationship between teacher and student is a core aspect of successful learning in all areas of education but this is especially true in RSE, given the personal nature of the subject. Students respond positively to teachers who show authenticity and empathy and who are willing to listen to and respect their views. At the same time the teacher must be able to set limits and boundaries. The following points should be considered by teachers of RSE:

- Ongoing professional development and training for all teachers of RSE/SPHE will support the effective delivery of RSE.
- Teachers assigned to teach RSE/SPHE must have an understanding of the range of teaching methodologies associated with education in this area.
- All teachers of RSE at Senior Cycle should inform themselves about the previous learning of students at Junior Cycle in RSE/SPHE and use methodologies appropriate to context, age and stage.
- Teachers must be familiar with their school's RSE policy, particularly with regard to some of the sensitive issues that may arise in a RSE class. A school does not have a right to omit any aspect of RSE. It is the responsibility of the RSE teacher to articulate the values expressed in the school's RSE policy in a way that is respectful to all. This can be done while also allowing students to express their views and opinions in a respectful way.
- The teacher is responsible for ensuring that the classroom is a safe environment for students. A way of fostering this climate from the beginning is to help students to establish ground rules for working together as a group.
- Teachers should be sensitive to the needs of students of all sexual orientations and gender identities.
- It may be necessary to set boundaries for students in terms of what can be discussed and what questions can be answered in an RSE class.
- Given the sensitivity of many of the topics in RSE teachers should be aware of the range of pastoral and counselling supports available within the school and outside school.

## **Confidentiality**

- At the beginning of each academic year and at regular intervals throughout the year, students are informed that complete confidentiality cannot be guaranteed.
- It is school policy that in circumstances where a student is considered at some risk of any type of abuse or breach of the law, the teacher must refer this immediately to the Designated Liaison person or Deputy Designated Liaison person if DLP is not available.
- Teachers must indicate clearly to students when the content of a conversation can no longer be kept confidential.

The Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools 2017 must be adhered to.

## **Additional Educational Needs**

Students with additional educational needs may require more help than others in coping with the physical and emotional aspects of growing up. It is the responsibility of the class teacher to familiarise themselves with the educational needs of the student.

## **Offering Advice**

The purpose of RSE is to provide a general education about sexual and relational matters and issues. The role of the RSE teacher is not to offer individual advice or counselling on aspects of sexual behaviour.

If an issue arises in class, the RSE teacher may decide it necessary to inform a relevant teacher, Year Head, Deputy Principal or Principal.

In some cases, it may be necessary to refer a student to the extended school pastoral structures, for example, the Student Support Team, for further assistance.

In RSE class it is important that we are particularly mindful of the various ranges of levels of maturity and experience among our students. RSE teachers may choose to say that it is not appropriate to deal with that question at this time. When deciding how to deal with the question the teacher will consider the age and readiness of the students, the RSE programme content, the ethos of the school and the RSE policy. If a teacher becomes concerned about a matter that has been raised, he/she should seek advice and take appropriate steps as outlined in **The Department of Education and Skills Circular 0081/2017 on Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools 2017 and the school's Child Safeguarding Statement and Risk Assessment** (all documents are available on the school website).

## **Guest Speakers**

It is school policy that most of the RSE programme is best delivered by teachers. Circular 0043/2018 states "The qualified classroom teacher is the best placed professional to work sensitively and consistently with students and he/she can have a powerful impact on influencing students' attitudes, values and behaviour in all aspects of wellbeing education." If outside agencies or guest speakers can enhance the quality of the provision of the programme then they may be considered in addition but not instead of the planned RSE programme in the school.

In line with Circular 0043/2018, *Best practice guidance for post primary schools in the use of programmes and/or external facilitators in promoting wellbeing consistent with the Department of Education' Wellbeing Policy Statement and Framework for practice* the following should be considered when supplementing or complementing wellbeing promotion:

- Does the programme and/or external facilitator address an identified need?
- Will the programme be delivered to class groups with the involvement of school staff?
- Does the programme enhance protective factors which predispose students to positive outcomes in the face of adversity?

When engaging external speakers the staff member who books the visitor will provide them in advance of the visit with a copy of this RSE policy. Once approval has been given by the Principal

the organising teacher will also make the speaker aware of the ethos of the school and the manner of delivery of the RSE Programme.

External facilitators must be compliant with the school's Child Safeguarding Statement and other relevant school policies and procedures.

- Programmes used must be delivered by facilitators who are qualified to work with the specific area of content and with students for whom the programmes are designed.
- Relevant school staff should be informed of the details of the programme being provided prior to the visit.
- External facilitators must always work under the guidance and supervision of the relevant classroom teacher who will remain in the room for the duration of the visit unless the speaker is vetted by the school prior to their visit.
- It is the responsibility of the person organising the external speaker that the content of the programme and the method of delivery is suitable for the student needs and appropriate for the age group.
- The programme will then be evaluated by the teachers and students with regard to the subject matter, methodology and messages communicated after the programme has been delivered.
- Where necessary and appropriate, parents/guardians will be informed of the programme delivered by guest speakers.

### **Further Development and Evaluation**

The school will facilitate participating teachers in taking part in ongoing professional development so as to provide the proper delivery of the RSE programme. It will also ensure that appropriate teaching materials which have been identified by staff as useful and approved by the Principal are available for delivery of the programme.

The teachers involved in the delivery of the programme will evaluate the RSE programme each year and modifications may be made if this is considered desirable for an effective delivery of a relevant programme within the provisions of this policy statement.

### **Provisions for Ongoing Support, Development and Review**

#### **1. Staff training**

We maintain an updated record of In-Service courses attended by staff. All SPHE staff are encouraged to register with the Oide website ([www.Oide.ie](http://www.Oide.ie)) for In-Service. Where possible, staff will be given opportunities to attend further professional development courses.

Information received at In-Service will be made available to all relevant teachers through subject department meetings at the beginning of the academic year.

#### **2. Planning**

The SPHE team will meet for subject planning and information sharing. At these meetings the SPHE coordinator will update staff in relation to In-Service training available and updates relating to the curriculum etc and to complete a review at the end of the academic year.

### 3. **Parents**

The school will continue to offer support to parents as the need arises and ask parental opinion to help review the policy.

### 4. **Students**

The school will continue to offer support to the Student Council as the need arises and ask for student opinion to help review the policy.

### 5. **Resources**

We have core and supplementary resources available to all SPHE and RSE staff. All resources are made available on the staff Google drive and located in a locker in R.32. Staff may also avail of web based resources for class planning. Websites used must be approved by the Department of Education, for example, HSE teaching resources. All staff are encouraged to harness the valuable IT resources available. As the need arises, the SPHE department will identify necessary resources for their subject and submit requests to the Principal.

#### **Related Policies:**

Child Safeguarding Statement and associated risk assessment

Pastoral Care Policy

Wellbeing Policy Statement & Framework for Practice

Whole School Guidance Plan

SPHE Provision

Anti-Bullying Policy\*

Student Charter


Code of Behaviour

SEN Policy

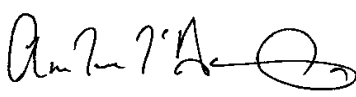
AUP Policy

\*Bí Cinéalta from September 2025

**This policy was ratified by the Board of Management on: 4<sup>th</sup> February 2025**

Signed: 

**Chairperson**

Signed: 

**Principal/Secretary, Board of Management**