Our Lady and St Patrick's College, Knock



Relationships and Sexuality Education Policy

Policy Details

Legal Status	Adopted	Version Date	Last Review	Next Review	Responsible
Statutory	6 th October 2022	September 2022	October 2019	September 2025	Mrs L M Clarke

Related Documents and Location

- 1. Child Protection/Safeguarding Policy
- 2. Anti-Bullying Policy
- 3. Pastoral Care Policy
- 4. Positive Behaviour Policy
- 5. eSafety and Digital Technology Policy
- 6. Special Educational Needs Policy
- 7. School Improvement Plan (2018-2021)
- 8. College's Mission Statement and Aims

All policies are available on the College Website and Private Folders.

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1. Introduction and Rationale

All young people have the right to high quality Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) that is relevant to their lives. RSE is a statutory element of the Northern Ireland Curriculum. Our Lady and St Patrick's College, Knock is committed to providing an education which prepares students effectively for adult life and RSE plays an essential role in achieving this. The College delivers RSE through the Education for Love (EFL) Programme. This programme seeks to provide young people with formal opportunities to gain knowledge and understanding of relationships and sexuality and develop morals and values that reflect our Catholic ethos.

"Amoris Laetitia" (The Joy of Love) is the post-synodal apostolic exhortation by Pope Francis released on 8 April 2016. It follows the Synods on the Family held in 2014 and 2015. The ground-breaking document asks the church to meet people where they are, to consider the complexities of people's lives and to respect people's consciences when it comes to moral decisions. The apostolic exhortation is mainly a document that reflects on family life and encourages families. It is also the Pope's reminder that the church should avoid simply judging people and imposing rules on them without considering their struggles. He urges the church to appreciate the context of people's lives when helping them make good decisions. The goal is to help families, in fact everyone, experience God's love and know that they are welcome members of the church. All this may require what the Pope calls "new pastoral methods" (paragraph 199).

Relationships and sexuality present various issues and challenges for young people, such as early sexual intercourse, teenage pregnancy, sexually transmitted infections (STIs), child sexual exploitation, female genital mutilation, sexual identity and orientation, sexually explicit images, cyber-bullying and mental health. In addition, many students struggle to talk to their parents/guardians about growing up and about sexual matters. Thus, RSE is essential if young people are to make responsible, moral and well-informed decisions about their lives.

This RSE Policy is written in accordance with guidance issued by the Department of Education (DE) and the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA). This policy also reflects the guidance issued by the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland on eliminating sexual orientation discrimination in schools and takes into account the rights of students and parents as outlined in the 'United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child' (UNCRC). A full list of documents considered in the writing of this policy can be found in Appendix 1 on Page 10.

Students, parents and staff were consulted in the drafting of this policy.

2. College Mission Statement and Catholic Ethos

Mission statement:

"Our Lady and St Patrick's College, Knock cares for young people in a way that encourages them to develop to their full potential within a supportive Christian community. We seek to prepare our students to play an active and responsible role in society, and to use their talents for the service of others."

This Mission Statement guides us in the task of enabling our students to realise "their full potential within a supportive Christian community". It stresses the importance of responsibility in relationships. Students are to be encouraged to "use their talents for the benefit of others". The Education for Love Programme aims to care for young people by nurturing their self-worth, dignity and confidence within a supportive, inclusive and sensitive learning environment.

The Aims of the College are to:

- develop the 'whole person' as a follower of Christ;
- promote the philosophy and values of Catholic Education;

- develop positive attitudes in an atmosphere of co-operation, justice and mutual respect;
- prepare young people to be confident and creative contributors to society;
- enable students to realise their full academic potential and to develop all their gifts and talents;
- prepare students for adulthood by enabling them to acquire the relevant knowledge and skills;
- engage positively with the local and wider community.

In accordance with the Aims of the College, the Education for Love Programme will endeavour to further Catholic values and develop the 'whole person' as a follower of Christ through its curriculum in partnership between teachers and students. We are guided by the College Aims in preparing our students for adulthood and seek to foster positive attitudes towards sexuality and relationships with others.

3. Morals and Values Framework

Much of "Amoris Laetitia" consists of reflections on the Gospels and church teaching on love, the family and children. It also includes a great deal of practical advice from the Pope, sometimes gleaned from exhortations and homilies regarding the family.

"Amoris Laetitia" reminds us that children must be educated in sex and sexuality. In a culture that often commodifies and cheapens sexual expression, children need to understand sex within the "broader framework of an education for love and mutual self-giving" (paragraph 280). Sadly, the body is often seen as simply "an object to be used" (paragraph 153).

RSE 'must not be value-free' (DE Circular 2001/15) and it should 'be taught in harmony with the ethos of the school and reflect the moral and religious principles held by parents and school management authorities' (DE Circular 2013/16). The College's Education for Love Programme reflects the beliefs and ethos of our Catholic school. It seeks to develop the 'whole person as a follower of Christ' and nurture the faith and personal development of each student so that they are capable of making responsible, moral and informed decisions. The programme, therefore, aims to present facts in an objective, balanced and sensitive way, set within the framework of Catholic values and an awareness of the law on sexual behaviour. The following key messages will be promoted through RSE within a framework that encourages:

- An appreciation of the value of family life, marriage and permanent loving relationships;
- An appreciation of the responsibilities of parenthood and a recognition that children are a gift from God;
- A recognition that sexual abstinence outside of marriage, and fidelity within it, are positive, realistic and healthy ideals to which young people should aspire;
- A recognition that both genders, male and female, are to be appreciated, respected and valued and seen as equal, different and complementary;
- An appreciation that friendships and relationships should be based on self and mutual respect, empathy, non-exploitation, honesty, truth and commitment;
- Compassion, forgiveness, mercy, tolerance, loyalty, self-restraint and care as essential qualities and skills to develop in relationships;
- A recognition that sexuality and relationships involve rights, duties and responsibilities;
- A recognition that all life is valuable and sacred from the moment of conception.

These key messages will influence the teaching of all topics in the EFL Programme including issues such as casual sex, contraception and abortion. Although these key messages are to be promoted, teachers should acknowledge that many students come from backgrounds that may not reflect all these values and experiences. Teachers must approach these issues with sensitivity and aim to avoid causing hurt and offence to students and their families. The development of a student's self-worth and confidence is essential. EFL teachers must be empathetic to the personal and emotional circumstances of individual students.

4. Aims of RSE

In line with our College aims and ethos, and CCEA guidelines, RSE within the College aims to:

- Promote the philosophy and values of Catholic Education;
- Select teachers who are sensitive to the ideals and aims of the Catholic Church;
- Develop the "whole person" as a follower of Christ;
- Develop individuals committed to the Christian way of life;
- Develop respect for diversity and inclusion;
- Develop students' appreciation of their uniqueness and sexuality as God-given gifts;
- Promote responsible behaviour and the ability to make informed decisions;
- Enhance personal development, self-esteem, well-being and resilience;
- Help students develop healthy and respectful friendships and personal relationships;
- Help students understand and express sexuality in a morally, socially and spiritually responsible manner;
- Facilitate communication about personal and sexual matters;
- Increase understanding, and respect for, human love, marriage and family life;
- Promote an appreciation of the sacredness and value of all human life from the moment of conception;
- Enhance understanding of the responsibilities of parenthood;
- Value the concept and qualities of consent in relationships and understand the law in relation to consent;
- Encourage students to witness to human dignity at all times online;
- Break the stigma surrounding periods and promote respect, understanding and open discussions about what people may experience when menstruating.

5. Objectives of RSE

In line with our College aims and ethos, and CCEA guidelines, RSE within the College seeks to enable students to:

- Develop a positive sense of self-awareness, self-esteem and self-worth;
- Establish strategies to manage stress and anxiety;
- Establish strategies to cope with difficult situations and protect themselves from exploitation and abuse;
- Be aware of and show respect for different family structures;
- Identify and avoid risk-taking behaviour;
- Establish and maintain healthy, equal and mutually respectful, non-exploitative and non-violent personal relationships;
- Explore moral and ethical issues regarding relationships and sexuality;
- Defer sexual activity until marriage;
- Be aware of the variety of ways in which individuals change or grow and develop strategies to cope with the challenges of growing up;
- Demonstrate understanding of reproductive systems, human fertility and sexually transmitted infections;
- Recognise and understand the emotional, moral and social implications of sexual maturation including sexual health, conception, contraception, teenage pregnancy and childbirth within the framework of Catholic values;
- Develop an awareness of issues relating to personal health;
- Identify and understand issues relating to sexual orientation, gender identity, gender roles and stereotyping;
- Establish strategies to cope with conflict, peer pressure and media influences;
- Critically evaluate information about relationships and sexuality from peers, the media and pornography;
- Recognise the need for online safety;

- Interpret the implications of legislation relating to sexually explicit images, sexting and sexual activity;
- Demonstrate understanding of the nature of consent and decision-making in relationships;
- Acquire and develop an appropriate vocabulary to discuss feelings, sexuality and development;
- Know about the menstrual cycle, periods and menstrual well-being;
- Challenge negative attitudes, stereotypes and gender inequalities surrounding periods.

6. <u>Curriculum Provision</u>

The EFL Co-ordinator works in conjunction with the Vice Principal (Pastoral Care). There are twelve teachers involved in EFL, throughout the various years. EFL lessons are incorporated within the Pastoral Care Programme in the College. Each year is timetabled differently:

Year 8	Students have one period per week for six weeks, twice a year. This is alternated with the Personal Development Programme.
Year 9	Students have one period per week for six weeks, twice a year. This is alternated with the Personal Development Programme.
Year 10	Students have one period per week for six weeks, twice a year. This is alternated with the Personal Development Programme.
Year 11	The whole year group attends a presentation delivered by an external agency.
Year 12	Aspects of RSE are delivered through GCSE Learning for Life and Work (LLW), Science and Religious Studies in consultation with the EFL Co-ordinator.
Year 13	Students have one period per week for ten weeks.
Year 14	The whole year group attends a presentation delivered by an external agency.

7. <u>Teaching and Delivery of RSE</u>

Each tutor group is divided between two teachers of EFL, timetabled simultaneously. The groups are mixed, boys and girls, with the option, on occasions, of one large mixed group or single sex groups depending on the needs of the group at the time.

All Year 8, 9, 10 and 13 classes have EFL lessons. A range of topics are covered throughout the different years, each having a set programme, though variation is possible depending on the needs of the group or if the teacher feels it is appropriate to cover a topic not on the programme. Any deviation from the programme must be discussed in advance with the EFL Co-ordinator. The smaller group setting should lead to a more informal type of class where the students feel at ease to discuss the topics covered.

Teaching and learning is based on a wide range of strategies including discussion, brainstorming, questionnaires, quizzes, audio-visual materials, scenario based case-studies, group work, role-play and debate. Teacher interaction is key to the success of the EFL Programme and an enquiry-based approach should be adopted by teachers.

All EFL teachers and outside agencies are required to promote the teaching of the Catholic Church on matters of sexuality and human development. Information on Catholic Church teaching will be provided for EFL teachers within teacher booklets.

8. Role of the EFL Co-ordinator

The EFL Co-ordinator's role includes:

- Supporting the College's distinctive mission and ethos;
- Leading, manging and developing a quality EFL Programme throughout the College;
- Taking responsibility for the development and implementation of the College's RSE Policy in accordance with DE/CCEA guidelines;
- Chairing and maintaining minutes of meetings with EFL teachers;
- Involving parents, students and staff in reviewing, evaluating and developing the EFL Programme;
- Evaluating the teaching and learning of EFL in the College through monitoring activities;
- Actively contributing to the work of the Pastoral Team, liaising with Heads of School where appropriate;
- Ensuring trainee staff, newly qualified staff and staff new to the College receive appropriate support for the delivery of EFL;
- Leading professional development of EFL staff through example, support and liaison with the leadership team;
- Liaising with outside bodies to organise and manage school events;
- Providing an annual report on the EFL Programme to the Vice Principal (Pastoral Care).

9. Specific Issues

A) Terminology

All staff teaching EFL will use the biological names for body parts and sexual acts, where appropriate and relevant to the EFL Programme. The use of common slang words will be avoided where possible. EFL teachers should use gender/sexuality neutral language where possible.

B) Provision for Students with Special Educational Needs

The EFL department works in line with the College's Special Educational Needs Policy, the procedures for dealing with Special Educational Needs and the Pastoral Care Programme.

Each class teacher has access to information at the beginning of each academic year relating to special educational needs and medical conditions. If required, teachers seek out further information from the Tutor, Head of Year, Learning Support Coordinator, from student records in the Students' Office or from SIMS. Staff work closely with the College First-Aider who manages all medical conditions.

Due to the informal nature of EFL classes and the personal and sensitive nature of the topics covered, we aim to make all students feel comfortable within the classroom environment. We try to ensure that all students are fully integrated with their peers. Teachers are sympathetic to the personal and emotional circumstances of each individual student. We are aware of, and take into account, the variety of existing student knowledge and differing attitudes or beliefs of students that may impact their capacity to understand the issues explored. This is particularly important in relation to special educational needs where physical development may outstrip emotional maturity. We follow the Stepwise Approach to Behaviour Management to ensure that the needs of students with behavioural and social difficulties are met.

C) Inclusive Learning and LGBTQI+

The RSE Policy aims to meet the needs of all students and be a positive experience for all participants. The EFL Programmes of the College should provide warm, welcoming and inclusive environments. They should foster respect for difference, challenge prejudiced attitudes and promote equality for all students. The EFL Programme should be sensitive to changing family life in today's society. "The ideals of respect and dignity for every person regardless of their race, creed or sexual orientation are to be recognised" (Accord 2002).

Following the guidance provided by the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland in 2009, the RSE Policy and EFL Programme aim to raise the self-esteem of all young people regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity. We seek to develop learners who value and respect difference and engage positively with it. Bullying, exclusion or offensive language relating to LGBTQI+ students will not be tolerated in EFL lessons or in the College. The EFL Programme will handle this issue in a sensitive, non-confrontational and reassuring way that reflects the ethos of the College.

D) Personal Backgrounds and Cultural Practices

EFL teachers must be sensitive to the personal circumstances and cultural backgrounds of their students. In Northern Ireland, civil and criminal legislation on female genital mutilation (FGM) is contained in the Female Genital Mutilation Act 2003. FGM is illegal and is a form of child abuse and violence against women. In addition, The Forced Marriage (Civil Protection) Act 2007 makes forced marriage illegal in Northern Ireland. Forced marriage is a violation of human rights and a form of child/adult/domestic abuse.

The College's EFL Programme will encourage students to explore cultural issues by providing information and raising awareness of female genital mutilation and forced marriage. Following the guidance of The Department of Finance and Personnel (2012 and 2014), students will be made aware of sources of support and will be encouraged to access appropriate advice and support if they are at risk. Issues relating to culture will be dealt with sensitively to ensure that cultures are not viewed negatively due to their practices. Any concerns about FGM/forced marriage will be referred to the Designated Teacher or Deputy Designated Teachers for Child Protection and Social Services (section 11 of the policy).

E) Sexting and the Digital World

The EFL Programme will teach students how to safely navigate the digital world. Technology plays an integral role in the lives of our students, which poses both opportunities and risks, for example, six out of ten 13-18-year-olds have been asked to send sexual images of themselves and four out of ten have done so (NSPCC Childline Survey 2013). The EFL Programme will raise awareness of potential threats or dangers posed by the Internet such as sexting, cyber-bullying, pornography, abuse and exploitation. Students will explore the implications of the law, the strategies they can use to protect themselves and where they can access advice and support if they are at risk.

F) Confidentiality and Disclosures

It is not necessary or advisable to encourage students or staff to discuss personal relationships or experiences. Ground rules should be negotiated beforehand and should include this advice. Group discussion and video clips allow exploration of the issues without personal disclosure. Staff cannot give any guarantees of confidentiality to students. If staff feel that a student is about to make a personal disclosure, which may compromise him/her, the student should be advised of the possible implications.

If certain disclosures are made, then the College's Child Protection/Safeguarding Policy must be adhered to. In line with the College's Child Protection/Safeguarding Policy, if a disclosure is made to a member of staff of underage sexual activity, parents will be informed and a referral made to Social Services (section 32 of the policy). In the event of such a disclosure, a member of staff must always report the matter immediately to the Designated Teacher or a Deputy Designated Teacher for Child Protection.

G) Dealing with Sensitive Issues and Responding to Students' Questions

If students raise issues that are offensive to some or beyond the maturity level of the majority of the students, EFL teachers will not answer in class. The teacher may ask the student to wait until the end of the lesson and answer the question in a sensitive matter. If the question raises child protection issues, this will be referred to the Designated Teacher or a Deputy Designated Teacher for Child Protection.

H) Period Dignity

'Period dignity refers to the accessibility and availability of essential care needed to support a period, in conjunction with the removal/breaking of stigma and taboo around periods. Education is a key factor in breaking the stigma surrounding periods and promoting respect, understanding and open discussions about what people may experience when menstruating.' (CCEA 2021)

The EFL Programme aims to:

- Ensure that students understand the term 'period dignity';
- Complement free period product provision by promoting the availability of free period products;
- Ensure that students understand the impact of periods on the emotional, mental, social and educational well-being of young people;
- Reduce stigma in relation to periods by providing both male and female students with relevant, age-appropriate information on periods;
- Enable students to understand how to deal with period issues, hygiene and disposal of period products;
- Have a positive impact on students' confidence, well-being, attendance and attainment.

10. Outside Agencies and Resources

All resources will be vetted by the EFL Co-ordinator and approved by the Vice Principal (Pastoral Care) before use to ensure they are consistent with the College's policies and ethos. Resources will be age-appropriate, sensitive and inclusive of all students' needs and experiences. They will contain factually accurate and up-to-date information.

When education and/or health professionals from statutory or voluntary organisations are invited into the College, the activities that are undertaken will complement the ongoing EFL Programme. The following procedures will be followed when using outside agencies:

- Copies of the RSE Policy, Child Protection/Safeguarding Policy, Mission Statement and Aims of the College will be given to the agency which will be asked to adhere to them;
- The agency will comply with both the College's policies and ethos;
- The agency will be made aware of, and will follow, procedures relating to issues of confidentiality and disclosures as outlined in the College's Child Protection/Safeguarding Policy;
- A teacher will always be present;
- Parents/guardians will be informed.

11. Staff Training and Development

Training will be organised by the EFL Co-ordinator and Vice Principal (Pastoral Care). Where appropriate, the Education Authority, Belfast Health and Social Care Trust and other agencies will be involved. Staff also benefit from the sharing of best practice at EFL meetings.

12. <u>Parental Involvement</u>

RSE is a lifelong process which begins informally with parents, guardians and carers. It is the primary duty and right of parents to be the principal educators in this area. Many parents/guardians are keen that their children are well prepared to handle situations around relationships and sexuality. Whilst the EFL Programme has a significant role to play, this role should ideally be additional and complementary to the role of parents/guardians. RSE is a shared responsibility between teachers and parents/guardians and we recognise the importance of collaborating with parents in reviewing and developing our policy and programme.

At the Year 8 induction interview, parents are informed that students will follow the EFL Programme. A letter is sent to parents of Year 11 and Year 14 students before presentations are delivered by external agencies. Opportunity is provided for any questions or queries from parents.

Whilst there is no legislative provision permitting the withdrawal of a child from classes in EFL, the College can grant these requests on an individual basis and will respect the wishes of the parent or guardian.

If a parent or guardian chooses to withdraw a child from all or parts of EFL, they must discuss the potentially detrimental effect that this can have with the Vice Principal (Pastoral Care). Parents and guardians must consider the social and emotional effects of being excluded, as well as the likelihood that the student will hear their peers' version of what happened or what was said in EFL classes, rather than the safe and reliable source of the teacher. The College will consider parental concerns and try to deal with problematic areas in order to reach a mutually acceptable resolution.

13. <u>Links across the Curriculum</u>

RSE is one of the three concepts explored in Personal Development and is a statutory element of the Northern Ireland Curriculum. The Personal Development Programme is delivered by Tutors and EFL teachers. Other subjects contribute to the teaching of RSE: Religious Education, Learning for Life and Work, Science and Home Economics. All subject teachers are required to promote the teaching of the Catholic Church on matters of sexuality and human development. Elements of RSE are also addressed through College assemblies and 'Focus of the Week' during Registration.

14. Review

It is intended that this policy is a flexible working document. The EFL Co-ordinator will review the RSE Policy every three years and will review the EFL Programme at the end of each academic year. Students are encouraged to become involved in the development and review of the EFL Programme. Students in each year group are asked to complete an evaluation questionnaire at the end of their EFL Programme. In addition, the Student Council will be used as a platform to evaluate and review the policy and programme. Teachers are also asked to complete a short evaluation on each lesson taught in the EFL Programme. This information will be forwarded to the EFL Co-ordinator who will correlate the findings which will be taken into account in the review.

15. How to Raise a Concern or Make a Complaint about the Administration of this Policy

If you have a concern or complaint about the administration of this policy, please contact Ms McCarthy, Vice Principal, in the first instance. If necessary, you may then access and follow the College's Complaints Procedure which is available on the College website at www.knock.co.uk. Should you remain dissatisfied with the College's response after completing the internal complaints procedure, you can bring your complaint to the Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman within six months. Contact details for the Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman are provided on Page 11 of the Complaints Procedure.

Signed: Mr Leo O'Reilly Date: 6th October 2022

(Chairperson of Board of Governors)

Signed: Miss Deborah McLaughlin Date: 6th October 2022

(Principal)

Related Documents

Our Lady and St Patrick's College, Knock - Mission Statement and Aims

DE Circular 2022/02 (22/02/22) - 'Children Who Display Harmful Sexualised Behaviour'

Catholic Schools' Trustee Service (2021) 'Relationships and Sexuality Education - Guidance Document for Post Primary Schools: Northern Ireland'

CCEA (2021) 'Period Dignity Policy/Guidance'

Pope Francis (2018) 'Guadete et Exsultate: On the Call to Holiness in Today's World'

DE Circular 2017/04 (Updated 02/09/19) - 'Safeguarding and Child Protection: A Guide for Schools'

DE Circular 2017/04 (24/04/17) - 'Safeguarding and Child Protection: A Guide for Schools'

Pope Francis (April 2016) 'Amoris Laetitia: The Joy of Love'

PSHE Association (April 2016) 'Key Principals of Effective Preventative Education' (Internet Safety)

DE Circular 2015/22 (26/08/15) - 'Relationships and Sexuality Education Guidance'

CCEA (2015) 'Relationships and Sexuality Education Guidance: An Update for Post-Primary Schools'

CCEA (2015) 'Teaching Controversial Issues at Key Stage 3'

Safeguarding Board for Northern Ireland (2015) 'Sexting and the Law' (A Basic Guide to Help Professionals and the Public Deal with Incidents of 'Sexting')

Department of Finance and Personnel (2014) 'Multi-Agency Practice Guidelines: Female Genital Mutilation'

DE Circular 2013/16 (25/06/13) - 'Relationships and Sexuality Education Policy in Schools'

Department of Finance and Personnel (2012) 'The Right to Choose: Statutory Guidance for Dealing with Forced Marriage'

ETI (2011) 'Report of an Evaluation of RSE in Post-Primary Schools'

DE (2011) 'Community Relations, Equality and Diversity in Education Policy'

DE Circular 2010/01 (13/01/10) - 'Guidance on Relationships and Sexuality Education'

CCEA (2009) 'Revised GCSE Scheme of Work: Learning for Life and Work'

Equality Commission for Northern Ireland (March 2009) 'Eliminating Sexual Orientation Discrimination in Northern Ireland, Short Guide - Education'

CCEA (2007) 'The Big Picture of the Curriculum at Key Stage 3'

CCEA (2007) 'The Big Picture of the Curriculum at Key Stage 4'

CCEA (2007) 'Personal Development Guidance for Key Stage 4'

CCEA (2007) 'Key Stage 3 Non-Statutory Guidance for Personal Development'

The Education Order (NI) 2006

ACCORD (2002) 'Love Rejoices in the Truth' (Relationships and Sexuality Education)

DE Circular 2001/15 (24/08/01) - 'Relationships and Sexuality Education'

CCEA (2001) 'Guidance for Post-Primary Schools: Relationships and Sexuality Education'

Pope John Paul II (1995) 'Evangelium Vitae' (The Gospel of Life)

United Nations Convention for the Rights of the Child (1989) Articles 12, 18, 19, 28 and 29