



Glenstal Abbey
SCHOOL

Relationships & Sexuality Education (RSE) Policy

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Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) Policy

Introduction

The RSE policy is a written statement of the aims of the RSE programme, the relationship of RSE to SPHE, and the organisation and management of RSE within the school. It is hoped to implement this policy after consultation between the SPHE Department Teachers, the Headmaster and Deputy Principal, the Board of Management and the Student Council.

School Information

Glenstal Abbey School is a post-primary boarding school for boys located in Murroe, Co Limerick. We are committed to providing a holistic education with the aim of developing the academic, cultural, sporting, moral and spiritual needs of our students.

In Glenstal Abbey School, what we seek to do above all is to encourage all to achieve the fullest potential that God has granted them, utilising all their talents to the full benefit of all. The life of the school is structured “so that the strong have something to strive for and the weak nothing to run from” (*Rule of Saint Benedict [RB] 64.19*).

With this in mind, it is our intention that everyone feels valued and our pupils are encouraged to develop their full potential in a caring and supportive environment. In partnership with our Board of Management and Student Council we have devised comprehensive policies and procedures which deal with discipline, bullying and other issues affecting the welfare of students.

Relationship of RSE to the School’s Mission Statement

Glenstal Abbey School exists in order to help young men grow in knowledge and grace. Grounded in the Catholic faith and the Benedictine intellectual tradition, the school seeks to foster:

- Reverence for God and the human person.
- Respect for learning and order.
- Responsibility for the shared experience of community life.

Glenstal Abbey School is committed to providing the best educational formation possible for all our students. We aim to provide an education for all students which will embrace their full human development: personal, academic, physical, moral and religious. Relationships and Sexuality Education encompasses the development of attitudes, beliefs and values about relationships, sexual identity and intimacy, contributing towards the full human development of the student. As outlined by the Department of Education and Skills in Circular 0037/2010, no aspect of the RSE programme including STIs, contraception, or sexual orientation can be omitted on the grounds of religious ethos. As we seek to promote the overall development of the student, this involves the integration of Relationships and Sexuality into personal understanding, growth and development within the context of our holistic educational ethos.

Scope

To what and to whom will the policy apply?

The policy will apply to school staff, students, Board of Management, parents/ guardians, visiting speakers and external facilitators.

The policy will apply to all aspects of teaching and learning about relationships and sexuality. Discussion about relationships and sexuality also takes place in classes other than SPHE/ RSE; it is therefore important that all teachers are familiar with the RSE policy.

Definition of RSE

Relationship and Sexuality Education encompasses the acquisition of knowledge and understanding, and the development of attitudes, beliefs and values about relationships, sexual identity and intimacy. Relationships and Sexuality Education seeks to provide students with opportunities to acquire knowledge and understanding of relationships and human sexuality, through processes which will enable them to form values and establish behaviours within a moral, spiritual and social framework.

Goals/Objectives

1. Relationship of RSE to SPHE

The Education Act (1998) emphasises that schools are obliged to promote the social and personal development of students and provide health education for them. As part of the SPHE programme students are encouraged to develop their own self confidence and build relationships with others. The aim of the SPHE programme is to promote physical, mental and emotional health and well-being. It also encourages the development of a healthy attitude to sexuality. Relationships and Sexuality are key elements of healthy social and personal development in all our lives, but particularly in the life of an adolescent. The RSE programme is designed to specifically deal with these issues and encourage students to deal with their own sexuality and develop relationships. RSE is one of the ten modules to be taught in SPHE at junior cycle and is mandatory for all year groups from first year to sixth year. The course will be developmental in nature and will be age appropriate.

2. Aims of the RSE programme

Relationships and Sexuality Education Programme will be taught as part of the SPHE Programme. The aims of RSE are:

- To help students understand and develop friendships and relationships.
- To promote an understanding of sexuality.
- To promote a positive attitude to students own sexuality and in their relationships with others.
- To promote knowledge of and respect for reproduction.
- To enable students to develop attitudes and values towards their sexuality in a moral, spiritual and social framework.
- To provide opportunities for pupils to learn about relationships and sexuality in ways that encourage them to think and act in a moral, caring and responsible way. It is acknowledged that these aims are aspirational due to the time constraints of the course.

Key Measures

1. Provision of training & staff development

A number of staff members have attended training in SPHE and RSE and management will continue to support staff training in this area.

2. Inclusion of parents/guardians

It is recognised by the school that the parents/guardians are the primary educators for our students and their role in education concerning relationships and sexuality is seen by the school as very important.

There will be information provided for parents about the content and the timing of the RSE module, in the induction pack for first years or at the start of the academic year. Informing parents/guardians of when these topics are being taught in school will enable them to discuss any further issues at home. The RSE policy will be available to download on the school's website for parents/guardians.

The RSE policy has been designed in consultation with a parent representative of the school and the views of the parents/guardians have been taken into account before ratification of this policy. Parents/guardians views may also be taken into account when reviewing the policy.

3. Ethical/Moral considerations:

Answering questions: While it is important to create an environment in SPHE/RSE in which students can discuss issues openly, teachers may not be able to answer all questions asked by students and can set limits. It may not be appropriate to deal with a student's explicit questions in a classroom situation e.g. questions on oral sex or abortion. The teacher may say that it is inappropriate to answer the question in class and may exercise his/her professional judgement, guided by the age of the students, in deciding whether to answer the question privately after class has finished. If a teacher becomes concerned about a matter that has been raised, he/she should seek advice from the DLP.

Confidentiality: Students should be asked not to disclose personal information in SPHE/RSE class. It is important that students are made aware of the limits of confidentiality. Teachers cannot guarantee confidentiality. Pupils must be informed that if a teacher becomes aware that a pupil is at risk of abuse, or in breach of the law, this information will be conveyed to the Headmaster and the appropriate action will be taken, as set down in the *Child Protection Procedures for Post-primary Schools (2011)*.

Sexual Activity: Students should be made aware that, following the passage of the Criminal Law (Sexual Offences) Act 2006, the age of consent for sexual activity for both males and females is 17 years of age in the Republic of Ireland. In circumstances where a teacher becomes aware that a pupil is engaging in underage sexual activity, the teacher must refer this immediately to the designated liaison person (DLP) ie the Headmaster.

Offering Advice: The school's function is to provide a general education about sexual matters and not to offer individual advice or counselling on aspects of sexual behaviour. However, teachers may provide pupils with education and information about where and from whom, they can receive confidential sexual advice and treatment, eg their doctor. Advice offered should not be directive and should be age appropriate to the student.

Family planning/Contraception: The subject of family planning is covered within the senior cycle RSE programme. However, the topic may need to be addressed before senior cycle. Students will be provided with information about methods of 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.

Homosexuality: The subject of sexual orientation is included in the RSE curriculum at senior cycle. The topic may need to be addressed before senior cycle. Discretion will be used with regard to the age at which students discuss homosexuality and it should be discussed in a clear and open manner and in a non-directive way.

Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs): While awareness of STIs is one of the objectives of the second year SPHE/RSE syllabus, STIs are mainly addressed in senior cycle. This topic will be dealt with in an age appropriate, open manner.

4. Practical issues:

SPHE is timetabled once a week for all junior cycle students. RSE is taught as a module over six class periods within the SPHE programme. Senior cycle students receive RSE lessons in one class per fortnight, within the two-week rotating timetable. SPHE/RSE is also delivered within the Transition Year programme as a weekly class. RSE/SPHE class groups may contain as many as 20 students. Boys will be taught together in their class groups.

Withdrawing pupils from the RSE programme

The school recognises that the parent/guardian has the right to withdraw their child from the RSE class if they wish to do so. The Headmaster may wish to ask the parents/guardians to put their request in writing or the parent/guardian may be invited to discuss this with the Headmaster and/or SPHE coordinator. We respectfully invite the parent/guardian to give reasons for withdrawal as sometimes this can resolve misunderstandings. Parents may be offered access to appropriate information or resources.

Special Needs: Students with special needs may need more help than others in coping with the physical and emotional aspects of growing up: they may also need help in learning what behaviours are and are not acceptable.

Using visiting speakers: The RSE programme will be delivered openly by trained teachers who are known and trusted by pupils. However visitors may enhance the quality of the provision as long as they are used in addition to, not instead of a planned programme of RSE. The visitor will be provided with a copy of the RSE policy prior to the visit. A member of teaching staff will be present with the visitor during the talk to ensure that our RSE policy is strictly adhered to.

Resources: Resources are available to teachers of SPHE/RSE in the form of textbooks, workbooks, appropriate DVDs, brochures etc. Supplementary resources are stored in the SPHE storage area outside the staff room and are available for teachers who wish to use them. Students are supplied with an SPHE individual student folder to keep a record of their work and other supplementary materials used in their classes.

Links to other School Policies

It is imperative that all school policies are consistent with one another and cohesive within the framework of the overall school plan. The RSE policy is developed in this context and takes into consideration the following policies

- o SPHE Policy
- o Substance Use Policy
- o Anti-Bullying Policy
- o Child Protection Guidelines

Teachers of the relevant subject areas, such as Science and Religious Education will be informed of the content, and the timing of the delivery of RSE, and in so far as possible, RSE will be taught in a cross-curricular way.

Roles and responsibilities in implementing policy

All partners, including Board of Management, Parents/Guardians, School Management and teaching staff, have roles and responsibilities in ensuring the implementation of the RSE Policy in our school. Teachers delivering the RSE programme will attend training provided by the SPHE support service.

Reviewing and Evaluating the RSE Policy:

We are committed to monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of this policy. A review of the RSE policy will take place on a regular basis and may include:

- (a) Pupil feedback (*ie* student council, survey of students, suggestion/comment box etc.)
- (b) Staff review and feedback,
- (c) Parental/guardian feedback
- (d) Feedback from representatives of the Board of