

ST. RAPHAELA'S SECONDARY SCHOOL

RSE POLICY 2025



SCHOOL PHILOSOPHY

St. Raphaela's wishes to cater for the education of the whole person. Within the context of developing the social, moral, emotional, physical, spiritual and academic potential of each student, it is envisaged that Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) will play an integral part. While the school respects the freedom of each to worship God according to the practices of her own religion, we are a Catholic School, which is reflected in our ethos. It is acknowledged from the outset that the parent is the primary educator and the role of the school particularly in RSE is to support this.

DEFINITION

Relationships and Sexuality education is an ongoing lifelong process of acquiring knowledge and understanding, and of developing attitudes, beliefs and values about sexual identity, gender orientation, relationships and intimacy. In the school setting it is an integral part of general educational provision which seeks to promote the overall development of the person which includes the integration of sexuality into personal understanding, growth and development. RSE aims to provide opportunities for young people to learn about relationships and sexuality in ways that will help them think and act in a moral, caring and responsible manner.

RATIONALE

Relationships and Sexuality Education is an important element of a holistic education. As young people develop, the messages they receive about sexuality and sexual behaviour require a safe context within which they can learn about themselves and the wider world. In accordance with circulars M4/95, M20/96, M22/00, M11/03 and M27/2008,¹ RSE is taught as part of SPHE in each year of the Junior Cycle SPHE programme.² Also, working in partnership with parents, schools have an obligation to teach Senior Cycle RSE even in the absence of a timetabled SPHE class. (See Circulars M4/95, M20/96, 0027/2008).

WELLBEING/RSE AND SPHE

² Circulars 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.

³ Junior Cycle Wellbeing Guidelines, NCCA 2017, www.ncca.ie/media/2487/wellbeingguidelines_forjunior_cycle.pdf. (p. 47).

This policy was ratified by the Board of Management at its meeting on Mon Feb 10th 2025

Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) is an integral part of the SPHE programme and the Wellbeing curriculum. RSE provides the context within which students can learn about the physical, social and emotional and moral issues related to relationships, sexual health, sexuality and gender identity including where to source reliable information

In Junior and Senior Cycle, the six indicators wellbeing indicators – Active, Responsible, Connected, Resilient, Respected and Aware– have been identified as central to students’ wellbeing. SPHE content and teaching modules provides learning opportunities designed to enhance each of these indicators thereby contributing significantly to the school’s Wellbeing programme in Junior and Senior Cycle.

AIMS

RSE in St. Raphaela’s has specific aims:

1. To help young people understand and develop friendships and relationships
2. To enable students to integrate socially with a high level of self-esteem
3. To promote an understanding of sexuality
4. To promote a positive attitude to one’s own sexuality and in one’s relationships with others
5. To encourage responsible decision-making in relation to oneself and others

LEARNING INTENTIONS OF RSE:

RSE should enable students to:

- Acquire the understanding and skills necessary to form healthy friendships and relationships
- Develop a positive sense of self-awareness, and the skills for building and maintaining self-esteem
- Become aware of the variety of ways in which individuals grow and change, especially during adolescence, and develop respect for difference between individuals
- Understand human physiology, including the reproductive cycle, human fertility and sexually transmitted infections (STIs)
- Understand the concept of consent and develop clear communication skills
- Explore boundaries and respect
- Understand sexual development and identity and explore aspects of sexuality including stereotyping, gender issues and cultural influences on sexuality
- Develop strategies for responsible decision making based on personal moral integrity that respects the rights of others
- Develop skills for coping with peer pressure, conflicts and threats to personal safety.³

LINKS TO JUNIOR CYCLE STATEMENTS OF LEARNING:

- SOL 11: The student takes action to safeguard and promote his/her wellbeing and that of others.
- SOL 5: The student has an awareness of personal values and an understanding of the process of moral decision-making.
- SOL 6: The student appreciates and respects how diverse values, beliefs and traditions have contributed to the communities and culture in which she/he lives.
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- Links between Junior Cycle SPHE and key skills specific to RSE include Managing myself, Staying Well and Working with others.

WHOLE SCHOOL CONTEXT AND MANAGEMENT OF RSE

⁴ Relationships and Sexuality Education, b4udecide.ie (2011)

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Teachers of RSE (as part of an integrated SPHE/Wellbeing programme) are aware of and act in accordance with the Child Safeguarding statement ratified by the Board of Management in 2024.

Learning in SPHE is essentially supported by a positive, empowering whole school environment and relevant school policies/guidelines including RSE, Anti-bullying and Substance-use Policies, and Child Protection Guidelines. This broader context for learning in SPHE helps to ensure that students learn to make informed decisions about their health and wellbeing. These decisions are further supported and encouraged by school, community and national policies and guidelines.

Our approach to the implementation of RSE in the school is as follows:

1. Appropriate language used by the teacher, i.e., being clear and concise without being overly explicit. All information is to be age appropriate.
2. Very sensitive issues such as 'abuse' should not be discussed in detail in class but students to be made aware that certain members of staff are specifically trained to discuss and deal with such problems, i.e., Guidance Counsellor. Parents and SPHE teachers also need to be aware of the possibility of such delicate information being entrusted to them. If a teacher becomes concerned about a matter that has been raised, he/she should seek advice from the Guidance Counsellor, or the principal (Designated Liaison Person).
3. Programme content will be made available to parents who wish to inform themselves about it. A copy of this policy will also be made available to any parent on request.
4. Parents who wish to remove their daughter from RSE class will be accommodated.

VISITING SPEAKERS

It is school policy that most of the RSE programme is best discussed openly with teachers who are known and trusted by the students. However, on occasion, a visiting speaker may be invited to talk to students in relation to a certain topic. On such occasions, the RSE co-ordinator will inform parents on VSWARE well in advance of the visit, and the purpose and content of the visit. Parents will be asked to sign a permission slip online, allowing their daughter to attend the talk. A Teacher will accompany the visiting speaker at all times during the visit. In the following RSE class, the students will be given the opportunity to evaluate the talk openly.

TRAINING

Teachers involved in this work require sensitivity to the needs of the group and an ability to deal with questions openly and honestly. Where possible, teachers with a genuine interest in RSE will be chosen to work on the programme. While some teachers have expert training in the specific areas of health, SPHE.ie/PDST.ie will facilitate willing teachers to obtain the necessary training in this field.

MONITORING, EVALUATION AND REVIEW

At meetings with the Wellbeing Co-Ordinator, teachers of RSE/SPHE have the opportunity to share thoughts, make suggestions and review the RSE programme content. Students are encouraged to share feedback, and parental responses are always welcome.

In particular the Junior Cycle Short Course SPHE Strand 3 focuses on students learning about important relationships in their lives and building relationship skills. Students also have the opportunity to record attitudes, values and feelings in their personal diary where they can reflect privately on their learning in RSE. These journals can prove an important resource for students when reviewed as they can reveal changing attitudes, feelings and judgements which can demonstrate their own developing sense of awareness towards self and others.

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Strand 3: Team Up provides learning outcomes particular to the RSE programme – Appendix 1.⁴ However, these outcomes should not be taken in isolation but seen as part of the integrated SPHE programme.

The following is a list of themes which will be covered in each Junior Cycle year during the course of approximately 6 lessons:

Year	Human Relationships	Human Growth and Development	Human Sexuality
One	- Self Esteem - Friendships & healthy relationships - Roles in a family - Personal hygiene	- Changes in adolescence - The male and female reproductive systems - Conception	- Gender identity - Sexual orientation - The male and female reproductive systems
Two	- Managing positive and toxic relationships - Decision making according to personal values - Peer pressure - Mental health and wellbeing	- Menstrual wellbeing - Male reproductive health - Contraception - Lifestyle choices and staying healthy	- Health and personal safety (consent) - Understanding fertility - Gender identity and sexual orientation
Three	- Self-esteem - Social media & pop culture - Recognizing sexual harassment	- Sexual health (STI's) - Contraception - Body image - Harmful effects of pornography	- Gender roles and expectations - Gender identity and sexual orientation

Junior Cycle Resources:

A variety of resources are available to teachers as listed below:

- Junior Cycle Wellbeing Guidelines, 2017
- Short Course SPHE Specification for Junior Cycle, JCT website with accompanying documents.
- HSE Health and Wellbeing Programme
- B4UDecide website
- Busy Bodies
- Visiting Speakers
- SPHE Curriculum, DES/NCCA, 2003
- SPHE Guidelines for Teachers DES/NCCA, 2001
- Resource Materials: Relationships and Sexuality Education (Dept. of Education & Science 1998)
- Relationships and Sexuality Education (an aspect of SPHE education) Interim Curriculum and Guidelines for Post Primary Schools, NCCA 1996
- <https://www.hse.ie/eng/about/who/healthwellbeing/hse-education-programme/junior-cycle-sphe-training-resources/>

RSE Senior Cycle Programme

⁴ Short Course, SPHE, Specification for Junior Cycle, 2016. P. 13.

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During Transition Year, 5th Year and 6th Year, Teachers concentrate on 'Themed Topics' for exploration and consideration by students. During Transition Year, many classes are based on lessons from the TRUST Programme which provides students with a thorough knowledge base in relation to RSE topics. As a result, they are able to focus more directly on selected themes for 5th Year and 6th Year.

Year	Themes
Transition Year	• Self Esteem • Boundaries • Consent and Sexual Boundaries
5 th Year	• Contraception • LGBTQ+ • Ethics
6 th Year	• STI's • Ethics

Senior Cycle Resources:

- The Trust Programme, (Department of Education and Science, the Health Service Executive and the Crisis Pregnancy Agency, SPHE support team),
- Growing Up Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender, (Dept. of Education, SPHE, Glen and BelongTo Youth Services),
- HSE Health and Wellbeing Programme
- More than a Phase, (Pobal, Social Inclusion Programme),
- Relationships & Sexuality Education: Senior Cycle, Department of Education & Science, 1999
- Various Mental Health Resources
- Mindfulness & self-awareness resources
- BBC Bitesize
- TES Resources
- TED Talks
- Senior Cycle RE Textbooks