

## **Heywood Community School - Relationships and Sexuality Education Policy.**

Heywood C.S., Ballinakill, Co. Laois.

087-5733333

School role number: 91427C

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

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

### **Mission Statement**

'Heywood Community School provides an educational setting in which, the person is encouraged to grow at every level - personally, academically, spiritually, socially and culturally.'

### **Our School Philosophy**

In fulfilling its mission, the school nurtures and affirms the uniqueness and full development of each individual. It promotes the personal and emotional development of students, staff and management in a caring and respectful environment. The school ethos respects the dignity of each person by listening to their views and encouraging them to question and search for meaning.

Mindful of our role in the education of young people, the school endeavours to provide a learning and teaching environment that encourages students to give due importance to their studies and promotes educational excellence. Day-to-day classroom work is enhanced by field studies projects and scheduled professional direction on study methods and examination techniques.

The ethos seeks also to awaken spirituality in all members of the school community. It strives to establish the school as a witness to the reign of God and the gospel values and will nurture the Christian faith through RE classes, annual retreats and through providing opportunities for spiritual engagement (prayer services, prayer opportunities), while at the same time demonstrating a spirit of tolerance of the religious beliefs of others, facilitating them in whatever way possible in the practices of their own faiths.

In living the ethos, the school will raise awareness, develop a concern and support for the vulnerable and disadvantaged in society. It will promote an awareness of justice and equality and establish a positive attitude towards the social inclusion of minority groups in a multicultural society. It will attempt to develop a community, which facilitates the development of a spirit of service and care in which parents, guardians, educators and young people work together for the good of the school, the community and the environment.

Heywood Community School recognises the importance of cultural and extra-curricular activities for all. This incorporates respect for our national language, our heritage, our sporting,

artistic and musical interests and our sense of national community and school pride. A cultural and extra-curricular programme is offered and all students are encouraged to participate.

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

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. It involves teaching and learning about all aspects of relationships and sexuality in an age and stage appropriate manner.

### **Relationships and Sexuality Education within Social, Personal and Health Education.**

The draft guidelines for RSE (NCCA, June 1995, 1.2) state that Social, Personal and Health Education is “spiral, developmental in nurture 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 areas 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.

This strand explores the cognitive, physical, emotional and social aspects of relationships and sexuality through a positive, inclusive, rights and responsibilities-based approach. The focus is on family relationships, friendships, romantic and potential sexual relationships in the future.

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 and help them think and act in a moral, caring and responsible manner.

At post-primary level, this means building on the primary programme and providing young people with information and skills to critically evaluate the wide range of information, opinions, attitudes and values offered today, and so make positive, responsible choices about themselves and the way they live their lives.

In the school setting, RSE will be taught in the context of Social, Personal and Health Education.

### **The aims of our RSE and Sexuality Education programme**

Relationships and sexuality education, which is located in the overall framework of Social, Personal and Health Education, has as its specific aims:

- To help pupils understand and develop friendships and relationships.

- To promote an understanding of sexuality.
- To promote knowledge of and respect of reproduction.
- To enable pupils to develop attitudes and values towards their sexuality in a moral, spiritual and social framework, in keeping with the policy of the school.
- To provide opportunities for pupils to learn about relationships and sexuality in ways that help them think and act in a normal in a moral, caring and responsible way.

Overall, this course aims to build students' self-awareness and positive self-worth; to develop the knowledge, understanding, skills, dispositions and values that will support them to lead fulfilling and healthy lives; empower them to create, nurture and maintain respectful and loving relationships with self and others; and enhance their capacity to contribute positively to society.

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

### **The aims of our RSE and Sexuality Education programme under the 2023 Specification for Junior Cycle**

#### **Students should be able to:**

- 3.1 Reflect on the values, behaviours and skills that help to make, sustain and end relationships respectfully with friends, family and romantic/intimate relationships.
- 3.2 Examine benefits and difficulties experienced by young people in a range of relationships – friendships, family relationships, and romantic/intimate relationships.
- 3.3 Identify signs of healthy, unhealthy and abusive relationships.
- 3.4 Appreciate the importance of setting healthy boundaries in relationships and consider how to show respect for the boundaries of others.
- 3.5 Consider the importance of taking care of their reproductive health.
- 3.6 Appreciate the breadth of what constitutes human sexuality, and how sexual orientation and gender identity are experienced and expressed in diverse ways.
- 3.7 Explore the pressures to become sexually intimate and discuss ways to show respect for people's choices.
- 3.8 Appreciate the importance of seeking, giving and receiving consent in sexual relationships from the perspective of building caring relationships and from a legal perspective.
- 3.9 Explain the importance of safer sexual activity with reference to methods of contraception and protection against sexually transmitted infections (STIs).

3.10 Discuss the influence of popular culture and the online world, in particular, the influence of pornography, on young people's understanding, expectations and social norms in relation to sexual expression.

3.11 Demonstrate how to access and appraise appropriate and trustworthy advice, support and services related to relationships and sexual health.

This strand is underpinned by three cross-cutting elements that are foundational for effective teaching and learning in SPHE. These are:

- Awareness
- Dialogue
- Reflection and action.

### **Awareness**

Awareness is the ability to understand one's own thoughts, emotions, values and behaviour. It includes understanding how different factors influence our sense of self and how we live our lives, including the influence of family, peers, the internet, gender, culture and social norms. This element also includes an awareness that to be human is to be in relationships and that we all share a common humanity and dignity, have rights and responsibilities.

### **Dialogue**

Through dialogical teaching and learning students are facilitated to engage with a diversity of viewpoints; discuss and reflect on their own perspectives, values, and behaviours and those of others; enlarge their understanding of topics of relevance to their lives; and come to informed, thoughtful decisions based on their personal values, with due regard to their own rights and responsibilities and the rights and responsibilities of others. Respectful dialogue is aided by presuming a diversity of backgrounds, identities, cultures and experiences in every classroom and seeing this as a resource for learning.

### **Reflection and action**

This cross-cutting element focuses on students reflecting on what they have learned and coming to their own personal insights and conclusions in response to their learning. It enables students to consider how the learning can inform their choices, behaviour and relationships, and discerning what it means for their lives now or for the future. Learning in SPHE is a 'praxis'; an ongoing process of critical reflection and action, nurtured by dialogue with others.

2023 Specifications for JC can be viewed via the link below. Page 16 focuses on Strand 3: RSE.  
<https://padlet.com/jct2/teaching-relationships-sexuality-education-across-the-strand-estr79iq2g4m510e/wish/2729895018>

## **Ethical/Moral Considerations: Guidelines for the Management and Organization of Relationships and Sexuality Education in Heywood Community School**

1. Arrangements regarding the teaching of the programme and the deployment of staff will be made by the principal. It is recognised that the success of the programme

depends on the willingness of suitable teachers to deliver the programme. Therefore, consultation must take place between prospective teachers and management and only teachers who are considered suitable and received adequate training to teach the RSE programme. **If any SPHE teacher does not wish to teach the RSE module of the SPHE curriculum, then provisions will be made for the SPHE coordinator or teachers willing and trained in the RSE module to teach it to students at Junior Cycle.**

An SPHE teaching team was established in Heywood Community School in 2019. All JC SPHE classes are taught by members of this team; who have also completed JC RSE training. Two members of the team have also received RSE training for the new 2023 Specification for Junior Cycle. The information and resources gathered during this training was shared with other members of the team.

By 2024/2025, all Senior Cycle SPHE classes and RSE modules will be taught by members of the SPHE teaching team. Currently, the RSE module is delivered to Senior Cycle students through the Religions Education Programme.

The delivery and planning of the RSE programme will be overseen by the SPHE coordinator.

The RSE module is located in the overall framework work of SPHE. Approximately six classes per year will be allocated to the RSE module. Following reflection and review, the JC RSE module commences in the month of January, while the Senior Cycle RSE module commences during the month of November (after the October midterm break).

In organizing the learning environment, the teacher will be careful to create an atmosphere, which respects the privacy of each individual student and treats all students with due sensitivity and care. Active learning methods will be used to ensure that students take personal responsibility for their learning and actively participate in the lessons (e.g. group work, discussion, reflection, role play and project work).

Contemporary topics and issues which may emerge in class will be dealt with by the teacher at a level appropriate to the age and stage of the student and within a framework of the school philosophy.

## **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. Relevant sections of the RSE Policy will be communicated to parents as appropriate. This policy will be designed in consultation with Parents Association 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.

A letter is sent to parents to inform them of the content and commencement of the RSE programme.

### **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. Teachers may provide pupils with education and information about where and from whom they can receive confidential sexual advice and treatment, e.g. their doctor or other suitable agency. Advice offered should not be directive and should be appropriate to the age of the of the pupil

### **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 coordinator or the principal. When deciding whether or not to answer questions that teachers should consider the age and readiness of the students, the RSE programme content, the ethos of the school, and the RSE policy.

### **5. Confidentiality.**

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 must refer this immediately to the DLP or DDLP. The principal will decide whether to inform the parents and/or appropriate authorities and may arrange for counselling.

The following is also school policy:

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

**The Children First: National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children state in Section 4.8.5:**

If a child discloses to a teacher or to other school staff that he or she is being harmed by a parent/carer, or any other person, including another child, the person who receives that information should listen carefully and supportively. This applies equally where the child implies that he or she is at risk of being harmed by a parent/carer, or any other person. It also applies equally if a parent/carer, or any other person discloses that he or she has harmed or is at risk of harming a child. The child should not be interviewed formally; the teacher or the staff member should obtain only necessary relevant facts and if and when clarification is needed. Confidentiality must never be promised to a person making a disclosure subject to the provisions of the Data Protection Acts and their requirements to report to the HSE Children and Family Services must be explained in a supportive manner. The discussion should be recorded accurately and the record retained securely. The teacher or other staff members should then inform the designated liaison person who is responsible for reporting the matter to the HSE Children and Family Services or in the event of an emergency and unavailability of the HSE, to An Garda Síochána.

**6. Withdrawing pupils from the RSE programme.**

- The SPHE programme is mandatory for all students. However, parents have the right to withdraw their child from the RSE module.
- Relevant sections of this policy are made available to parents in the school publication entitled, 'Information for Parents', together with details about the parents' rights to withdraw their child from sensitive aspects of RSE - parents will always be provided with a full copy of this policy following a request to do so.
- 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.

**What we do if a request for withdrawal from the RSC programme is made by a parent?**

- We discuss the nature of the concerns with the child's parent and, if appropriate, attempt to reassure them. Initially, such discussions take place at a meeting with the Year Head/Tutor and SPHE coordinator. The principal may become involved if necessary.
- We consider whether the programme can be amended or improved in a way that will reassure parents. Care is taken not to undermine the integrity of the RSE programme and the entitlement of other pupils. For example, it may be appropriate and desirable

to have single-sex classes for some sections of the RSE programme. For example, the Mindful Cycle Programme.

- We attempt to ensure that where a pupil is withdrawn, there is no disruption to other parts of their education. 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.
- We also point out that pupils may receive inaccurate information from their peers. We offer the parents access to appropriate information and resources.

## **7. Using visiting speakers and others**

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. The SPHE coordinator will provide the visitor, well in advance of the visit, with a copy of the 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) The visitor should be accompanied by a teaching staff.
  - (iii) How the visitor should be prepared for the visit.
  - (iv) How will the visit be built upon and followed up.
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- 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.
  - In order to inform the visitor of the precise requirements of a group and to make better use of the time of the visitor, it is advisable for the group to draw up questions in advance, and these should be forwarded to the visitor. This will help involve the pupils in the visit and will make the experience more relevant for them - it also facilitates planning.
  - The office should be informed of the date and the name of the visitor.
  - Where applicable, refreshments should be arranged with the catering staff.
  - The visitor should be welcomed at the main door.
  - 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.
  - A written acknowledgement of their contribution should be sent to the visitor and could appear in the school newsletter.



Visiting speakers for SPHE are incorporated into Heywood Community School's annual Health and Happiness Week. Such talks include Shout Out, The Shona Project, Teach Tom and The Mindful Cycle Programme.

## **8. Sexuality**

Teachers do not promote any one lifestyle as the only acceptable one for society. In addition to the study of sexual orientation and gender identity, covered in the curriculum, Heywood C.S. also promotes and supports the LGBTQ+ community within our school by part-taking in the national annual STAND-UP WEEK. Through SPHE classes, all year groups become aware of and learn about Homophobic Bullying. This is effectively achieved via PowerPoint, discussion points, YouTube clips, activity sheets and group/pair work activities.

## **9. 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.

## **10. Consent**

In October 2023, the SPHE coordinator and two members of the SPHE teaching team attended the NUIG Active Consent teacher training for senior cycle students.

'The Active\* Consent programme believes that the most effective form of consent education supports young people's sexual health and agency, and is taught through a sex-positive lens that honours their choices – whether or not they choose to become sexually active.'

It is an hour and a half long programme. The initial aim is to roll out the Active Consent programme to 6<sup>th</sup> Year students, during Heywood's Health and Happiness Week in March 2024. Proceeding this, a plan for 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> students to receive this programme will be put in place, in consultation with management.

Heywood's school chaplain and guidance counsellor will be available for an students who may need support for issues that may arise from engaging in the Active Consent programme.

## **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.

**It may be necessary for a key worker or specialist teacher to deliver key messages appropriate to a student's level of development.**

## **Resources:**

The school will purchase appropriate RSE 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.

Below is a link to the SPHE online toolkit where teachers have access to NCCA approved resources.

<https://www.curriculumonline.ie/Junior-Cycle/Short-Courses/SPHE-2023/SPHE-toolkit/>

## **Effective teaching methodologies**

The RSE teacher employs a variety of teaching methodologies related to the class and topic being taught.

The following is an example of the methodologies used:

Lecture, brainstorming, debates (walking/talking), role play, music, problem solving, discovery learning, reading, group work/pair work, class discussions, worksheets, revision aids, guest speakers, questioning (lower and higher order), media learning (YouTube clips), reflective experience through meditation/visualization, personal reflection in reflection diaries, ICT (Socratic quizzes and PowerPoints), project work and case studies.

## **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:

- pupil feedback;
- staff review and feedback;
- parental feedback.


## **Ongoing support, development and review**

### **Training**

- 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. All teachers in the SPHE teaching team have expert training in delivering JC RSE modules. Some of the

Religion teachers have expert training on delivering the TRUST programme to senior cycle students. Teachers who attend training are also encouraged to share resources and help train other teachers.

- The school will facilitate teachers to obtain expert training in this field, bearing in mind the overall budgetary framework and the need for ongoing teaching and learning programme of the school to continue with as little disruption as possible.

<b>Proposed By:</b>	<b>Danielle Doody</b>
<b>Seconded By:</b>	<b>Aine O'Neill</b>
<b>Signature of Chairperson:</b>	
<b>Date:</b>	<b>23<sup>rd</sup> January 2024</b>
<b>Review Date:</b>	