



St Louis High School Relationships and Sexuality Education Policy Statement

Enacted after consultation between staff, parent representatives, Principal and Board of Management.

In this policy document all references to gender are taken to be inclusive and the term "parent" is taken to include "guardian".

A. *St Louis High School*

1. The school is an all-girls' post primary, academically non-selective day school, with an enrolment varying between 630 and 670 pupils.

B. *St Louis High School's Philosophy*

Mission Statement

St Louis High School is a dynamic centre of learning where we foster a happy and secure environment.

We nurture creativity and embrace diversity while building on our rich traditions in an atmosphere of generosity.

We share in the journey towards deeper understanding in this complex world.

1. The school encourages its pupils to consider and assess different viewpoints in relation to issues of morality. The experience gained through the working out of this policy and through respecting the needs of minority groups and individuals enriches the whole life of the school.
2. The school gives its pupils the opportunity to explore the humanities, sciences, arts and business studies. In addition it provides religious, moral and physical education in order to meet its founding objectives of supporting pupils 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 after consultation with parents, staff and pupils and the following excerpts illustrate how the ethos of the school operates on a daily basis:

Students will at all times show respect for themselves, all members of the school community and its environment.

As a school community we aim to create a positive learning environment. The purpose of the Code of Behaviour is:

- To make school safe for all
- To ensure effective teaching and learning
- To facilitate academic success for students
- To allow for the holistic development of students

C. Definition of Relationships and Sexuality Education

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

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

1. The *Draft Guidelines for RSE* (NCCA, June 1995, 1.2) state that Social Personal and Health Education 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 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. The aims of our Relationships and Sexuality Education programme

1. Relationships and sexuality education which is located in the overall framework of Social, Personal and Health Education, has as its specific aims:
 - a) To help pupils understand and develop friendships and relationships
 - b) To promote an understanding of sexuality
 - c) To promote a positive attitude to one's own sexuality and in one's relationship with others
 - d) To promote knowledge of and respect for reproduction
 - e) To enable pupils to develop attitudes and values toward their sexuality in a moral, spiritual and social framework in keeping with the ethos of the school
 - f) 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.

F. *Guidelines for the management and organisation of Relationships and Sexuality Education in our school*

1. Arrangements regarding the teaching of the programme and the deployment of staff will be made by the Principal.
2. **Informing and Involving Parents:**
Parents are the primary educators of their children and their role in education concerning relationships and sexuality is seen by the school as very important. This policy has been designed in consultation with Staff and Parents' Council representatives and the views expressed by parents will be taken into account when reviewing the policy. A copy of this policy will be made available to any parent on request to the school Office.
3. **Offering Advice:**
The school's function is to provide a general education about sexual matters and issues and not to offer individual advice, information or counselling on aspects of sexual behaviour and contraception - however sources of professional information and advice will be identified when appropriate.
4. **Explicit Questions:**
It may not be appropriate to deal with some explicit questions in class. Teachers may choose to say that it is not appropriate to deal with that question at this time. If a teacher becomes concerned about a matter that has been raised he/she should seek advice from the SPHE Co-ordinator or the Principal. When deciding whether or not to answer questions, the teacher should consider the age and readiness of the students, the RSE programme content, the **ethos of the school** and the RSE policy.
5. **Confidentiality and Reporting:**
It is school policy that in circumstances where a pupil is considered at some risk of any type of abuse or in breach of the law, the teacher, as a mandated person, must refer this immediately to the Principal/Designated Liaison Person. The Principal, in consultation with the teacher (mandated person), will follow Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools 2017 when and where appropriate.

The following is also school policy:

- a) teachers must not promise absolute confidentiality;
- b) pupils must be made aware that any incident may be conveyed to the Principal/DLP and possibly to parents if the Principal/DLP decides that it is in the best interests of the pupil to notify parents;
- c) teachers must use their professional judgement to decide whether confidence can be maintained having heard the information;
- d) teachers must indicate clearly to students when the content of a conversation can no longer be kept confidential - the student can then decide whether to proceed or not.

The Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary schools 2017 states in 4.1., 4.2.1, 4.2.2 & 4.2.3

4.1.1 The Children First Act 2015 has placed a statutory obligation on specific people to report child protection concerns that are at or above the threshold of harm (as defined in that Act) to Tusla. Such persons are referred to as 'mandated persons' under the Act. All teachers who are registered with the Teaching Council are mandated persons under the Children First Act, 2015.

4.2.1 In accordance with the best practice (non-statutory) requirement of the Children First National Guidance 2017, these procedures continue the previous requirement that any member of school personnel including a registered teacher who received an allegation or has a suspicion that a child may have been, is being, or is at risk of being abused or neglected, is still required to report the matter, without delay, to the DLP in the school.

Every registered teacher, as a mandated person now also has a statutory obligation to make his or her own mandated report to Tusla where the concern about the child is at or above a threshold of harm as defined in the Act. Therefore in addition to reporting his or her concern to the DLP, a registered teacher must also consider whether or not the concern is at or above the defined threshold of harm at which the registered teacher has his or her own statutory obligation under the Children First Act 2015, to submit a mandated report to Tusla.

4.2.2 Every registered teacher should note that as a mandated person the statutory obligation under the Children First Act 2015 to make a mandated report to Tusla rests with the individual teacher and this applies regardless of whether or not the DLP reports the concern in question. However, a registered teacher who makes a mandated report to Tusla jointly with the DLP meets his or her statutory obligation to report to Tusla under the Children First Act 2015.

4.2.3 Registered teachers as mandated persons have two main statutory obligations under the Children First Act 2015 and they are:

- (a) to report any knowledge, belief or reasonable grounds to suspect that a child has been harmed, is being harmed or is at risk of being harmed to Tusla, and
- (b) to assist Tusla in assessing a concern which has been the subject of a mandated report, if requested by Tusla in accordance with the Act.

6. **The division between biological and non-biological aspects of sex education:**

The Science and Home Economic Departments primarily cover the curriculum content that deals with biological aspects of reproduction. All students study Science for the Junior Cycle Profile of Achievement (JCPA).

7. **Withdrawing pupils from the RSE programme:**

1. Relevant sections of this policy are made available to parents on request. Details about the parent's right to withdraw their child from sensitive aspects of RSE will be provided in advance of delivery of same. Parents will always be provided with a full copy of this policy following a request to do so.
2. Issues such as over population and birth control are met in a minor way in subjects such as Geography and Development Education. However, as any discussion is limited and set within the context of the other subject concerned, it does not constitute part of the RSE Programme.
3. Parents do not have to give reasons for withdrawal, but we respectfully invite them to do so - sometimes we can then resolve misunderstandings. Once a parent's request to withdraw is made, that request must be complied with until revoked by the parent. (See also appendix 1)

8. **Using visiting speakers and others**

- a) It is school policy that most of the RSE programme is best discussed openly with teachers who are known and trusted by the pupils. However visitors can enhance the quality of the provision as long as they are used in addition to, not instead of a planned programme of RSE.
- b) The SPHE Team will provide the visitor, well in advance of the visit, with a copy of this RSE policy. After gaining approval from the Principal for the visit, the organiser makes the visitor aware of the ethos of the school and the manner of delivery of the RSE programme. Issues to consider are:
 - i) the degree of explicitness of the content and presentation;
 - ii) will the visitor be accompanied by teaching staff?
 - iii) will the staff take an active role in the visitor's activities?
 - iv) how will the visitor be prepared for the visit?
 - v) how will the visit be built upon and followed up?
- c) Visitors should be given advance notice of the composition of the class and an idea of how their contribution fits into the scheme of work.
- d) The Office should be informed of the date and name of the visitor.

- e) Where applicable, refreshments should be arranged with the catering staff.
- f) The visitor should be welcomed at the main door.
- g) At the end of the session a vote of thanks should be given by a pupil and the visitor escorted to the main door after refreshments.
- h) A written acknowledgement of their contribution should be sent to the visitor and could appear in the School Newsletter.

9. **Sexual Orientation**

Teachers do not promote any one life-style as the only acceptable one for society and therefore it is inevitable and natural that sexual orientation will be discussed during a programme of sex education. One of the advantages of exploring issues concerning sexual orientation is the opportunity to correct false ideas, assumptions and address prejudice. Discussion of sexual orientation should be appropriate to the age of the pupils.

10. **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.

11. **Special Needs**

Children with special needs may need more help than others in coping 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, and in being warned and prepared against abuse by others.

G. *Ongoing support, development and review*

Training:

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, an ability to deal with questions openly/honestly and a preparedness to refer to more expert advice if necessary. The skills acquired in general teaching apply also to health education. Furthermore, many teachers have training in related areas such as counselling. Some teachers have expert training in the specific areas of health, relationships and sexuality education and will be encouraged to support other teachers.
2. The school will facilitate teachers to obtain expert training in this field, bearing in mind the overall budgetary framework and the need for the ongoing teaching and learning programme of the school to continue with as little disturbance as possible.

Resources:

The school will purchase appropriate RSE teaching materials which have been identified by staff as useful and which have been approved by the Principal, within the normal budgetary framework and as general school

resources allow.

Monitoring, evaluating and reviewing the RSE programme:

We are committed to monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of this programme. Specifically important to the RSE Programme are:

- a) pupil feedback;
- b) staff review and feedback;
- c) parental feedback.

Reviewed and Ratified by the Board of Management November 2018

Chairperson BoM *Marianne Mooney* Date: 28/11/18

Appendix 1

What we 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 and if appropriate attempt to reassure them (initially such discussion takes place at a meeting with the Year Head and SPHE Co-ordinator, the Principal may become involved if necessary)
- b) we consider whether the programme can be explained further in a way that will reassure parents - care is 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 - we therefore attempt 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.