

BALLYCLARE SECONDARY SCHOOL

RELATIONSHIPS AND SEX EDUCATION POLICY



Context

Northern Ireland has one of the highest pregnancy rates in Europe with approximately 1700 babies born each year to young women under 20 years.

Many young people are maturing earlier. It is therefore important that young people are provided with appropriate, factual information and are given opportunities to discuss their feelings and concerns. There is greater freedom, increased responsibility and exposure to a bewildering variety of messages from the media about sexuality and gender issues. RSE will help young people to deal with these challenges. It provides opportunities for young people to critically evaluate the wide range of information, opinions, attitudes and values with which they are bombarded.

In Ballyclare Secondary School, RSE will be delivered in a manner which fully supports and promotes the Christian ethos of the school.

Introduction

Our sexuality is a central and significant part of who we are and how we see ourselves in relation to others. It is part of our overall health and contributes to our physical, mental, emotional and spiritual well-being. RSE can help to promote a positive view of sexuality and sexual health by helping young people to feel good about themselves, to respect others and be able to make safe, responsible and satisfying relationships. Whilst presenting the Christian viewpoint that a sexual relationship should exist within marriage and that this is ideal, recognition will be given to the fact that other lifestyles exist which are closer to some of our pupils' experience. This is as stated in the Education Act 1993, "sensitivity is therefore needed to avoid causing hurt and offence to pupils and their families; and to allow such children to feel a sense of worth". The purpose of this policy document is to establish a coherent framework within which the delivery of our RSE programme will inform and support pupils, parents, Board of Governors and teaching staff,

The importance of sexual relationships is such that sexuality and relationships education should not be left to chance. Ballyclare Secondary School has a responsibility to ensure that all of its pupils receive a planned and structured programme which is sensitive to pupil needs and shows consideration for any religious, moral and cultural issues which may be raised.

Rationale

All pupils have a right to an education which adequately prepares them for adult life. Through an effective RSE programme a school can help to develop its pupils self-esteem by creating a climate of trust and acceptance in which each person is valued, respected and encouraged to recognise their individual needs and wants of others and to develop the skills and self esteem to become confident adolescents/adults. This complies with the ethos of the school.

Definitions

Relationships and sexuality education will foster an understanding of, and a healthy attitude to human sexuality and relationships in a moral, social and spiritual framework. It is not simply sex education.

Morals –_are directly displayed in behaviour, they are what you believe, your ability to distinguish between right and wrong and are directly related to your faith and experiences.

Values –_are the beliefs which govern behaviour, respect for self and others, honesty, commitments, trust, compassion, forgiveness and self-discipline.

Our pupils need a clear framework of values from which they can make moral and responsible judgements.

Aims

- To present factual information in an objective, balanced and sensitive manner.
- To encourage pupils to appreciate the value of marriage and a stable family life.
- To understand the responsibilities of parenthood.
- To promote an appreciation of the value of human life.
- To help our young people understand that in sexual behaviour there are physical, emotional and moral implications and that both sexes must behave responsibly.
- To encourage pupils to take responsibility for their own actions and to understand the long and short term consequences of their actions.
- To foster an understanding of the uniqueness of each individual, therefore making it important for pupils to treat themselves and others with respect, dignity and self-restraint.
- To offer the message that abstinence is a positive option until young people are emotionally mature enough to understand the inherent responsibilities.

Objectives

These aims will be met through the following objectives:-

- Provide information concerning the physical aspect of sexual matters which will include changes at puberty and reproduction.
- Remove ignorance and fear of sexual matters by providing the necessary information.
- Give correct and clear information that will enable young people to make responsible decisions.
- Discuss sensitive issues such as the sacredness of life, abortion, sexually transmitted infections (STIs), HIV and AIDS, contraception, sexual identity and sexual abuse.
- Increase awareness of sources of help and to help students develop the confidence and skills to use them.

The Rights and Responsibilities of Parents

Although there is no statutory parental right to withdraw a child from classes in RSE, parents will be consulted on a number of issues and will be informed as to the context of the RSE programme. The school will discuss the nature of any parental concerns and attempt to deal with any misunderstandings. The parents' wishes should, however, be respected.

Teaching Sensitive Issues

The teaching style and the methods which teachers use when teaching about issues such as contraception, abortion and HIV and AIDS are crucial. The messages which the pupils receive must be consistent and compatible with the morals and values framework endorsed by Ballyclare Secondary School.

Marriage and Family Life

The RSE programme will promote stable family life where marriage is seen as the ideal, but other permanent loving relationships are recognised and valued. The single parent family is also acknowledged as providing a stable and loving environment.

Confidentiality and Advice to Individual Pupils

The dividing line between good pastoral care and trespassing on parental rights and responsibilities is very narrow. Therefore the provision of advice to individual pupils must be carried out with great care.

In the teaching of RSE, the child's right to privacy must be respected at all times by both the teacher and all other pupils in the class. It is important that a teacher is never to feel obliged to impart information about his/her own personal life.

Terminology

In our society, many swear words are sexual in origin and refer to sex in a debasing way. The message given by the use of this language is very powerful and creates associations with sexuality which are primarily negative. It is therefore extremely important that proper terminology is used in RSE activities and that the tone of discussions is respectful and genuine.

Contraceptive Advice to Young People under the age of 17

As part of the RSE policy, teachers may provide information on the types of contraception available and the risks to health. Information about where, and from whom, they can receive confidential advice, treatment and support **must not** be given.

Sexual Identity and Orientation

The issue of sexual orientation will be handled in a sensitive, non-confrontational and reassuring way. It will be acknowledged that during the transition from childhood to adulthood some adolescents experience strong, emotional attachments and feelings towards people of the same sex. Many move on to form a heterosexual relationship while some remain homosexual or bisexual. Teachers will treat these issues without prejudice.

Visitors

Talks or presentations by visitors will be carefully monitored and only those who comply with the ethos of the school will speak to students. All visitors will be given the opportunity to read relevant policies and their presentations should be in agreement with them.

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