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Louth and Meath Education and Training Board

School Policy Board of Management Ratification Documentation

School Name	**St Peter's College, Dunboyne**
Policy	Relationships and Sexuality Education Policy

Ratified at the BOM meeting on:	20 **Date** April **Month** 2026 **Year**
Proposed By:	Lucy OMahoney
Seconded By:	Niall Kelly
Signed:	Fiona Murphy **Chairperson**
Signed:	Deirdre Maye **Principal**

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School Policy Consultation Documentation

Student Consultation:	**Yes** ☒ **No** ☐
Ratified at a meeting on:	3rd **Date** March **Month** 2026 **Year**
Proposed By:	Abigail Grogan
Seconded By:	Adam Dillon

Staff Consultation:	**Yes** ☒ **No**
Ratified at a meeting on:	14th **Date** April **Month** 2026 **Year** 24th Feb 2026
Proposed By:	Yvonne Myles
Seconded By:	Ruth Mc Oenogh

Parent/Guardian Consultation:	**Yes** ☒ **No** ☐
Ratified at a meeting on:	13th **Date** Jan **Month** 2026 **Year**
Proposed By:	Lucy O Mahoney
Seconded By:	Olwyn Walsh.

Signed:	Deirdre Maye **Principal/Secretary to the Board of Management**
Date:	20 **Date** April **Month** 2026 **Year**

St. Peter's College
Dunboyne, Co. Meath
71950F

St Peter's College

Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) Policy

Signed: Maria Murphy
(Chairperson of the Board of Management)

Date: 20th April 2026

Review Date: April 2029

1. Introductory Statement:

This RSE policy was developed in accordance with:

1. Our mission statement
2. Guidelines as set out in Circular M4/95, M20/96, C23/10 *Social and Personal Health Education (SPHE) and Relationships and Sexuality Education-Best Practice Guidelines for Post Primary Schools* and C37/2010.
3. Guidance from SPHE Department, Senior Cycle SPHE Specification 2024 and Junior Cycle SPHE Specification 2023
4. Consultation with the School Support Team

5. Consultation with the Parents Association and Student Council

All partners of the School/College community were consulted during its review.

This RSE policy is a written statement of the aims of the RSE programme that is delivered within the SPHE programme in St. Peter's College. This policy applies to all aspects of teaching and learning about relationships and sexuality. It also applies to all school staff, students, parents /guardians, visiting speakers, invited guests, volunteers and members of the Board of Management.

2. Rationale:

St. Peter's College respects the religious practice, beliefs and value system of each student while encouraging its students to respect diversity, to be positive in their outlook on life and to develop a respect and appreciation for Christian values and other world religions and cultures. The vision of the school is also to nurture the values of tolerance, inclusion and care within the school and the wider community. The experience gained through the working out of this policy and through respecting the needs of minority groups and individuals enriches the whole life of the school. The RSE programme as taught in the school will comply with Section 16 (ii) of the Memorandum of Agreement on the Educational Character, Policy and Philosophy of St. Peter's College.

It is necessary to have an RSE policy as RSE is a key element of healthy social and personal development as:

- 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.
- The Education Act 1998 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 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 and Senior Cycle, the RSE programme is part of the Social, Personal and Health Education.
- The effectiveness of an RSE programme is dependent on a collaborative policy process involving teachers, parents/guardians, members of the board of management and students
- Spiritual, moral and ethical issues will arise when teaching RSE. This RSE policy will guide teachers in the treatment of such issues in accordance with the ethos of the college. It is important that teachers of RSE understand that their role is to express the views of the whole school community on these sensitive issues and not their own personal views.

  In this regard, it should be noted that:

  - Schools are required to deliver all aspects of the RSE curriculum – including those in relation to sexual orientation, contraception, sexually transmitted infections, abusive relationships, influence of

social media and pornography etc. This can be done within a context in which teaching of the programme is informed by the school's ethos.

- A school can express its ethos while at the same time facilitating students in discussing a range of views in relation to topics within the RSE programme.

- RSE should be taught in the context of a whole school climate that is inclusive and respectful, and ensuring that the RSE classroom is a safe place for all.

3. Aims and Objectives:

The policy intends to provide all stakeholders with an understanding of the rationale and framework for mediation of the programme in the school as well as providing specific guidance to teachers of the programme. The aims and objectives of the RSE programme are as follows:

Aims:

- Promote knowledge and respect for reproduction.
- Provide an opportunity to learn about relationships and sexuality.
- Encourage students to think and act in a moral, caring and responsible way.
- Help students understand and develop friendships.
- Help students understanding of sexuality.
- Develop a positive attitude towards one's own sexuality.
- Recognise what is a healthy or unhealthy and abusive relationship
- To show students where to access trustworthy advice and guidance

Objectives:

- The policy will ensure clarity and consensus on how RSE is taught in St. Peter's College.
- It will articulate the aims of the RSE element of the SPHE programme.
- It will clarify the rights, roles and responsibilities of all within the college community in relation to the RSE programme with particular reference to college staff, students, parents/guardians and the board of management.
- It will ensure that teachers, parents/guardians and students understand how the teaching of RSE is linked to the college ethos.
- It will provide information on the practicalities of delivering the programme.

4. Moral and Values Framework:

The RSE programme in St. Peter's College is consistent with the school philosophy and the core values and ethos of the school. The programme reflects the following value statements:

- every individual is unique and valued in their own right;

- we are all sexual beings;
- making decisions about sexual behaviour is not simply a private and personal matter – there are also social, ethical, spiritual, legal and community implications;
- sexual intercourse is an expression of intimacy and relationship
- Sex should be something that is enjoyed in a relationship of equals where both parties are consenting, responsible and respectful of each other;
- men and women have equal rights and responsibilities in sexual matters;
- any sexual contact by force or without consent is a violation of the person.

It is the responsibility of the RSE teacher to teach within this moral and values framework

5. KEY MEASURES:

A. Provision of training and staff development:

- Arrangements regarding the deployment of staff will be made by the Principal. Consideration will be given to gender balance. Teachers will be consulted and where practicable, teachers who express an interest in teaching SPHE/RSE will be timetabled.
- All teachers involved in this work do not 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 RSE.
- In service training for the teaching of RSE will be encouraged and facilitated by the school. Available training opportunities will be identified via www.OIDE.ie
- Appropriate teaching resources will be made available to staff subject to budget constraints.

B. Inclusion of Parents/Guardians:

- Parents /Guardians are the primary educators of their children and their role in education concerning relationships and sexuality education is seen by the college as very important. Information will be provided to parents in advance of the RSE section of SPHE being delivered in class. Parents/Guardians are advised via a signature page in the homework journal that should they wish to withdraw their child from RSE that they should send a letter to the Ceannaire in advance.

- The policy has been designed in consultation with the Parents' Association representatives and the views expressed by parents will be taken into account when the policy is being reviewed. A copy of this policy will be made available to any parent/guardian on request to the general office.

  Note: The *Education Act 1998* 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 18, the student. Hence, parents /guardians have a right to opt their child out of the sensitive issues in RSE if they wish to do so. Parents do not have to give reasons for withdrawal. Once a parent's/guardian's request to withdraw is made in writing, that request will be complied with until revoked by the parent. If a parent wishes to withdraw their child they must collect their child from school for the duration of the class as there is no supervision available at this time.

6. Ethical/Moral Considerations:

RSE is a complex area of the curriculum. The school's RSE policy provides guidance for teachers on the moral and ethical framework within which the programme will be taught. The boundaries of the RSE programme will be delivered with due deference to:

(a) The age of the students
(b) The school ethos
(c) Limits of confidentiality, limits to discussions and questions.
(d) RSE curriculum guidelines

Issues include the following:

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 by students and can set appropriate limits. 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.

- Students will be told at the start of the RSE module that the class group is not the appropriate environment to make a disclosure and they will be advised about the best way to make a disclosure. Students may ask questions about issues which are not included in the curriculum. On these, and on all questions, teachers

will use their professional judgment, guided by the age of the students, the RSE curriculum and the RSE policy for the school.

- Students should be made aware at the beginning of the RSE programme that asking personal questions of staff and peers is inappropriate and unacceptable. If a teacher becomes concerned about a matter that has been raised they should inform/seek advice from the SPHE Co-ordinator or Principal/Deputy Principal.

Confidentiality:

- While students should not be encouraged to disclose personal or private information in SPHE/RSE classes, there may be times when they do talk about their own lives. Confidentiality should be respected unless a teacher becomes aware that a student is at risk, in which case the appropriate action should be taken e.g. follow the procedures set down in the Child Protection Procedures and Guidelines for Post-Primary Schools (2025).

  It is important that the students must be made aware of the limits of confidentiality and that teachers do not give unconditional guarantees of confidentiality. Teachers may refer back to the ground rules agreed at the start of their SPHE programme. Students must be aware that any incident may be conveyed to the Principal and possibly the parents /guardian if the Principal decides that it is in the best interests of the child. Teachers will inform students when the content of a conversation can no longer be kept confidential. If it is a child protection matter, the Principal acting as the Designated Liaison Person may be required to make a report to TUSLA.

Sexual Activity and Consent:

- It is advisable for teachers to give young people information on the age of consent which, following the passage of the Criminal Law (Sexual Offences) Act, 2006, is 17 years of age for both males and females for heterosexual and homosexual sex. Accordingly, a sexual relationship where one or both parties is under 17 years of age is illegal. The Child Protection requirements in respect of underage sexual activity as detailed in section 4.7.1 of the *Child Protection procedures for Primary and Post-Primary schools 2025* (Department of Education and Youth) apply to all mandated persons in the school.

- The legal definition of consent to a sexual act, as defined in the Criminal Law (Sexual Offences) Act 2017 will also be discussed within the RSE programme. OIDE/Department of Education Personal Safety Resources will also be used for reference. Resources from Curriculum Online will be utilised.
- https://www.curriculumonline.ie/senior-cycle/sphe/sphe-toolkit/resources-for-learning-and-teaching-sphe-2024/
- https://www.curriculumonline.ie/junior-cycle/short-courses/sphe/sphe-2023/sphe-toolkit/resources-for-teaching-and-learning-in-sphe/

Family Planning/ Contraception / Unplanned Pregnancy:

- 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 and unplanned pregnancy. Age appropriate information is already taught as part of the Junior Certificate science curriculum. Schools can use their discretion with regard to the age at which students receive any aspect of the RSE programme.
- https://www.curriculumonline.ie/senior-cycle/sphe/sphe-toolkit/resources-for-learning-and-teaching-sphe-2024/
- https://www.curriculumonline.ie/junior-cycle/short-courses/sphe/sphe-2023/sphe-toolkit/resources-for-teaching-and-learning-in-sphe/

Sexual Orientation / Genders / Sexuality:

- The post-primary RSE Curriculum Guidelines include the subject of sexual orientation. RSE training courses delivered by the SPHE Support Service provide teachers with further materials.
- Teachers do not promote any one lifestyle as the only acceptable one for society. Therefore, it is inevitable and natural that sexual orientation will be discussed during a programme of sex education.
- One of the many advantages of exploring issues concerning sexual orientation is the opportunity to correct false ideas, assumptions and address prejudice. Discussion of sexual orientation should be appropriate to the age of the pupils.

- The *Equal Status Act 2000* and the *Equality Act 2004* prohibit discrimination across nine grounds, including sexual orientation. Consideration needs to be given to the messages that are conveyed if the subject of sexual orientation is not discussed in schools.
- It is important that any student who is coming to terms with their sexual identity should not experience any harassment, embarrassment or isolation which may impact on their mental and emotional health and they should be offered support from the Student Support Team.
- https://www.curriculumonline.ie/senior-cycle/sphe/sphe-toolkit/resources-for-learning-and-teaching-sphe-2024/
- https://www.curriculumonline.ie/junior-cycle/short-courses/sphe/sphe-2023/sphe-toolkit/resources-for-teaching-and-learning-in-sphe/

Abortion:

- This topic will be dealt with in an age appropriate, open manner, looking at all aspects of the issues in a non-directive way.

Physiology /Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs):

- Male and female sex organs will be addressed with associated sexual function and dysfunction.
- While awareness of STIs is one of the objectives of the Second Year SPHE/RSE syllabus, STIs are mainly addressed in Senior Cycle. Given the prevalence of STI transmission, it is important that the subject is addressed in schools.
- https://www.curriculumonline.ie/senior-cycle/sphe/sphe-toolkit/resources-for-learning-and-teaching-sphe-2024/
- https://www.curriculumonline.ie/junior-cycle/short-courses/sphe/sphe-2023/sphe-toolkit/resources-for-teaching-and-learning-in-sphe/

Pornography and Online Safety:

- This topic will comprise of discussion of the dangers associated with viewing pornography including unrealistic expectations, sexual coercion and sexting.

All of the above detailed issues will be dealt with in an open and age appropriate manner. They will be treated in a non-prescriptive way and consistent with the Moral and Values Framework as outlined in the 'Aims and Objectives' section of this policy.

7. Practical Issues

- First Year students have two periods of SPHE per week
- Second Year students have one period of SPHE per week.
- Third year students have two periods of SPHE per week.
- SPHE is a Junior Cycle Short Course reported on the Junior Cycle Profile of Achievement and students will undertake Classroom Based Assessments (CBAs) as part of this programme.
- RSE will be included as a module in January as part of their SPHE programme.
- The SPHE teacher will notify parents via Compass when the RSE lessons will be taking place.
- Students in senior cycle must receive 60 hours of SPHE class contact time over the final two years of senior cycle education. In St Peter's College, SPHE will be delivered as one 40 minute period a week and one 40 minute period a fortnight over two years.
- Senior students will have key assignments to complete as part of the SPHE specification.
- Visiting speakers must be made aware of the schools RSE policy, Mission statement and the SPHE visitor guidelines as laid down by the Department of Education in circular 0023/2010 to secondary schools.
- The Board of Management approves all speakers in line with **(CL0043/18 & CL0042/18)** and Student Support Teams are advised when visiting speakers are in the College. Thus, classroom teachers must remain in the classroom with the students. All programmes and events delivered by visitors and external agencies must use appropriate evidence based methodologies with clear educational outcomes. Such programmes are best delivered by those specifically qualified to work with young people for whom the programmes are designed. Evaluation of the speakers is compulsory.

- Provision will be made for students with special needs as laid down by the NCCA guidelines. To comply with these guidelines it will be necessary for the class teacher to consult with the special needs co-ordinator, prior to the programme, to discuss any students with special needs and to ascertain how they can be supported throughout the programme.

- Consideration and sensitivity must be given to the needs of students with special circumstances. Children with special needs may need more help than others in coping with the physical and

emotional aspects of growing up; they may also need more help in learning what sorts of behaviour are and are not acceptable, and in being warned and prepared against abuse by others.

- This policy is made available to parents and details about the parent's right to withdraw their child from sensitive aspects of RSE are included in the policy. Parents have the right to withdraw students from RSE but not SPHE. Parents do not have to give reasons for withdrawal, but we respectfully invite them to do so - sometimes we can then resolve misunderstandings. Once a parent's request to withdraw is made (in writing) to the students Ceannaire (Year Head), that request must be complied with until revoked by the parent. Should a parent withdraw their child from the RSE module of the SPHE course then they must collect their child from school during each of these lessons as there is no resource provided by the Department of Education to provide supervision for their child at this time. Parents will be informed through the school diary that written correspondence is required to remove a student from the RSE module of the SPHE programme and parents are notified via Compass when the RSE module will commence each year. (See also appendix 1).

8. Links to other Policies and to Curriculum Delivery:

- School policies are developed to be consistent with one another, within the framework of the overall School Plan. Relevant college policies already in place have been examined with reference to the RSE Policy.

Links to curriculum delivery:

- Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) is a Junior Cycle, Transition Year and Senior Cycle core subject. SPHE provides students with opportunities to develop the skills and competencies to care for themselves and others and to make informed decisions about their health, personal lives and social development. This includes providing information on relationships and sexuality.

- Aspects of RSE are delivered across the curriculum, through subjects such as Religious Education, Science, Biology and Home Economics. In St. Peter's College, our aim is to ensure that all students receive a full and balanced RSE programme from First Year through to Sixth Year.

9. Implementation, Arrangements, Roles and Responsibilities:

- Teaching Staff will have direct responsibility for delivering the RSE programme at Junior Cycle and Senior Cycle.

- Tutors and Ceannairí have a Pastoral care role in liaising with students, parents/guardians, school Chaplain, the Guidance Department, school counsellors and the Special Education Needs Co-ordinator.

Ratification & Communication:

- Parents/guardians will be informed of the RSE Policy from the time of acceptance of their son/daughter.

- A copy of the RSE policy will be available at all times in the school's Student Office and on the school's Website.

Monitor the Implementation of the policy:

- The Principal is responsible for the implementation of the policy but may assign the monitoring to the RSE staff.

Reviewing and evaluating the policy:

- Ongoing review and evaluation will take place cognisance of changing information, guidelines, legislation and feedback from parents/guardians, students, teachers and others.

- The policy will be revised as necessary in the light of such reviews and evaluation and within the framework of school planning.

- The policy will be reviewed at 3 year intervals or sooner if necessary.

- Some practical indicators will be used to gauge the impact and effectiveness of the policy. Such indicators include the following:
    - A student /teacher evaluation form may be given to some classes at the end of the RSE module.
    - The range of resource material available to teachers.
    - The in-service training availed of by teachers.
    - Parents and Guardians awareness of the policy.
    - Feedback received from teachers, students, parents/guardians and members of the Board of Management.

Appendix 1

What we do if a request for withdrawal from the RSE programme is made (in writing) by a parent to the Ceannaire:

a) Deputy Principal will phone the parent/guardian to confirm the decision and to explain that the student will need to be collected from school, will discuss the nature of the concerns with the child's parent and if appropriate attempt to reassure them

b) Feedback to SPHE Team to consider whether the programme can be amended or improved in a way that will reassure parents - care is taken not to undermine the integrity of the RSE programme and the entitlement of the other students

c) It is pointed out that students who have been withdrawn are vulnerable to being asked about this by their peers or being singled out - we therefore attempt to cause minimal embarrassment to the student and minimal disruption to the programme

d) It is pointed out that students may receive inaccurate information from their peers or online

e) Parents are provided with appropriate information and resources.