



DOMINICAN COLLEGE

RELATIONSHIPS & SEXUALITY EDUCATION POLICY

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 Dominican College is a voluntary Catholic secondary school for girls under the trusteeship of Le Chéile. We seek to educate within a distinct Catholic ethos while respecting the multi-faith dimension of our society. We recognise the unique character of each student and nurture their spiritual, intellectual and physical growth. We are committed to educating students as people of integrity and responsibility, encouraging them to use their gifts to contribute to a more just society. A spirit of co-operation, respect and understanding is encouraged between staff, students, parents and all those associated with our school. We seek to create an inviting place of learning which promotes respect, appreciation and care for each other and our environment.
- 1.2 This Relationships and Sexual Education policy is a written statement of the aims of the RSE programme, the relationship of RSE to SPHE, and the organization and management of RSE within Dominican College. This policy document has been developed following discussion and input from the various stakeholders: SPHE teachers, the Religion department, CARE Team, the Parents Council, the staff within the school and the Board of Management.

2. SCOPE

- 2.1 The policy will apply to all aspects of teaching and learning about relationships and sexuality within the school. While specific lessons on RSE will primarily take place in SPHE/RSE class, discussion about relationships and sexuality also takes place in other subject areas and contexts. It is therefore important that all teachers be familiar with the RSE policy. Furthermore, the policy will apply to school staff, students, board of management, parents/guardians, visiting speakers and external facilitators.

3. RATIONALE

- 3.1 Sexuality is a key element of healthy social and personal development. Young people are exposed to a wide variety of messages about sexuality and sexual activity. Schools, in

consultation with parents/guardians, need to reflect on how to provide for the needs of their students in this area and to provide them with the knowledge and skills necessary to facilitate a sense of maturity and responsibility in this area.

- 3.2 The effectiveness of an RSE programme is dependent on a collaborative policy process and implementation involving teachers, parents/guardians, members of the board of management and students.
- 3.3 The legal context in which the policy operates is:
- The **Education Act, 1998** which requires that schools should promote the social and personal development of students and provide health education for them.
 - Section 4 of the **Rules and Programme for Secondary Schools** which 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. At junior cycle, the RSE programme is part of Social, Personal, and Health Education (SPHE).
 - Circulars **M4/95** and **M20/96** request schools to commence a process of RSE policy development.

4. RSE & THE SCHOOL VISION AND ETHOS

4.1 Dominican College is a voluntary Catholic secondary school for girls. The school offers a range of post-primary courses. We pride ourselves on the level of support and encouragement given to pupils of all abilities and we strive to help students identify and achieve their potential in terms of academics, sport, the arts and the other areas in which students may be talented. The ethos of the school is one which respects every individual in the school community, promotes an environment which enhances self-esteem, and endeavours to develop the talents and aptitudes of every student. It aims to promote responsible citizenship.

4.2 This RSE policy exists within the context of our school mission which states that:

“Dominican College is dedicated to the holistic development of each student, aiming to foster and develop self-esteem, respect, tolerance and fairness, while valuing individual differences and uniqueness.”

4.3 The fostering of an informed, mature and responsible attitude towards relationships and sexuality serves to enhance the holistic development of each student as well as foster self-awareness, self-esteem and a respect and tolerance for others. RSE therefore plays an important role in the fulfilment of the school mission.

- 4.4 Spiritual, religious, moral and ethical issues will arise when teaching RSE. These issues will be dealt with in a manner which is cognisant of the Catholic, inclusive and tolerant ethos of the school. Teachers of RSE will bear in mind that their role in delivering this programme is to express the views of the whole school community on these sensitive issues and not their own personal views.

5. DEFINITION OF RELATIONSHIP AND SEXUALITY EDUCATION

- 5.1 Relationship and Sexuality Education 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. It is a lifelong process of acquiring knowledge and understanding as well as beliefs and values about sexual identity, relationships and intimacy.
- 5.2 Dominican College aims to provide young people with information and skills to evaluate the wide range of information, opinions, attitudes and values offered today, in order that they will make positive, responsible choices about themselves and the way they live their lives.
- 5.3 The RSE programme also provides opportunities for young people to learn about relationships and sexuality in ways that help them to think and act in a moral, caring and responsible way.

6. AIMS OF THE RSE PROGRAMME

- 6.1 Relationships and Sexuality Education, which is located in the overall framework of Social, Personal and Health Education, has as its specific aims:
- 6.1.1 To help students understand and develop friendships and relationships
- 6.1.2 To promote a healthy understanding of human sexuality
- 6.1.3 To promote a positive attitude to one's own sexuality and in one's relationship with others
- 6.1.4 To promote knowledge of, and respect for, reproduction
- 6.1.5 To enable students to develop attitudes and values toward their sexuality in a moral, spiritual and social framework, and in keeping with the policy of the school
- 6.1.6 To provide opportunities for students to learn about relationships and sexuality in ways which help them to think and act in a moral, caring and responsible way

6.1.7 To foster respect, understanding and tolerance for difference.

7. RELATIONSHIP OF RSE TO SPHE

- 7.1 SPHE promotes the health and well-being of children and young people within school. It looks at issues such as relationships at home and in school, building self-esteem and learning skills of communication, decision making and expressing feelings in an appropriate manner. It is within this context that the RSE programme is primarily delivered within the school.
- 7.2 The Department of Education and Skills has approved the recommended syllabus for SPHE at junior cycle. As a life-skills programme, SPHE aims to:
1. Enable students to develop personal and social skills.
 2. Promote self-esteem and self-confidence.
 3. Enable students to develop a framework for responsible decision making.
 4. Provide opportunities for reflection and discussion.
 5. Promote physical, mental and emotional health and well being.
- 7.3 The RSE programme forms part of the SPHE programme. Junior Cycle SPHE Syllabus states that Social Personal and Health Education is 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. The content of the school's SPHE programme includes a wide range of topics such as self-esteem, self-identity, assertiveness, motivation, effective communication, decision-making skills, bullying, healthy eating, hygiene and safety – all of which can contribute to the effectiveness of the RSE programme.

8. RSE PROVISION

- 8.1 In its broadest sense, RSE is a whole-school responsibility and all members of this community share responsibility for modelling relationships that are characterised by justice and respect.

- 8.2 At a more formal level, RSE is dealt with in the context of certain subjects; Science, Home Economics, CSPE, Religion, and population demographics/social studies within the Geography syllabus.
- 8.3 To ensure an adequate response to the needs of all students, specific provision for RSE is made within the Social, Personal, and Health Education programme and/through the provision of specific RSE courses and workshops.
- 8.4 The content of RSE at post-primary level is described under three themes:
- 8.4.1. **Human Growth and Development:** This theme consists of an age appropriate understanding of the biology and psychology of the human life cycle. This is accompanied by a rationale for responsible behaviour in relationships and sexuality activity.
- 8.4.2. **Human Sexuality:** Sexuality is an integral part of the human personality and has biological, psychological, cultural, social and spiritual dimensions. The theme offers opportunities to develop a holistic understanding of sexuality and identity as contributing to the development of personal well being, enhancing personal and family relationships and ultimately contributing to the well being of society.
- 8.4.3. **Human Relationships:** This theme focuses on the importance of relationships for health and well-being. It examines how one relates to self and others, stressing the importance of self-esteem as a basis for worthwhile friendships and relationships. It addresses issues such as communication, influence, intimacy, sexual attraction and sexual expression in relationships consistent with personal and moral integrity. These themes are neither sequential nor discrete; they merge and overlap with each other. Teaching strategies should reflect this relationship.

9. MANAGEMENT AND ORGANIZATION OF THE RSE PROGRAMME

- 9.1 An SPHE co-ordinator will be appointed each year and will have responsibility, in conjunction with the Principal, for the oversight of the provision of SPHE with the school.
- 9.2 Arrangements regarding the teaching of the programme and the deployment of staff will be made by the Principal.
- 9.3 Parents are the primary educators of their children and their role in education concerning relationships and sexuality is seen by the school as being very important. The RSE policy will be included on the school website at www.taylorshill.ie. This policy was developed following consultation with the parents' council representatives and the views expressed by parents will be taken into account when reviewing the policy.

- 9.4 The school's function in relation to RSE 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 students 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 student.
- 9.5 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 a particular question at that 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.

10. ISSUES OF CONFIDENTIALITY

- 10.1 In accordance with the *Child Protection Guidelines for Post-Primary Schools*, it is the policy of Dominican College, that in circumstances where a pupil is considered to be at some risk of any type of abuse or in breach of the law, the teacher must refer this immediately to the Designated Liaison Person for Child Protection (DLP), or in their absence, the Deputy Designated Liaison Person (DDL). This person will decide whether to inform the parents and/or appropriate authorities.
- 10.2 Teachers must not promise absolute confidentiality. Such a promise cannot be kept if there is any concern about the safety or welfare of the student. In all such cases the DLP or DDL must be informed.
- 10.3 Students must be made aware that any incident may be conveyed to the Principal, DLP and possibly to parents if the Principal decides that it is in the best interests of the student to notify parents.
- 10.4 Teachers must use their professional judgement to decide whether confidentiality can be maintained having heard the information. However, in cases where there is any doubt whatsoever, they must consult with the DLP.
- 10.5 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.
- 10.6 The *Child Protection Guidelines for Post Primary Schools* state in paragraph 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 DLP. 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 as in paragraph 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.”

11. DIVISION BETWEEN BIOLOGICAL AND NON-BIOLOGICAL ASPECTS OF RSE

- 11.1 The school policy is that the Science Department deals primarily with the biological aspects of reproduction, but within the teaching of RSE, biological terms will be used and there may be a cross-over of content within both areas. This may provide an opportunity for cross-curricular co-operation and team teaching.

12. WITHDRAWING PUPILS FROM THE RSE PROGRAMME

- 12.1 This policy, in accordance with the Department of Education and Skills Circular M4/95, recognises that the home is the natural environment in which Relationships and Sexuality Education takes place. It also recognises that most parents look to schools for support in fulfilling their obligations to their children in this area of development. Consequently, Dominican College seeks to play a supportive and complementary role to the home in this task. It is envisaged that this will be achieved by involving parents, management, teachers, and where appropriate, pupils, in a collaborative exercise towards the development of this policy.
- 12.2 In accordance with The Education Act, 1998 (section 30, subsection (2)(e)), the school affirms that a student is not required to attend instruction which is contrary to the conscience of the parent or, in the case of a student who has reached 18 years, the student. Parents thus have a right to opt their child out of the sensitive issues in RSE if they wish to do so. Where this is the case, the school will make alternative arrangements for the student. In such situations, the school will require parents to put their request in writing.
- 12.3 Parents do not have to give reasons for withdrawal, but we respectfully invite them to do so – sometimes we can then resolve misunderstandings.
- 12.4 Issues such as over-population, birth control and other sexual matters are met in a minor way in subjects such as Geography and Religious 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.

- 12.5 Where a request for withdrawal from the RSE programme is made by a parent:
- 12.5.1 The nature of the concerns will be discussed with the parent by the SPHE Co-ordinator, relevant Year Head or member of school management.
 - 12.5.2 Consideration will be given to whether or not the programme can be amended or improved in a way which will reassure the parents. Care will be taken not to undermine the integrity of the RSE programme or the entitlement of the other pupils. Any changes will have to take into account staffing and supervision considerations.
 - 12.5.3 It will be pointed out that by being withdrawn, the pupils may receive inaccurate information from their peers and may be subject to peer teasing.

13. USING VISITING SPEAKERS AND OTHER NON-STAFF MEMBERS

- 13.1 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 and not instead of, a planned programme of RSE.
- 13.2 The SPHE Co-ordinator 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 organizer makes the visitor aware of the ethos of the school and the manner of delivery of the RSE programme. Issues to be considered and discussed by the organizer in consultation with the Principal and SPHE Co-ordinator are:
- i. The degree of explicitness of the content and presentation
 - ii. Will the staff take an active role in the visitor's activities?
 - iii. How will the visitor be prepared for the visit?
 - iv. How will the visit be built upon and followed up?
- 13.3 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.
- 13.4 In order to inform the visitor of the precise requirements of a group and to make better use of the time, it is advisable 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.

- 13.5 Where possible and appropriate, the organiser or another member of staff should be present in the room with the visitor and students. It is, however, recognised that this may not always be desirable or appropriate.

14. GUIDANCE ON ISSUES OF SEXUALITY

- 14.1 The pace of social change in Ireland over the last number of years has been rapid. For many parents, students and teachers, this has resulted in a sense of confusion in relation to sexual mores. This may be further compounded for young people by the influence of various media.
- 14.2 The RSE programme in Dominican College is taught in the context of the school ethos and stresses the importance of taking a mature, responsible, caring and respectful attitude towards sexual activity. Any discussion of sexual activity will take cognisance of the Criminal Law (Sexual Offences) Act, 2006, which specifies that 17 is the legal age of sexual consent for both males and females.
- 14.3 As outlined by the Department of Education & Skills in Circular 0037/2010, no aspect of the RSE programme, including STIs, contraception, or sexual orientation, can be omitted on the grounds of religious ethos. As we seek to promote the overall development of the student, this involves the integration of the RSE programme into the context of our holistic educational ethos.
- 14.4 Teachers do not promote any one lifestyle as the only acceptable one for society, and therefore it is inevitable and natural that issues of sexual preference and identity will be discussed during a programme of sex education. Such discussion is also desirable in the context of the RSE programme as the Equal Status Act, 2000 and the Equality Act, 2004 prohibit discrimination on nine grounds including sexual orientation and the Guidelines state that the omission of preference or identity from the programme may convey an undesirable message to students. Any discussion of such issues should be appropriate to the age of the students. In discussing this area, the RSE programme will provide an opportunity to correct false ideas, assumptions and address prejudice and discrimination.
- 14.5 The Post-Primary RSE Curriculum Guidelines state that the subject of family planning should be covered within the senior cycle RSE programme. The programme requires that young people are provided with information about methods of contraception but consideration should be given to the moral and values framework within which it is taught. The RSE Curriculum Guidelines state that the issue of family planning may be addressed with Junior Cycle students. When this is the case, the topic will be discussed in an age appropriate, open manner, looking at all sides of the issues in a non-directive way.

15. SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS

- 15.1 Students with special educational needs may require more help than others in coping with the physical and emotional aspects of growing up. They may need more help in learning what types of behaviour are and are not acceptable. Such students may also require guidance in being able to identify and respond to potential risks of abuse posed by others.

16. PROVISION OF TRAINING AND STAFF DEVELOPMENT

- 16.1. The school will facilitate teachers to obtain expert training in this field, bearing in mind the overall budgetary framework and the need for the on-going teaching and learning programme of the school to continue with as little disturbance as possible.
- 16.2 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, some teachers may have training in related areas such as counselling and some may have expert training in the specific areas of health, relationships and sexuality education and will be encouraged to train other teachers.
- 16.3 Within budgetary constraints, all resources needed in terms of time, finance and personnel, will be made available to develop and support the RSE programme in the school. The programme will be supported by the SPHE support service and the school's team within the Health Promotion Service of the HSE.

17. MONITORING, EVALUATING & REVIEWING THE RSE PROGRAMME

- 17.1 The implementation of the RSE policy will be monitored by the SPHE/RSE department and where deemed necessary by the Principal or the Board of Management.
- 17.2 Dominican College is committed to monitoring and evaluating on a regular basis the effectiveness of this policy. Review of the policy will include feedback from relevant stakeholders.

Last reviewed and ratified by Dominican College Board of Management on 24th April 2017.