

**Bridgetown College**

**Relationships and Sexuality Education Policy**

**Ratified by BOM 26<sup>th</sup> April 2012**

## **A) The School**

Bridgetown Vocational College is a co-educational school under the umbrella of Co. Wexford VEC with an enrolment varying between 600-650 pupils.

## **B) Our School Philosophy**

Bridgetown Vocational College aims to provide a holistic educational experience meeting the diverse needs of the community in a positive learning environment. We encourage all students to realise their full potential and develop a sense of self-worth by promoting mutual respect, co-operation and tolerance.

Bridgetown Vocational College is multi-denominational, co-educational and non-selective in its intake. The college ethos is broadly Christian and since most young people in the area (stretching from Wellingtonbridge to Rosslare Harbour, and from the sea to Forth Mountain) attend Bridgetown Vocational College, the college atmosphere strongly reflects the ideas and attitudes of the local community. The college ethos promotes respect, seeks to promote the development of the potential of each individual and aims to generate moral and social responsibility.

## **C) Definition of Relationships and Sexuality Education**

RSE is a developmental process through experiential learning in which pupils participate to help cultivate a healthy attitude towards themselves and others, particularly in the area of sexuality and relationships.

## **D) Relationships and Sexuality Education within Social, Personal and Health Education**

The Draft Guidelines for RSE (NCCA, June 1995, 1.2) state that Social, Personal and Health Education is "spiral developmental in nature and age appropriate in content and methodology". The RSE Programme is designed to follow this principle and pattern. Apart from the specific lessons of RSE, SPHE covers other areas which would be pertinent to the development of a healthy attitude to sexuality in oneself and one's relationships with others. SPHE deals with many issues such as self-esteem, communication and decision making skills, all of which can contribute to the effectiveness of the RSE programme.

## **E) The aims of our Relationships and Sexuality Education programme**

The Relationships and Sexuality Education programme is located in the overall framework of Social, Personal and Health Education and has specific aims:

- (a) To help pupils understand and develop friendships and relationships
- (b) To promote an understanding of sexuality
- (c) To promote a positive attitude to one's own sexuality and in one's relationship with others
- (d) To promote knowledge of and respect for reproduction
- (e) To enable pupils to develop attitudes and values toward their sexuality in a moral, spiritual and social framework in keeping with the policy of the school
- (f) To provide opportunities for pupils to learn about relationships and sexuality in ways that help them to think and act in a moral, caring and responsible way.

It is acknowledged that in a course of limited duration these aims are aspirational.

## **F) Guidelines for the management and organisation of Relationships and Sexuality Education in our school**

1. Arrangements regarding the teaching of the programme and the deployment of staff (on a voluntary basis) will be made by the principal in consultation with the individual members of staff.

2. Informing and involving parents: parents are the primary educators of their children and their role in education concerning relationships and sexuality is seen by the school as very important. This policy has been designed following consultation with all the partners including Parents Council representatives. A copy of the RSE policy is available on request.

3. Offering Advice: The school's function is to provide a general education about sexual matters and issues and not to offer individual advice, information or counselling on aspects of sexual behaviour and contraception. However, sources of professional information and advice will be identified where appropriate. Teachers may provide pupils with education and information about where and from whom they can receive confidential sexual advice and treatment e.g. local medical professionals or other suitable agencies. Advice offered should not be directive and should be appropriate to the age of the pupil.

4. Explicit Questions: It may not be appropriate to deal with some explicit questions in class. Teachers may choose to say that it is not appropriate to deal with that question at that time. If a teacher becomes concerned about a matter that has been raised he/she should seek advice from the SPHE co-ordinator or the principal. When deciding whether or not to answer questions the teacher should consider the age and readiness of the pupils, the RSE programme content, the ethos of the school and the RSE policy.

5. Confidentiality: It is school policy that in circumstances where a pupil is considered at some risk of any type of abuse (e.g. moral or physical) or in breach of the law, the teacher must refer immediately to the Designated Liaison Person or in his/her absence the Deputy Liaison Person who will then decide whether to inform the parents and/or appropriate authorities and may arrange for counselling. It should be noted:

(a) Teachers must not promise absolute confidentiality.

(b) Pupils must be made aware that any incident may be conveyed to the Designated Liaison Person and possibly to parents. If the Designated Liaison Person decides that it is in the best interests of the pupil to notify parents.

(c) Teachers must use their professional judgement to decide whether confidence can be maintained having heard the information.

(d) Teachers must indicate clearly to pupils when the content of a conversation can no longer be kept confidential.

The pamphlet "Procedures for Dealing with Allegations or Suspicions of Child Abuse" issued by the Department of Education contains the following in paragraph 4.1:

"If a teacher receives an allegation or has suspicion that a pupil may have been abused, or is being abused, or is at risk of abuse he/she should, without delay, report the matter to the Designated Liaison Person in that school. A written record of the report should be made and placed in a secure location by the Designated Liaison Person. The need for confidentiality at all times, as previously referred to in Chapter 1 Paragraph 1.2 of these guidelines, should be borne in mind. The supports of the school should continue to be made available to the child".

6. The division between biological and non-biological aspects of sex education: the school policy is that the Science Department deals primarily with the biological and contraception aspect of reproduction. The Home Economics Department also deals with the biological aspects of reproduction.

7. Withdrawing pupils from the RSE programme:

- Relevant sections of this policy are made available to parents in the school publication entitled "Information for Parents" together with details about the parent's right to withdraw their child from sensitive aspects of RSE - parents will always be provided with a full copy of this policy following a request.
- Parents do not have to give reasons for withdrawal but we respectfully invite them to do so. Once a parent's request to withdraw is made, that request must be complied with until revoked by the parent.

## 8. Using visiting speakers:

(a) It is school policy that most of the RSE programme is best discussed openly with teachers who are known and trusted by the pupils. However, visitors can enhance the quality of the provision as long as they are used in addition to, not instead of a planned programme of RSE.

## 9. Homosexuality

Teachers do not promote any one lifestyle as the only acceptable one for society and therefore it is inevitable that homosexuality will be discussed during a programme of sexual education. One of the many advantages of exploring issues concerning homosexuality is the opportunity to correct false ideas, assumptions and address prejudice. Discussion of homosexuality should be appropriate to the age of the pupils.

## 10. Special Needs

Children with special needs may need more help than others in coping with the physical and emotional needs 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.

## **G. On-going support, development and review**

### Training

1. All teachers involved in this work require sensitivity to the needs of the group, an ability to deal with questions openly and honestly and preparedness to refer to more expert advice if necessary.
2. The school will facilitate teachers to obtain relevant training in this field, bearing in mind the overall budgetary framework and the need for the on-going teaching and learning programme of the school to continue with as little disturbance as possible.

### **Resources**

The school will purchase appropriate RSE teaching materials, which have been identified by staff as useful and which have been approved by the principal, within the normal budgetary framework and as general school resources allow.

### **Evaluation**

The evaluation of RSE in the school should be on-going and should involve all those who were involved in the planning process. Regular meetings between all involved in a particular section of the RSE programme would facilitate such on-going evaluation.

Specifically, important to the RSE programme is:

- (a) Pupil feedback
- (b) Staff review
- (c) Parental feedback