Ennistymon Community School

Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) Policy

Ennistymon Community School (ECS) is a co-educational, multi-denominational post-primary school under the joint patronage of CEIST, ERST and Limerick and Clare Education and Training Board (LCETB).

The school is committed to providing a safe, inclusive and supportive learning environment where every student is respected and valued. The school recognises the dignity and uniqueness of every person and seeks to promote the holistic development of all students: personal, social, emotional, physical, moral, spiritual and intellectual.

The teaching of Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) reflects the ethos of the school and the values underpinning the Junior Cycle SPHE Specification (2023) and Senior Cycle SPHE Specification. All students are included and respected regardless of gender identity, sexual orientation, family status, ethnicity, religion, ability or socio-economic background.

Rationale

Relationships and Sexuality Education is an integral part of Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) and supports students to develop the knowledge, understanding, skills, attitudes and values necessary to make informed, healthy and respectful decisions about relationships and sexuality.

The school acknowledges:

- the central role of parents/guardians as primary educators

- the right of students to age-appropriate, evidence-based and inclusive RSE

- the importance of fostering respectful relationships, consent, wellbeing and safety

the responsibility of schools under the Education Act 1998, the Children First Act 2015, the Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools (revised 2023), and current Department of Education circulars.

This policy is informed by:

- NCCA Junior Cycle SPHE Specification (2023)

- NCCA Senior Cycle SPHE Specification

- Department of Education Circulars relating to RSE and SPHE

- Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools (2023)

- Bí Cineálta Procedures to Prevent and Address Bullying Behaviour for Primary and Post-Primary Schools (2024)

- Wellbeing Policy Statement and Framework for Practice

- LGBTQ+ Inclusion Guidance

- Education Act 1998

- Equal Status Acts

Definition of RSE

Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) is a lifelong process through which young people acquire knowledge, understanding, skills and values that enable them to:

- develop healthy and respectful relationships
- understand human sexuality and sexual health
- appreciate diversity
- develop positive self-esteem and body image
- understand consent and personal boundaries
- make informed and responsible decisions
- recognise and seek support in situations that may be unsafe, exploitative or abusive.

RSE is developmental, age-appropriate, inclusive and spiral in nature, building on previous learning as students mature.

Relationship of RSE to the School Mission

Ennistymon Community School seeks to provide an education that supports students in becoming responsible, respectful and resilient members of society.

The RSE programme contributes to this mission by

- promoting wellbeing and positive mental health
- fostering empathy, respect and inclusion
- supporting students in understanding relationships and identity

- encouraging critical thinking and informed decision-making

- helping students develop communication and interpersonal skills

RSE is delivered in a manner consistent with the school's characteristic spirit and in accordance with Department of Education requirements that all aspects of the RSE curriculum, including sexual orientation, gender identity, contraception, consent and sexually transmitted infections, are taught.

Scope of the Policy

This policy applies to:

- all students

- teachers and school staff

- visiting speakers and external facilitators

- parents/guardians

- Board of Management

The policy applies to all teaching and learning relating to relationships, sexuality, gender, identity and wellbeing delivered through:

- SPHE

- Wellbeing

- Religious Education
- Guidance
- pastoral care
- anti-bullying initiatives
- visiting speakers and workshops
- school policies and practices

Aims of the RSE Programme

- support students' overall wellbeing
- promote self-awareness, self-esteem and resilience
- help students develop healthy, respectful and caring relationships
- enable students to understand physical, emotional and social development
- provide accurate and age-appropriate information about sexuality and sexual health
- foster understanding of consent, personal boundaries and online safety
- support students to recognise healthy and unhealthy relationships
- encourage respect for diversity and inclusion

- develop communication, decision-making and critical thinking skills

- empower students to seek help and support where necessary

Learning Outcomes and Curriculum Content

Junior Cycle

RSE is delivered as part of the Junior Cycle SPHE curriculum and Wellbeing programme.

Learning is guided by the NCCA Junior Cycle SPHE Specification (2023), particularly the strand:

Relationships and Sexuality.

Topics may include:

- friendships and relationships

- identity and self-image

- emotional wellbeing

- puberty and adolescent development

- reproduction

- sexual orientation and gender identity

- consent and personal boundaries

- healthy and unhealthy relationships

- communication skills
- online relationships and digital safety
- influence of media and pornography
- respect, empathy and inclusion
- sexual health and protection

Senior Cycle

Senior Cycle RSE is delivered through Senior Cycle SPHE, Religious Education, Guidance and wellbeing initiatives.

Topics may include

- healthy intimate relationships
- consent and communication
- sexual health
- contraception
- sexually transmitted infections
- fertility and reproduction
- influence of social media and pornography

- gender equality
- respect and personal responsibility
- relationship abuse and coercive control
- help-seeking and support services

The curriculum is age-appropriate, evidence-informed and responsive to the needs of students.

Inclusive Practice

The school is committed to creating an inclusive environment where all students feel safe, respected and represented.

RSE Teaching

- acknowledges diverse family structures and relationships
- uses inclusive and respectful language
- challenges stereotypes and prejudice
- addresses homophobic, biphobic and transphobic bullying
- supports equality and human rights
- recognises the experiences and identities of LGBTQ+ students

All teaching materials and methodologies will reflect current best practice and Department of Education guidance.

Approaches and Methodologies

RSE is taught using student-centred and active learning methodologies which support engagement, reflection and discussion.

Methodologies may include

- group discussion
- pair work
- role play
- scenarios and case studies
- reflective activities
- media analysis
- anonymous question box
- collaborative learning
- digital and multimedia resources

Teachers will establish clear ground rules to ensure a safe, respectful and supportive learning environment.

Sensitive topics will be approached with care and professionalism.

Safe Learning Environment

The school recognises the importance of creating a safe environment for discussion

- Students will be encouraged to
- respect differing opinions and experiences
- use appropriate language
- maintain confidentiality within agreed limits
- avoid sharing personal or identifying information during class discussions

Teachers will:

- manage discussions sensitively
- respond appropriately to questions
- correct misinformation
- reinforce factual, evidence-based information
- A question box or anonymous question process may be used
- Teachers will not disclose personal information about themselves

Child Protection and Safeguarding

All RSE teaching and related activities will comply with:

- Children First: National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children

- Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools (2023)

- The school Child Safeguarding Statement

If a disclosure is made by a student, teachers cannot guarantee confidentiality and must follow child protection procedures.

Students will be informed of the limits of confidentiality.

The Designated Liaison Person (DLP) and Deputy DLP are responsible for managing child protection concerns in accordance with statutory requirements.

Parents and Guardians

Parents/guardians are recognised as the primary educators of their children and play an essential role in supporting RSE.

The school will:

- communicate with parents regarding RSE provision

- provide access to this policy

- inform parents of significant RSE modules where appropriate

- encourage parents to discuss RSE topics at home

Under Section 30(2)(e) of the Education Act 1998, parents/guardians have the right to withdraw their child from aspects of RSE instruction that they consider contrary to their conscience.

Parents wishing to withdraw their child should make a written request to the Principal.

The school will discuss the request with parents/guardians to clarify the nature and purpose of the lessons concerned.

Students who are withdrawn will be supervised in accordance with school procedures.

Visiting Speakers and External Facilitators

Visiting speakers and external facilitators may support the RSE programme where appropriate.

They should

- supplement but do not replace the role of the teacher
- must work within the school ethos and this policy
- must use age-appropriate and evidence-based materials
- will be supervised by a teacher at all times
- External facilitators must comply with school safeguarding procedures

Students with Additional Educational Needs

RSE will be differentiated to meet the needs of all learners.

Students with additional educational needs may require:

- adapted resources
- additional pre-teaching of vocabulary or concepts

- smaller group instruction
- visual supports
- repetition and reinforcement

Teaching approaches will be informed by students' developmental, emotional and communication needs.

Parents/guardians and relevant staff may be consulted where appropriate.

Assessment

Assessment in RSE will be formative and support learning.

Assessment approaches include:

- reflection
- self-assessment
- classroom discussion
- projects and presentations
- quizzes and activities
- teacher observation

Assessment will focus on students' understanding, skills and engagement rather than personal beliefs or experiences.

Staff Support and Professional Development

Teachers delivering RSE will be supported to access relevant Continuing Professional Development (CPD).

The school will

- encourage participation in Oide/NCCA CPD
- provide opportunities for collaboration and planning
- support access to appropriate teaching resources

Teachers delivering RSE should be comfortable teaching the programme and familiar with current guidance and best practice.

Related School Policies

This policy should be read in conjunction with:

- Child Safeguarding Statement
- Anti-Bullying Policy / Bí Cineálta Procedures
- Code of Behaviour
- Wellbeing Promotion Policy
- Guidance Plan
- Critical Incident Policy

- ICT and Acceptable Use Policy
- Substance Use Policy
- Special Educational Needs Policy
- Admissions Policy
- Dignity at Work and Equality Policies

Policy Review

This policy will be reviewed every two years or earlier where:

- legislative or curricular changes occur
- Department of Education or NCCA guidance changes
- school evaluation or consultation indicates a need for review

The review process will involve:

- school management
- SPHE/RSE teachers
- Board of Management