

*Lisnagarvey High School  
Circular No 2015/09*

**RELATIONSHIPS & SEXUALITY  
IN LISNAGARVEY HIGH SCHOOL**

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## **RATIONALE**

Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) is a statutory requirement of the Northern Ireland Curriculum. The School's policy is in line with DE circulars 2001/15, 2010/01 and CCEA's Guidance for Post Primary Schools (2001).

Lisnagarvey High School is a community where we aim to prepare students for the opportunities, responsibilities and experience of adult life. RSE is a lifelong process which encompasses the acquisition of knowledge, understanding and skills and the development of attitudes, beliefs and values about personal and social relationships and gender issues.

Our Relationships and Sexuality Programme acknowledges that sexuality cannot be taught in isolation but should be delivered in the context of relationships, and the moral and value structures of the School. Our sexuality is a central part of who we are and how we see ourselves in relation to others.

Relationships and Sexuality Education should enable pupils to clarify what they believe and why they believe it and to develop a respect for the belief of others. Pupils need opportunities to explore values and attitudes and to consider how they and others are affected by them. It is about empowering young people to make appropriate and informed decisions.

This policy is intended to provide a framework through which young people can develop the skills, attitudes and values necessary to deal with the challenges they will meet in this very sensitive area.

## **CONTEXT - A LEGAL FRAMEWORK FOR RSE**

The Education Reform (Northern Ireland) Order 1989 requires all grant-aided schools to offer a curriculum which:

- promotes the spiritual, moral, cultural, intellectual and physical development of pupils at the school and thereby of society; and
- prepares such pupils for the opportunities, responsibilities and experiences of adult life.

Education is concerned with the personal, social, emotional and vocational preparation and moral development of young people as well as with their academic attainment. RSE is an important part of children's preparation for adult life. It must not be value-free and it should lead to the acquisition of understanding and attitudes which prepare pupils to view their relationships in a responsible and healthy manner.

Lisnagarvey High School's RSE Programme aims to present facts in an objective, balanced and sensitive manner, set within a clear framework of values and an awareness of the Northern Ireland legislation on sexual behaviour. Pupils are encouraged to appreciate the value of a stable family life, marriage and the responsibilities of parenthood.

As they mature, pupils should come to understand the importance of self-restraint, dignity, respect for themselves and others, including those of a different sexual orientation, and acceptance of responsibility.

RSE is taught in a sensitive manner which is in harmony with the ethos of the school and in conformity with the moral and religious principles held by parents and school management

authorities. Teaching takes place within a caring moral context, stressing the importance of stable, loving personal relationships, parental responsibilities and family life.

Through the study of Health Education, children should learn about changes which will occur in their bodies as they grow older. In Primary School they should be prepared for the physical and emotional changes at puberty. As they progress through their school career they will become more aware of their own sexuality and they will require information and guidance in coming to terms with physical and emotional changes and how these affect their feelings towards, and relationships with, other people.

Most parents see the need for their children to have knowledge of, and information about, sexual matters. Some undertake this responsibility in the home; some prefer to share it with the school and other appropriate agencies; others, however, are unable or reluctant to advise their children adequately. As a result, children's knowledge of sexual matters can be acquired in a distorted manner from their peers or other sources. In a society in which sexual conduct is presented openly in the media, young people need both the guidance of sympathetic and well-informed adults and the opportunity to learn about, discuss and reflect upon sexual development in a secure and understanding environment such as that provided by the family and the school.

## **WHY RSE IS REQUIRED IN THE CURRICULUM**

The age at which sexual intercourse first takes place has been decreasing over the past few decades. Some people believe that sex education lessons are responsible for early sexual activity. Research, however, has indicated that those young people for whom the school classroom is the main source of information about sexual matters are no more likely to have had intercourse before the age of 16 than those citing other main sources, i.e., parents, boyfriends or girlfriends, friends.

## **EQUALITY OF PROVISION**

The provision of RSE is an equal opportunities issue. All pupils have a right to education which prepares them for adult life. Statistics given to us by the Health Promotion Agency for Northern Ireland, show that the age at which a young person matures and first becomes sexually active is decreasing. RSE needs to be addressed at both KS3 and KS4 levels.

Pupils with Special Educational Needs have the same needs as other pupils. However, the content and delivery of the RSE Programme may be different. The RSE programme will be tailored to the pupils' needs in terms of content, methodology and the resources used.

## **ROLE OF THE RSE CO-ORDINATOR**

The Co-ordinator has responsibility for all issues related to RSE. This includes:

- Ensuring that the programme is taught effectively and is appropriate to the age and maturity of the pupils.
- Liaising with the Principal, Board of Governors, staff, parents and Health and Educational visitors on RSE matters.
- Attending in-service training and disseminating appropriate information to other members of staff.
- Liaising with outside agencies for curriculum purposes.

## **KEY MESSAGES**

Pupils should be encouraged to have:

- An appreciation of the value of stable family life, marriage, permanent loving relationships and responsibilities of parenthood.
- An appreciation of the value of marriage, family life and permanent loving relationships based on trust and commitment as a realistic alternative to media stereotypes.
- An acknowledgement of singleness and celibacy as equally valuable and fulfilling options.
- Deferment of sexual activity until physically and emotionally mature enough to understand the inherent responsibilities.

## **VALUES**

- Respect for self.
- Respect for others.
- Non-exploitation in relationships.
- Commitment, trust and bonding within relationships.
- Honesty with self and with others.
- Mutuality in relationships.
- An exploration of the right, duties and responsibilities involved in relationships.
- Compassion, forgiveness, mercy and care when people do not conform to their way of life.

## **AIMS**

The programme has been designed to:

- Enhance the personal development, self-esteem and well-being of the pupil.
- Help the pupil to develop healthy and respectful friendships and relationships.
- Foster an understanding of, and a healthy attitude towards human sexuality and relationships in a moral, social and spiritual framework, appropriate to the level of maturity of the pupil.
- Promote responsible behaviour and the ability to make informed decisions.
- Help the pupil to value family life and marriage.
- Appreciate the responsibilities of parenthood.
- Promote an appreciation of the value of human life and the wonder of birth.
- Explore the spiritual, moral and ethical issues surrounding sexuality.
- Develop a respect for their own, and other people's bodies.
- Understand the stages of development from infancy to adolescence to adulthood.
- Develop skills in forming, and maintaining healthy relationships.
- Develop skills in recognising and protecting themselves from abuse.
- Communicate about feelings, sexuality and development using appropriate language.
- Understand the influence of messages from peers and the media on one's own values.
- Develop skills to resist detrimental peer pressure and exert positive pressure on others.
- Prepare pupils to cope with the physical and emotional challenges of growing up.
- Help pupils gain an elementary understanding of human reproduction.
- Give accurate information to correct misunderstanding they may have gained from their peers.
- Help pupils to prepare for adult life.

## **OBJECTIVES**

Develop skills in recognising and protecting themselves from abuse. The RSE programme enables pupils to:

- Acquire and develop knowledge and understanding of self.
- Develop an appreciation of the dignity, uniqueness and well-being of others.
- Develop an awareness of different family patterns.
- Develop personal skills which will help establish and sustain healthy personal relationships.
- Develop skills in recognising and protecting themselves from abuse.
- Understand sexual development and identity and explore aspects of sexuality including sex roles, stereotyping, gender issues and cultural influences on sexuality.
- Understand human physiology with reference to the reproductive cycle, human fertility and sexually transmitted infections.

## **ORGANISATION OF RSE PROGRAMME**

The RSE Programme should enable pupils to develop the skills necessary to form and maintain relationships and to make informed choices and decisions regarding health and well-being.

Pupils need to be given the opportunity to develop:

**Practical Skills** - for everyday living including the ability to access health and advisory services.

**Communication Skills** - for listening to others' points of view and the ability to put forward their own view.

**Decision Making and Problem Solving Skills** - for making informed choices and moral judgements about what to do in certain situations as well as considering the consequences of their actions.

## **TEACHING**

The delivery of RSE will take place within a caring moral context, stressing the importance of stable, loving personal relationships, parental responsibilities and family life. The teaching will, at all times be appropriate to the maturity and level of understanding of the pupils concerned. Aspects of positive relationships are reinforced by the ethos and life of the school.

Generally RSE is taught in mixed groups, so that boys and girls are encouraged to work with each other and gain an understanding of each other's perspectives. However, in certain circumstances, normal mixed gender classroom arrangements may be changed when it appears more appropriate to teaching gender specific issues to single sex groupings.

Teachers responsible for teaching aspects of RSE are competent, sensitive and sympathetic to the requirements of the programme and the topics therein. It is delivered through a range of subjects, each touching upon aspects of the RSE programme. The normal RSE topics are taught in Science and RE with more in-depth areas covered in Personal Development and LLW and Child Development classes.

The RSE Programme is developmental, accessible and appropriate to the age and maturity of the pupils. It meets the needs of both genders and aims to be a positive experience for all participants. RSE issues are presented in a way that is free from sensationalism and bias and with sensitivity pitched to the pupils' needs and circumstances/situations.

If pupils raise issues that are offensive to some, or beyond the maturity level of the majority of the students, the teacher should not answer the question in class, but arrange to speak to the pupil after class and suggest also that the pupil discusses the matter with his/her parents.

Due to the sensitive nature of some of the issues highlighted in the programme teachers have the right to state that for personal reasons they do not wish to give a personal opinion on a particular issue that has arisen in class.

The following are areas covered at Key Stage Three and Four;

KS3 Personal Development Programme	KS4 Learning for Life and Work
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Gender &amp; Identity</li> <li>• Types of Relationships</li> <li>• Qualities of Friendship</li> <li>• Managing Difficulties &amp; Conflict within Relationships, Including Friendships</li> <li>• Challenging Relationships</li> <li>• Sexual Maturation</li> <li>• Communication &amp; Respect within Friendship</li> <li>• Developing Close Personal Relationships, Including Romantic Friendships</li> <li>• Internal &amp; External Influences on Romantic Relationships</li> <li>• Coping Strategies within Romantic Relationships</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Personal Development</li> <li>• Self-Esteem</li> <li>• Managing Influences</li> <li>• Personal Messages</li> <li>• The 3 R's of a Relationship</li> <li>• Sexual Identity</li> <li>• Sexual Harassment and Abuse</li> <li>• STI's and HIV</li> <li>• Contraception</li> <li>• Emergency Contraception</li> <li>• Abortion</li> <li>• Teenage Pregnancy</li> <li>• Where to Find Help</li> </ul>

## **ACTIVE LEARNING STRATEGIES**

The following strategies in relation to the Revised Curriculum can be used to address a range of RSE topics in an active way:

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mind-Mapping</li> <li>• Discussions</li> <li>• Group Work - pairs/fours etc.</li> <li>• Think, Pair &amp; Share</li> <li>• Feedback - reporting back</li> <li>• Presentations</li> <li>• Debates/Walking Debates</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Listening Experiences</li> <li>• Questionnaires</li> <li>• Visiting Speakers</li> <li>• Case Studies</li> <li>• Role Play</li> <li>• Circle Time</li> <li>• Diamond 9 Exercises</li> </ul>
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## **INVOLVING PARENTS**

It is important that parents should be involved in, and fully informed about, the school's programme on RSE and its approaches to particularly sensitive issues. The teaching offered by the school should always reinforce and strengthen positive family relationships and the role of parents, and the counselling and advice available to individual pupils should complement and support the proper exercise of parental rights and responsibilities.

Schools should take account of parents' views on the content of their RSE Programme and, in order that parents should know and understand the context in which certain teaching/learning materials are used, schools may find it helpful to give parents opportunities to examine them, to discuss their use with staff, and to discuss them with their children at home.

## **SPECIFIC ISSUE STATEMENTS**

**Status of the Family** - The school acknowledges the value of the institution of marriage and family, while being sensitive to children who are from a one-parent family. Happy marriages are presented as the ideal. In this context, staff will use the term 'husband' and 'wife' rather than 'partners'.

**Confidentiality and Child Protection** - A teacher approached by a pupil for counselling on sexual matters should, where appropriate, encourage the pupil to seek advice from his or her parents and/or from qualified professionals.

Staff cannot give any guarantee of confidentiality to pupils. If details are revealed which could lead staff to suspect that sexual abuse is involved, the teacher must follow procedures outlined in the Child Protection Policy.

**Withdrawal from Class/Exclusion from RSE Classes** - Lisnagarvey High School is committed to working with parents/carers. Parents/carers have a right to withdraw their children from RSE lessons which fall outside those aspects covered in the compulsory curriculum. We are willing to discuss with concerned parents, their expressed desire for their son/daughter to be excluded from aspects or the entire RSE Programme.

**Terminology** - All staff teaching RSE related issues should always use the proper biological names for body parts and sexual acts. The common slang or vernacular should be avoided.

**Use of Visitors and other Resources** - When using guest speakers or representatives from voluntary or statutory agencies, care should be taken to ascertain that they have read and are willing to comply with the school policy. Their participation in the teaching will complement the ongoing RSE curriculum and they should know what has been taught in preparation for their visit and how the school proposes to develop their input further.

**The Sacredness of Life** - In line with the ethos of the school, the value and sacredness of human life is actively promoted. This may influence teaching on abortion and casual sex.

**Homosexuality** - Pupils will be reprimanded if they call each other names such as 'gay' or 'lesbian' in a derogatory manner.

All members of the school community, regardless of sexual orientation, gender, colour, religion, will be respected and valued. Pupils should allow others the right to hold different views/lifestyles from them in a peaceful manner.

Lisnagarvey High School will not tolerate antagonism/bullying or other forms of abuse against pupils, who reveal that they are experiencing homosexual feelings.

## **MONITORING & EVALUATION**

The school recognises and accepts the importance of on-going monitoring and evaluation of the RSE programme. This policy will be reviewed regularly.



## **CONCLUSION**

Lisnagarvey High School's RSE Policy has been devised to take account of the Northern Ireland Curriculum. There are many excellent examples where schools have established clear sex education policies in consultation with parents, governors and the wider community, and where they are delivering effective programmes. But there is also much uncertainty about what sex and relationship education is and how it should be taught. This policy aims to address those areas of uncertainty.