



Circular 0037/2010

**TO THE PRINCIPALS AND BOARDS OF MANAGEMENT IN POST-
PRIMARY SCHOOLS**

RELATIONSHIPS AND SEXUALITY EDUCATION

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The purpose of this circular is to remind schools of their obligations to:
- (a) develop a school policy in regard to Relationships and Sexuality Education and
 - (b) implement a programme in this area as an element of Social Personal and Health Education at junior cycle, and as an RSE programme in senior cycle.
- 1.2 Circulars M4/95, M20/96, M22/00, M11/03 and M27/2008 refer, all of which are available at www.education.ie. These circulars require schools to develop a Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) policy and programme, and to implement them for all students from First Year to Sixth Year.
- 1.3 Schools have a responsibility under Section 9 (e) of the Education Act 1998 to promote the moral, spiritual, social and personal development of students and promote health education for them, in consultation with their parents, having regard to the characteristic spirit of the school.
- 1.4 Regard must also be had to Section 30 (2) (e) under which a child may not be required to attend instruction in any subject which is contrary to the conscience of the parent of the student, or in the case of a student who has reached 18, the student.
- 1.5. Access to sexual and health education is an important right for students under the terms of the Article 11.2 of the European Social Charter. The Council of Europe
European Committee of Social Rights, which examines complaints regarding breaches of the Charter, has indicated it regards this Article as requiring that health education “*be provided throughout the entire period of schooling*” and that sexual and reproductive health education is “*objective, based on*

contemporary scientific evidence and does not involve censoring, withholding or intentionally misrepresenting information, for example as regards contraception or different means on maintaining sexual and reproductive health.”

The Department’s Lifeskills Survey and a recent Dáil na nÓg study *Life Skills Matter – Not Just Points*, which is available at www.omcya.ie have highlighted low levels of implementation of RSE in senior cycle.

Development and implementation of an RSE Policy

- 2.1 Schools are required to have a policy for RSE which has been developed in consultation with teachers, parents/guardians, members of Boards of Management and students. The Student Council should be involved in the consultation process where an RSE policy is in development, and made aware of the policy, if the development of a policy has been completed. Guidelines for the development of an RSE policy are at www.education.ie (press Education Personnel, and see School Policies and Plans on left column).
- 2.2 The RSE policy should reflect the core values and ethos of the school as outlined in the school’s mission statement. Spiritual, moral and ethical issues may arise when teaching RSE. The school’s RSE policy should guide teachers in the treatment of such issues, in accordance with the ethos of the school.

3 Delivery of an RSE Programme

- 3.1 Schools are required to teach RSE as an integral component of Junior Cycle SPHE up to Third Year, as outlined in the Junior Cycle SPHE Curriculum Framework produced by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA, 2000). Schools are also required to teach Senior Cycle RSE even in the absence of a timetabled SPHE class.
- 3.2 The NCCA Interim Curriculum Guidelines for RSE (1996) can be accessed from the SPHE website (www.sphe.ie). Schools are required to teach all aspects of the RSE programme, including family planning, sexually transmitted infections and sexual orientation. Elements of the programme cannot be omitted on the grounds of school ethos; however all aspects of the programme can and should be taught within the ethos and value system of the school as expressed in the RSE policy.
- 3.3 Teaching resources for Junior Cycle and Senior Cycle RSE were developed in 1998 and 1999. They are available on the SPHE website (www.sphe.ie) A new resource to support the teaching of RSE at Senior Cycle - the TRUST (Talking Relationships, Understanding Sexuality Teaching) Resource is available to teachers attending Senior Cycle RSE training. The resource consists of a dvd and 20 accompanying lessons. It covers the topics of relationships, fertility, contraception, sexually transmitted infections and sexual orientation. It

provides valuable support for teachers and schools and should assist in ensuring consistency of treatment of Senior Cycle RSE.'

- 3.4 Given the sensitivity of some aspects of RSE, schools are advised to avail of the RSE and SPHE training offered through the SPHE Support Service. (www.sphe.ie, Marino Institute of Education, Griffith Ave, Dublin 9, phone 01-8057718, fax 01-8535113, email sphe@mie.ie)

4 **Social Personal and Health Education in Senior Cycle**

- 4.1 **Please bring this circular to the attention of teachers and members of the school board of management.** This circular may also be accessed at www.education.ie under Education Personnel/Circulars
- 4.2 **Schools will be asked to confirm in 2010/11 that an RSE programme is being provided (a) as an integral part of SPHE for each year of Junior cycle, and (c) as a programme within senior cycle.**

Margaret Kelly
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