

CBS Thurles Relationships and Sexuality Policy



CBS THURLES

Mission Statement

‘Thurles CBS is a place of learning where students are prepared for adult life, academically, emotionally, spiritually and culturally.

We strive for a safe environment, free from bullying. We aim to promote the Christian values inspired by the vision of Blessed Edmund Rice.

We seek to create an atmosphere of respect for the needs and talents of all members of our school community, while challenging all to reach their full potential’.

Introductory Statement

CBS Thurles is a voluntary second-level school with a Catholic ethos under the trusteeship of ERST. The Relationship and Sexuality Policy (RSE) has been developed following consultation between staff, parents, students, Principal and the Board of Management.

As an Edmund Rice School, CBS Thurles seeks to promote the five key elements of an Edmund Rice School as espoused by the ERST Charter:

- Nurturing faith, Christian spirituality and Gospel-based values
- Promoting partnership in the school community
- Excellence in teaching and learning
- Creating a caring school community
- Inspiring transformational leadership

Definition of Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE):

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.

Policy Context and Rationale

This policy is informed by:

- The schools Mission Statement
- The SPHE Policy
- The Code of Behaviour
- The Child Protection Policy/Child Safeguarding Statement
- Substance Abuse Policy
- Critical Incident Policy
- Data Protection Policy
- Inclusion Policy
- The Whole school Guidance Plan
- The Wellbeing Statement

Relationship to characteristic spirit of the school

The RSE policy acknowledges the importance of RSE being taught in the context of Wellbeing/Religious Education and a whole-school climate that is inclusive and respectful. The policy reflects the educational philosophy of the Christian Brothers, ERST and ethos of the school, as outlined in the school's Mission Statement.

Scope

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. This policy will apply to all aspects of teaching and learning about friendships, relationships and sexuality in CBS Thurles. Discussions about relationships and sexuality also take place in classes other than SPHE/RSE; it is therefore important that all teachers are familiar with

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

Framework

The school recognises that parents are the primary educators of their children and that the home is the natural and primary environment in which RSE should take place. The RSE programme delivered in the school is intended to support and enhance the education provided in the area of relationships and sexuality. While the RSE programme delivered in the school is linked to the school ethos; school management acknowledges and respects the diverse cultural and religious background of its student population.

In CBS Thurles, RSE will be located within the overall framework of SPHE and Religious Education. The specific aims of the RSE programme are:

- To build on the primary school programme which strives to help young people learn at home and at school about their own development and about their friendships and relationships with others.
- To promote an understanding of sexuality.
- To promote a positive attitude to one's own sexuality and to one's relationships with others.
- To promote a knowledge of and respect for reproduction.
- To enable young people 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 helps them think and act in a moral, caring and responsible way.
- To provide young people with information and skills to evaluate critically the wide range of information, opinions, attitudes and values offered today, in order that that they will make positive, responsible, moral, caring and responsible decisions about themselves and the way they live their lives, while also respecting the dignity of others.

Goals/Objectives of the RSE policy

- The RSE policy ensures clarity and consensus on how RSE is taught in CBS Thurles.
- It articulates the relationship of RSE to SPHE.
- It clarifies the rights, roles and responsibilities of all members of the school community in relation to the RSE programme, with particular reference to school staff, students, parents and the Board of Management.
- It ensures that teachers, parents and students understand how the teaching of RSE is linked to the school ethos.
- It provides information on the practicalities of delivering the programme.

However, it is acknowledged that in a course of limited duration some of these aims are aspirational.

Relationship of RSE to SPHE:

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.

Section 4 of the Rules and Programme for Secondary Schools requires schools to have an agreed policy for RSE and a suitable RSE programme in place for all students at both junior and senior cycle. ‘In deciding to include a Relationships and Sexuality Education programme (RSE) as part of Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) in school curricula, the right and duty of parents to provide for the religious, moral, intellectual, physical and social education of their children is acknowledged. While the home is the natural environment in which RSE takes place most parents look to the schools for support in fulfilling their obligations to their children in this area of development. Consequently the school is seen as playing a supportive and complementary role to the home in this task. It is envisaged that this will be achieved by involving parents with management and teachers and, where appropriate, with pupils, in a collaborative exercise towards school policy development’. (*Dept. of Ed. Circular M4/95 RSE*)

It is the responsibility of the Board of Management to ensure that an RSE programme is made available to all students. At Junior Cycle, the RSE programme is part of Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) while at Senior Cycle the programme is delivered within the context of the Religious Education programme. The effectiveness of the RSE programme is dependent on a collaborative policy process involving teachers, parents, students and the Board of Management.

The management of RSE in CBS Thurles

- Arrangements regarding the teaching of the programme and the deployment of staff will be made by the Principal.
- Provision of support, training and staff development includes:
 - The provision of an RSE co-ordinator.
 - Teachers are facilitated to attend RSE and SPHE training.
 - Teaching materials and resources are made available to teachers of SPHE and RSE.
- The Parents’ Council is consulted on the design and review of the RSE policy. The views expressed by parents will be taken into consideration when reviewing the policy.

- Parents have a responsibility to inform themselves of the RSE programme content and to prepare their children for the information they will acquire around the sensitive areas covered in RSE.
- Parents are informed of the RSE aspect of the programme by a written letter prior to the start of the programme.
- The RSE policy is available to all parents on request and parents are asked to familiarise themselves with the policy content.
- While all partners in the school community – teaching staff, students, parents and management – are agreed on the programme, CBS Thurles recognise, nevertheless, the right of any parent who so wishes to request that their child should not participate in the programme.
- Our RSE Programme will be structured with specific involvement and links to subjects such as Religious Education, Science, Biology, Physical Education, CSPE and English.
- The RSE component will take approximately 5-6 classes over each school year.
- Those involved in teaching it will draw up the RSE Programme.
- The programme will be in line with the NCCA Curriculum and Guidelines. The curriculum and the guidelines are available in the school for parents who wish to see them.
- In delivering the programme teachers will show sensitivity to the needs of the group and the school.
- The school's management will provide a commitment to the programme by facilitating its implementation through teacher recruitment and training, ongoing in-service, timetabling and consultation.
- The post holder with responsibility for RSE shall liaise with SPHE teachers. The programme will be delivered by teachers timetabled for SPHE at junior level and by those timetabled for Religious Education at senior level.
- The approach to teaching of topics within RSE will involve giving students clear information, building up their self-esteem and helping them to learn to communicate, to make decisions and to express feelings in an appropriate way.

Withdrawing pupils from the RSE programme

The Education Act (1998; section 30, subsection (2)(e) provides that a student is not required to attend instruction in any subject which is contrary to the conscience of the parents or in the case of a student who has reached the age of eighteen years of age. Parents have a right therefore to withdraw their child from all or any aspect

of RSE. Parents must notify the Principal in advance of the wish to have their child withdrawn from all or part of the programme. The school may ask the parents to put their request in writing. Parents do not have to give reasons for withdrawal, but the school may respectfully invite them to do so - sometimes the school can resolve any misunderstandings that may exist. Once a parent's request to withdraw is made, that request must be complied with until revoked by the parent. Appropriate arrangements shall be made by school management for the accommodation of any student that may be withdrawn from the RSE programme.

The following process takes place if a request for withdrawal from the RSE programme is made by a parent:

- The school shall discuss the nature of the concerns with the parent(s) and, if appropriate, attempt to reassure them about the content of the programme. Initially such discussion takes place at a meeting with the RSE co-ordinator but it may be necessary to also involve the school Principal.
- The school shall consider whether the programme can be amended or improved in a way that will reassure parents. However, care must be taken not to undermine the integrity of the RSE programme and the entitlement of the other students.
- The school shall attempt to ensure that where a student is withdrawn from RSE there is no disruption to other parts of their education.
- The school shall make parents aware that sometimes students withdrawn from the RSE programme feel embarrassed but parents are assured that the school shall make every effort to cause minimal embarrassment to the student and minimal disruption to the programme.
- The school shall also point out that students may sometimes receive inaccurate information from their peers.
- The school shall offer parents access to appropriate information and resources.

Ethical/Moral considerations – Guidelines for teachers

Explicit Questions

It is natural that students should wish to ask questions in the area of RSE. However, it may not be appropriate to deal with some explicit questions in class. While it is important to create an environment in RSE in which students can discuss issues openly, teachers may not be able to answer all questions asked by students and can set appropriate limits. 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 RSE co-ordinator or the Principal. If any questions asked by students are deemed to be inappropriate, the teacher will refer the student to their parents or state that this information may be available at a later stage of the curriculum.

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. With regard to matters of a confidential nature, the school cannot take any responsibility for what is discussed among students outside of the RSE lesson.

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 Principal. The Principal will decide whether to inform the parents and/or appropriate authorities and may arrange for counselling.

Teachers strive to create a safe learning environment for all students. While students should not be encouraged to disclose personal or private information in RSE classes, there may be times when they talk about their own lives. It is important that students are made aware of the limits of confidentiality and that teachers do not give unconditional guarantees of confidentiality. Confidentiality should be respected unless the teacher feels that the child is at risk or where there are reasonable grounds to believe that a law may be broken. In such a case, the appropriate action should be taken in accordance with the procedures set down in the Child Protection Procedures for Post-Primary Schools, the school's Child Protection Policy / Child Safeguarding Statement and the Children First legislation (2017) or the school's Substance Abuse Policy. The teacher must inform the Designated Liaison Person and ensure that all reporting procedures are complied with. The Child Protection Guidelines for Post Primary schools state in 4.1.1. And 4.2.1.:

- 4.1.1. *If a member of staff receives an allegation or has a suspicion that a child may have been abused, or is being abused, or is at risk of abuse he/she should, without delay, report the matter to the Designated Liaison Person in that school. A written record of the report should be made and placed in a secure location by the Designated Liaison Person. The need for confidentiality at all times, as previously referred to in Chapter 1 Paragraph 1.2 of these guidelines, should be borne in mind. The supports of the school should continue to be made available to the child.*
- 4.2.1 *If the Designated Liaison Person is satisfied that there are reasonable grounds for the suspicion or allegation he/she should report the matter to the relevant health board immediately.*

The school adheres to the following guidelines when addressing issues of confidentiality:

- All students are made aware of the limits of confidentiality and that teachers do not give unconditional guarantees of confidentiality.
- Students are informed 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 student to notify parents.
- Teachers must use their professional judgment to decide whether confidentiality can be maintained having heard the information.

- 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

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, sexual identity and gender identity will be discussed during a programme of sex education. One of the advantages of exploring LGBT+ identities and issues is the opportunity to correct false ideas, assumptions and address prejudice. Discussion of sexual and gender identity and sexual orientation should be appropriate to the age of the students. The post-primary RSE Curriculum Guidelines include the subject of sexual orientation.

Sensitive Issues e.g. Sexual Activity, Abortion and Contraception

Sensitive topics will be dealt with in an age-appropriate, open manner, looking at all sides of the issues in a non-directive way, within the context of the school's ethos and DES-NCCA guidelines. RSE teachers give young people information on the age of consent which, following the passage of the Criminal Law (Sexual Offences) Act, 2006, is seventeen years of age for both males and females. The post-primary RSE Curriculum Guidelines state that the subject of family planning should be covered within the Senior Cycle RSE programme. There is a lesson on family planning in the RSE Senior Cycle Resource Materials. The RSE programme requires that young people are provided with information about methods of contraception, and this is done within the values and moral framework of the ethos of CBS Thurles. While awareness of sexually transmitted infections (STIs) is one of the objectives of the Second Year SPHE/RSE syllabus, STIs are mainly addressed in Senior Cycle.

Out-of-School Factors

CBS Thurles recognises the many out-of-school factors which affect the development of a positive attitude to sexuality during adolescence. These include the social lives of students, the relationships they form, their behaviour within these relationships, the peer expectations of relationships, the reading material of students, their exposure to sexually explicit material/pornography on video/smart phones, television and through music. The RSE programme will attempt to heighten the students' awareness of the influences of these forces on the development of their values and attitudes and empower them to make informed decisions and choices.

Students with Special Educational Needs

Students with special educational needs and students with additional educational needs may require more help than others in coping with the physical and emotional aspects of growing up. These students may also need additional support to distinguish between acceptable and unacceptable behaviours.

The RSE programme delivered in the school aims, as far as is practicable to help students with special educational needs to develop the skills necessary to protect themselves from harm and reduce their vulnerability. Teachers delivering the RSE programme shall work closely with the school's learning support/special educational needs team and with parents to tailor the RSE programme to meet the needs of individual students in the area of relationships and sexuality.

Guest Speakers

It is school policy that most of the RSE programme is best discussed openly with teachers who are known and trusted by the students. 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 Co-ordinator / RSE teacher will inform the visitor, well in advance of the visit, of this RSE policy and request that they familiarise themselves with its content. 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.

The RSE teacher should remain in the classroom whilst the speaker is delivering the subject matter in line with Circular 0023/2010 from the Department of Education and Science.

Issues to consider include:

The degree of explicitness of the content and presentation.

Will the teaching staff take an active role in the visitor's activities?

How will the visitor be prepared for the visit? How will the visit be built upon and followed up?

Guest speakers will not meet with any individual student or small group of students in private to discuss or deal with relationships and sexuality.

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, though not mandatory, for the group to draw up questions in advance and these should be forwarded to the visitor. This will involve the students in the visit and will make the experience more relevant for them - it also facilitates planning.

The Principal, Deputy Principal and the Administration Office staff should be informed of the date and name of the visitor.

At the end of the session a word of thanks should be given by a student.
A written acknowledgement of their contribution should be sent later to the visitor.

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 agencies. Advice offered should not be directive and should be appropriate to the age of the pupil.

Ongoing support, development and 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 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 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 the ongoing teaching and learning programme of the school to continue with as little disturbance as possible.

Implementing, Monitoring, Reviewing and Evaluating the Policy

Effective policy requires constant monitoring and evaluation to ensure successful implementation and to review what adjustments may be necessary from time to time.

This policy is ratified by the Board of Management and is the agreed policy of CBS Thurles. All teaching staff must be familiar with this policy and aware of any changes implied in curriculum delivery.

The Board of Management and Senior Management Team are committed to ensuring access to CPD opportunities for all teachers involved in RSE, to providing relevant RSE school resources and to supporting efforts of parents to provide educational opportunities for other parents. Senior Management and the Board of Management facilitate teachers to participate in professional development opportunities, with due regard to the school budget and Supervision/Substitution rota, and the need for the ongoing teaching and learning programme of the school to continue with as little disturbance as possible. Up to date records are maintained of In-Service courses attended by staff. Information received at In-Service will be made available to all relevant teachers.

Any teacher has the right to opt out of teaching the sensitive elements of RSE, following reasonable notification to the Principal. It is the responsibility of the Board of Management to ensure content is covered by another teacher or an outside speaker.

The policy will be reviewed and evaluated at least every two years under the direction of the Board of Management. On-going review and evaluation will take cognisance of changing information, guidelines, legislation and feedback from parents, students, teachers and others. The policy will be revised as necessary in the light of such review and evaluation and within the framework of school self-evaluation and policy planning.

To review and evaluate the policy, it will be necessary to gauge the impact and effectiveness of the policy by examining the extent to which:

- RSE is being successfully taught through SPHE and Religious Education for all relevant students.
- Resource materials are available to teachers.
- The timetable facilitates the implementation of the RSE programme at both Junior and Senior Cycle level.
- Appropriate professional development for teachers is available and relevant teachers are availing of it.
- Staff, students and parents are aware of the policy.
- Feedback is received from teachers, school staff, students, parents, Student Council members and members of the Board of Management.

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.

The following resources are recommended:

- SPHE Resource materials for Relationships and Sexuality Education prepared by the NCCA and approved by the Department of Education and Science (1999)
- Trust (RSE) Senior cycle
- Health and Wellbeing: SPHE 1, 2 & 3
- On your own two feet
- B4U Decide
- Growing up LGBT
- Cancer Awareness Programme
- Mental Health Matters
- Be safe Be wise
- **Web sites:**
- www.sphe.ie
- www.pdst.ie

- www.sess.ie
- www.healthpromotion.ie
- www.webwise.ie
- www.thinkcontraception.ie
- www.tes.ie
- www.ted.ie
- www.Kahoot.ie
- www.mentimeter.ie
- www.teni.ie
- www.crisispregnancy.ie
- www.glen.ie
- www.belongto.org

Approval

This policy has been approved by CBS Thurles Board of Management.

Signed: _____ Date: _____
Chairperson, Board of Management