



St. Columba's College

Relationships & Sexuality Education Policy

Updated December 2025, next due for review December 2026

Person Responsible for updating policy: Head of RSE

Our School Philosophy

The mission of St Columba's College is to aim to provide the best possible secondary education within a community that values and respects the Christian principle in a mainly boarding co-educational environment. Whilst the ethos is that of the Church of Ireland, the College has a vision of ecumenism which welcomes, values and respects pupils of other nationalities, denominations and religions.

All pupils are equally valued, irrespective of sex, social background, family circumstances, educational achievement, physical characteristics or intellectual functioning. Pupils experience a sense of caring and belonging. They are treated fairly. Their spiritual and moral development is encouraged alongside their intellectual, social and academic development.

Definition of Relationships & Sexuality Education (RSE)

Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) is a lifelong process of acquiring knowledge and understanding and of developing attitudes, beliefs and values about sexual identity, relationships and intimacy. This education is delivered consciously and unconsciously by parents, teachers, peers, adults and the media.



While parents are the primary and natural educators of their children, the College has a role to play in supporting and complementing the work of the home in this task. RSE will provide structured opportunities for pupils to acquire a 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. Pupils will be provided with information and skills to critically evaluate the wide range of information, opinions, attitudes and values offered today and so make positive, responsible choices for themselves and the way they live their lives.

Relationship of RSE to SPHE

The general aim of education is to contribute towards the development of all aspects of the individual, including the aesthetic, creative, cultural, emotional, intellectual, moral, physical, political, social and spiritual development for personal and family life, for living in the community and for leisure.

Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) provides pupils with a unique opportunity to develop the skills and competencies to learn about themselves, to care for themselves and others, and to make informed decisions about their health, personal lives and social development. In this way, pupils are enabled to participate as active and responsible adults in the personal and social dimensions of society and to make responsible decisions which respect their dignity and that of others.

SPHE is the main focus of the school's RSE programme, supported by the whole school climate and cross-curricular opportunities. SPHE is spiral and developmental in nature and age appropriate in content and methodology. RSE follows this principle and pattern. SPHE deals with issues such as self-esteem, assertiveness, communication and decision-making skills, all of which can contribute to the effectiveness of the RSE programme. RSE is taught as an integral part of the SPHE programme in Forms I – VI.

The aims and objectives of the RSE programme.

The overall aims of the RSE programme as an element of SPHE are:

1. to enhance the personal development, self-esteem and well-being of the pupil.
2. to help the pupil to understand and develop friendships and relationships.
3. to enable the pupil to develop positive attitudes and values towards his/her sexuality in a moral, social and spiritual framework.
4. to promote a positive attitude to his/her relationships with others.
5. to enable the pupil to acquire an understanding of, and respect for, human love, sexual
6. relationships and reproduction.
7. to enable the pupil to develop a tolerant and non-condemnatory attitude.



The objectives of the RSE programme are to enable the pupil:

1. to acquire the understanding and skills necessary to form healthy friendship and relationships.
2. to develop a positive sense of self-awareness and the skills for building and maintaining self-esteem.
3. to become aware of the variety of ways in which individuals grow and change, especially during adolescence and to develop respect for difference.
4. to understand human physiology with particular reference to the reproductive cycle, human fertility and sexually transmitted infections.
5. to understand sexual development and identity and explore aspects of sexuality including sex roles, stereotyping, gender issues and cultural influences on sexuality.
6. to value family life and to appreciate the responsibilities of parenthood.
7. to develop strategies for decisions and actions consistent with personal moral integrity and respectful of the rights and dignity of others.
8. to develop skills for coping with peer pressure, conflict and threats to personal safety.

Some of these objectives are supported by the other elements of SPHE, by the broader curriculum and the whole school climate. Consultation has taken place with teachers of related subjects in the development of this policy statement.

As a boarding school, we recognise that all staff, particularly Housemasters, House Tutors and our medical team, have a very important role in supporting our pupils in their personal development.

The management and organisation of the RSE in the College.

The RSE programme is delivered during at least 6 class periods per year to all forms. Pupils receive information that is appropriate to their age and level of development. By its nature, RSE explores issues which give rise to differing views and sensitivities. Such issues will be covered with the school philosophy and ethos in mind.

SPECIFIC ISSUES:

Policy on outside visitors:

It is the policy of the College that the RSE programme will be delivered by the teachers. The combined skills and talents of the teaching staff will be fully utilised in the implementation of the programme. In certain instances, it may be considered appropriate to invite specialists to participate in the programme. When engaging external facilitators, the best practice criteria as outlined in DES Circular No. 0043/2018 are followed.

Ongoing support:

Teachers will attend regular training as necessary from the SPHE teachers' profession network and other relevant organisations.



Monitoring and Evaluation

Evaluation of the programme is on-going. As a result of evaluation the programme is reviewed at the end of each school year. Any amendments necessary as a result of this review will be undertaken.

Pupils record their own perceived progress in a given skill through questionnaires, worksheets and personal reflection exercises. Their work and skills are assessed by teachers through specific tasks, prep or project work.