



ALEXANDRA COLLEGE DUBLIN

Alexandra College Policy on Relationship & Sexuality Education

Relationship to the characteristic spirit of Alexandra College.

Since 1866, Alexandra College has been educating, inspiring and championing outward-looking women of character in a Church of Ireland ethos, influenced by the Quaker values of our founder.

This policy aligns with the characteristic spirit of the school which is set out in our ethos, mission, our values and our educational philosophy.

Our Mission

We are committed to creating and maintaining an inclusive learning environment in which every girl is enabled to know her worth, see the worth of others, and to live each school day well, for her good and for the common good.

It is our hope that every student leaves this College equipped to continue her lifelong learning process joyfully, to carve her own path, to make and sustain relationships, and to make her particular positive contribution to society.

Achievement of our mission requires the full support, engagement and day to day commitment of the whole school community.

Our Educational Philosophy

We believe that:

- learning is questioning, exploring, understanding and sharing
- learning is a challenging and enjoyable lifelong process
- teaching should stimulate, encourage and excite the students
- students benefit from a safe environment in which they can stretch, experiment and discover their potential

We reflect consistently on how we educate and learn so that we facilitate and inspire engaged learners and citizens.

Our Values

Our core values are a daily commitment to a way of being in the world. Together, they provide a framework to help us to think clearly, behave positively, reach sound decisions,

develop our potential, be well, and contribute to the development and wellness of others. We are committed to:

Independent Thinking: We teach our students to know themselves; how to think freely, critically and purposefully; to reason respectfully.

Respect: We respect ourselves, each other and our environment. We acknowledge the perspective, development and contribution of every individual and work together to benefit personal growth and the common good. We create an atmosphere and community of respect, understanding, non-judgmental challenge and encouragement.

Responsibility: We are responsible for ourselves and to society. We encourage our students to create and to take leadership opportunities, to act purposefully with conscience.

Diversity: We value the identity, heritage and culture of every student. We acknowledge and celebrate interconnectivity and the value and challenge of difference.

1. Purpose of the Policy

The purpose of this policy is to:

- a. set out the rationale for the College's Relationship and Education Policy
- b. acknowledge that parents/guardians are the primary educators and that home is a natural environment for Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE)
- c. ensure that students are safe, respectful of themselves and of each other, and that they are equipped to cultivate healthy relationships.

2. Definition of Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE)

Relationships and Sexuality Education is a lifelong developmental process of acquiring knowledge and understanding and of cultivating healthy open attitudes about ourselves and others, sexuality, relationships and intimacy. Alexandra College aims to provide young people with information and skills to evaluate a wide range of information, opinions and attitudes so that they will make positive, responsible, respectful choices about themselves and the way they live their lives.

The RSE programme also provides opportunities for young people to learn about relationships and sexuality in ways that help them think and act in a moral, caring and responsible way.

3. Relationship of RSE to Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE)

The Department of Education and Skills has approved the recommended syllabus for SPHE at Junior Cycle. A lifeskills programme, SPHE, is developmental in nature and age appropriate in content and methodology. It aims to:

- a. enable students to develop personal and social skills
- b. promote self esteem and self confidence
- c. enable students to develop a framework for responsible decision making
- d. provide opportunities for reflection and discussion
- e. promote physical, mental and emotional health and well being.

The Relationship and Sexuality Education Programme forms part of the SPHE programme and is designed to follow the same developmental approach and methodology.

4. Aims of the RSE Programme

RSE comprises part of the content of each module. The methodology includes discussion, group work, music, games, artwork and written work. All students are encouraged to obey the ground rules which include co-operation, respect and confidentiality.

Our RSE programme aims to:

- a. help our students to understand and develop healthy friendships and relationships;
- b. promote an understanding of sexuality;
- c. promote a positive attitude to one's own sexuality and the sexuality of others and to relationships;
- d. promote knowledge of and respect for reproduction;
- e. enable young people to develop healthy attitudes towards their sexuality in a moral, spiritual, emotional and social framework in keeping with the ethos of the school;
- f. provide opportunities for students to learn about relationships and sexuality in ways that may 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.

5. Scope

This policy applies to all aspects of teaching and learning about relationships and sexuality. Discussion about relationships and sexuality also takes place in other classrooms other than SPHE/RSE, so it is important that all teachers are familiar with RSE policy.

This policy will apply to school staff, students, Board of Management, parents/guardians, visiting speakers and external facilitators and will be freely available to all.

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

The school policy is that the Science and SPHE Departments deal with the biological aspects of reproduction.

7. Outside Speakers

Visitors to the classroom can be immensely valuable as part of the SPHE programme. The delivery of the programme remains at all times the responsibility of the teacher. It is recommended that when visitors are used to support SPHE, the SPHE teacher should remain with the class group during the visit.

If engaging outside speakers to address students, staff will take the ethos and values of the school into consideration, direct outside speakers to this RSE policy and remind them that students must be addressed appropriately, relative to the age and life experience of the students.

8. Sexual Activity

Teachers should use their professional judgement, guided by the age of the students, together with the student's emotional maturity, the RSE Curriculum and the RSE Policy for the school, while dealing with the topic of sexual activity. It is advisable that teachers give young people information on the age of consent which, following the passage of the Criminal Law (Sexual Offences) Act, 2006, is 17 years for both males and females.

9. Family Planning

The post primary RSE Curriculum Guidelines state that the subject of Family Planning should be covered within the Senior Cycle RSE Programme. The RSE Programme requires that young people are provided with information about methods of contraception. Teachers should use their professional judgement, guided by the age of the students, together with the student's emotional maturity, the RSE Curriculum and RSE Policy for the school, while dealing with the topic of family planning.

10. Sexually Transmitted Infections

Creating awareness of Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs) is undertaken in second level schools. Information on STIs is mainly addressed in the Senior Cycle. Teachers should use their professional judgement, guided by the age of the students, together with

the student's emotional maturity, the RSE Curriculum and RSE Policy for the school, while dealing with the issue of Sexually Transmitted Infections.

11. 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 and should set appropriate limits. Inappropriate questions will not be answered by a teacher in class. Students may ask questions about issues which are not included on the curriculum. On these and all questions asked, teachers should use their professional judgement, guided by the age of the students, together with the student's emotional maturity, the RSE Curriculum and RSE Policy for the school.

12. Management of Information and Child Protection

It is school policy that if a teacher receives an allegation or has a suspicion that a pupil is being abused (as defined in Children First: National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children), the teacher should, in the first instance, report the matter to the Principal/Designated Liaison Person (DLP) or in exceptional circumstances to the Chairperson of the Board of Management.

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

Teachers must not promise absolute confidentiality. Students must be made aware that any incident may be conveyed to the Principal and possibly to parents/guardians if the Principal decides that it is in the best interests of the student to notify parents. 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.

Where the matter is reported to the Principal/(DLP) and she is satisfied on advice that there are reasonable grounds for the suspicion or allegation, a report should be made in accordance with the school's Child Protection Policy and the requirements of the Department of Education and Skills' Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post Primary.

It is essential that all times the matter be treated in the strictest confidence and not discussed except among the parties mentioned above.

13. Guidelines for the Management and Organisation of RSE in Alexandra College

SPHE incorporating RSE is a Department of Education and Skills approved course. The College will follow the Department of Education guidelines and syllabus as they develop and in accordance with the ethos of the school.

The Principal is responsible for the arrangement of the teaching of the RSE programme and the deployment of staff. Teachers will follow the guidelines and lesson plans drawn up by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA). One timetabled period per week will be allocated to SPHE and out of the SPHE Programme in the year; six timetabled periods will be assigned to RSE. RSE is included in the Transition Year programme. In Fifth and Sixth Year RSE is an integral part of the Religious Education Programme with a minimum of six lessons per year.

Mindful of our responsibility for the moral and spiritual education of Church of Ireland students, 1 of the 6 classes required for RSE may be taken by the school chaplain.

Alexandra College acknowledges the right and duty of parents to provide for the religious, moral, intellectual, physical and social education of their children. Alexandra College will play a supportive and complementary role to the home in its provision of SPHE and RSE. In doing so, we will be sensitive to parents' conscientious or moral objections to the inclusion of their daughters in elements of this programme and, while striving to be sensitive to all, recognise the right of parents, in consultation with the Principal, to act in accordance with their stated beliefs. Sensitive issues will be dealt with appropriately and may be discussed by the policy committee in order to seek clarification of such issues in the light of the ethos of Alexandra College.

14. Links to Other School Policies

All of our school's policies are interconnected and are considered and reviewed by reference to each other. The RSE policy should be considered in conjunction with the Child Protection Policy, the School's Guidance Plan, the Anti-Bullying Policy, the Code of Behaviour and the Internet and Social Media Policy.

15. Measures for Ongoing Support, Development and Review

Alexandra College recognises the importance of having committed, trained staff in the implementation of its SPHE programme. The College encourages and facilitates participation in in-career development opportunities whenever possible. It also aims to provide relevant RSE school resources.

The role of parents in imparting SPHE is the primary one and Alexandra College will seek to support the efforts of parents to provide educational opportunities for other parents through the Alexandra College Parents' Association.

16. Provision of Training and Staff Development

Alexandra College has appointed an SPHE Convenor. SPHE Support Service offers training and support to teachers in both Junior Cycle and Senior Cycle RSE/RE and the school seeks to up skill and train the SPHE/RE teachers in this important area of the SPHE Curriculum on an ongoing basis.

17. Monitoring of Policy

The implementation of the RSE policy will be monitored at SPHE/RSE department meetings and other meetings deemed necessary by the Principal or Board of Management.

18. Evaluating and Reviewing the RSE Programme

The school will review this policy on an annual basis and it will be amended as necessary. Amended statements will be brought to the attention of all parents.