

Fingal Community College



SPHE & RSE Policy

June 2025

Ratified by the Board of Management	18 th September 2025
Date for Review	June 2027

1. Introduction

Fingal Community College delivers a six-year cycle from first year to sixth year. This policy was drawn up in consultation with all the school partners - the board of management, teaching staff, parents, and students. This policy applies to all stakeholders and external facilitators.

This policy has been developed in line with the ethos and philosophy of the college which has at its core the care and wellbeing of every student and the provision of a safe and secure learning environment for all members of the school community.

Mission Statement

Our college is a caring and proud learning community committed to the pursuit of excellence. Students, teachers, and parents are encouraged and supported to be the best that they can be in a school environment that respects diversity and fosters justice and equality for all.

We strive to ensure that our Mission Statement is lived out every day in the classrooms and corridors of our school. The development, care and welfare of each student is central to all that we do. Our sincere hope is that all students are guided, supported and enabled to reach their full potential academically, personally, emotionally and socially.

The core values we have identified as being central to all relationships and structures within our school are **Fairness, Courage and Courtesy.**

Rationale of the SPHE Programme

Early adolescence is a time of significant change for young people, physically, emotionally, and socially. Using experiential methodologies and group work, students have the dedicated space and time in SPHE to develop their understanding and skills to learn about themselves, to care for themselves and others, and to make informed decisions about their health and wellbeing in a rapidly changing world.

In SPHE, students have opportunities to revisit different themes which focus on developing self-awareness and respect for others, and the skills of self-management, communication, coping, decision-making and relating to others. The SPHE Specification also emphasises the importance of student agency and engagement in the learning process as key to learning in the effective domain. The skills involved are vital for self-fulfillment, for living in communities, and for full engagement in learning beyond SPHE. Personal reflection, resilience and empathy are also promoted through SPHE.

Relationships and sexuality education (RSE), as a core component of the SPHE programme, is important for people at this stage of their lives. They are exposed to a range of information about relationships and sexuality from informal sources, the media and online. SPHE provides the context within which young people can learn about important physical, social, emotional, and moral issues around relationships, sexual health, sexuality, and gender identity, including how to get reliable information from trusted sources.

It is important to build on students' learning in SPHE from their primary education also. Learning in SPHE is essentially supported by a positive, empowering whole school environment and relevant school policies/ including Fingal Community College's Positive Code of Behaviour, Bí Cineálta (Anti- Bullying), Substance-Use policies, and Child Protection Procedures. 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 college, community, and national policies & guidelines.

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

2. Course Overview

The Junior Cycle short course in SPHE is designed to enable students to develop a positive sense of themselves and a commitment to caring for themselves and others.

Strand 1: Understanding Myself and Others

This strand focuses on developing self-awareness and self-esteem and building some of the foundational skills and dispositions needed for healthy relationships and to thrive in life, including communicating and negotiating, listening, showing empathy, respecting difference, and self-management/self-regulation.

Strand 2: Making Healthy Choices.

This strand offers opportunities for students to consider how they can make healthy choices to support their wellbeing. It explores what being healthy might look like for a teenager what helps or gets in the way of making healthy choices and how to access reliable information to support good choices.

Strand 3: Relationships and Sexuality

This strand explores the cognitive, physical, emotional, and social aspects of relationships and sexuality through a positive, inclusive, rights and responsibilities-based approach. The focus is on family relationships, friendships, romantic and potential sexual relationships in the future.

Strand 4: Emotional Wellbeing

This strand primarily focuses on nurturing emotional wellbeing and promoting positive mental health. It helps students develop problem solving and coping skills for dealing with the emotional ups and downs of life, explores how they can support themselves and others in challenging times and discusses where/how to find support, if needed.

The four strands are underpinned by three cross-cutting elements that are foundational for effective teaching and learning in SPHE. These are:

- **Awareness**
- **Dialogue**
- **Reflection and Action**

The full short course for Junior Cycle SPHE specification 2023 can be found at the following address: <https://tinyurl.com/4cpjnj5m> see also appendix A

Senior Cycle SPHE will be guided by the following strands and learning outcomes. This SPHE specification is designed for a minimum of 60 hours of class contact time over the final two years of senior cycle education. Senior Cycle SPHE is designed around broad learning outcomes that, with careful planning, can enable all students to engage and achieve relative to their individual aptitudes and abilities. The learning outcomes are relevant to all students and further guidance to support planning for a diversity of students in the SPHE classroom can be found on the SPHE toolkit. The learning outcomes set out below describe the knowledge, understanding, skills, values and dispositions that students should be able to demonstrate after a two-year period of learning. This learning is underpinned by three cross-cutting elements which are summarised below:

Strand 1: Health and Wellbeing

Within this strand students will explore the factors that influence their physical, social, spiritual, emotional and mental wellbeing and the relationships between these. They will learn ways to take care of themselves and stay as healthy as possible, with a particular focus on gaining awareness, skills, techniques and information to protect their mental health.

Strand 2: Relationships and Sexuality

Within this strand students will explore the wide range of relationships that are important for their lives with a particular focus on gaining the awareness, knowledge and skills to support them in creating and nurturing respectful, caring and healthy relationships. This strand also supports students to recognise and be empowered to respond to instances of abuse or violence in relationships. Note: Each of the learning outcomes below should be taught in a way that LGBTQ+ identities, relationships and families are fully integrated and reflected in teaching and learning, as opposed to being addressed within stand-alone lessons.

Strand 3: Into Adulthood

Within this strand students will gain specific knowledge and skills to support them as they make the transition to adulthood and learn how to take greater responsibility for themselves. This includes being enabled to manage choices, develop the skills that are needed to plan for the future, establish and stick to good habits, and achieve goals. It also supports students in learning how to take care of themselves in times of change or challenge, understanding their

rights and responsibilities before the law, and building the skills needed to advocate for and express solidarity with those experiencing discrimination or inequality.

The senior cycle SPHE specification can be found at this address; <https://tinyurl.com/2th6rkuj>
(See also appendix A)

Cross-Curricular Links

Fingal Community College supports the value of the cross-curricular elements of the SPHE programme. Religious Education, Science, and Home Economics are traditionally considered to be the subjects with the most related topics to SPHE. However, Fingal Community College's Physical Education Department plays a significant role in the promotion of Social, Personal and Health education, while all other departments in the school promote and teach SPHE related topics throughout the themed weeks which we hold in the College e.g. Anti-Bullying Week, Stand Up Awareness Week. There is also a strong emphasis placed on student participation in extra-curricular activities which also promote Social, Personal and Health education such as extracurricular sports, debating, student book club and more.

Links to Other Policies

https://www.fingalcc.ie/Content/2024/10/my49-2024_Code_of_Positive_Behaviour.pdf

<https://www.fingalcc.ie/page/School-Policies/19867/Index.html>

Assessment, Record-keeping, and Reporting

The Junior Cycle places a strong emphasis on assessment as part of the learning process. This approach requires a more varied approach to assessment in ensuring that the assessment method or methods chosen are fit for purpose, timely and relevant to the students. Assessment in Junior Cycle SPHE will optimise the opportunity for students to become reflective and active participants in their learning and for teachers to support this.

This assessment comes in the form of self-assessment, peer assessment and teachers' assessment of students. Students may be given questionnaires, worksheets, or reflective activities to self-assess. Peer assessment could be used by groups of students to evaluate how well they worked as a team. Teacher's assessment might involve the assessment of the students' work and skills through specific tasks, homework, or project work. Samples of work done in SPHE might be kept by the students as a record of achievement. Such work might be shown and discussed at home.

Each student will be provided with the relevant SPHE workbook at the start of the year under the new Department of Education schoolbooks scheme. It is expected that all students will

have this book in their possession for every SPHE class, for activities to be completed within the book.

As part of the assessment for the short course, students will complete one Classroom Based Assessment (CBA). Considering the diversity of learners and contexts, and to support maximum flexibility and choice, students will engage in one of the following CBAs:

Title	Format	Student preparation
Portfolio of my learning and reflection in SPHE	Individual selection of items of work, such as digital, written texts, posters, audio-visual or multi-modal	Students will choose three pieces of work, completed over time and linked to different strands of learning within the course, and present these accompanied by a reflection on why each piece was chosen and how it marked important learning for the student in SPHE.
OR		
Title	Format	Student preparation
Taking action for SPHE	Individual or small group project that can be presented in a wide range of formats	Students will, over a specified time, with support and guidance from the teacher, research, report and reflect on an action they have taken to raise awareness about or promote an aspect of health/wellbeing studied in the SPHE short course.

Student progress and achievement in short courses, both in ongoing assessments and in the specific Classroom-Based Assessment relating to this course, will be communicated to parents/guardians in interim reporting and in the Junior Cycle Profile of Achievement (JCPA).

Whilst the timing of the Classroom-Based Assessment in short courses may vary from school to school, Classroom-Based Assessment for assessment reporting purposes in the JCPA cannot be conducted in first year. This Classroom-Based Assessment can be completed during second or third year.

3. Relationship and Sexuality Education

Definition of Relationships & Sexuality Education

RSE is a developmental process through experiential learning in which pupils participate to help cultivate a healthy, respectful attitude towards themselves and others, particularly around sexuality and relationships. RSE aims to provide age-appropriate opportunities for young people to learn about relationships and sexuality in ways that help them think and act in a moral, caring, and responsible manner. The curriculum is delivered using a spiral approach which allows for the treatment of topics to be deepened as the student matures.

Relationships & Sexuality Education within Social, Personal & Health Education (SPHE)

The *Draft Guidelines for RSE* (NCCA, June 1995, 1.2) state that SPHE 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 that would be pertinent to the development of a healthy attitude to sexuality in oneself and one’s relationships with others. SPHE addresses many areas such as self-esteem, assertiveness, communication, and decision-making skills – all of which are essential components that contribute to the effectiveness of the RSE programme.

The Connection Between Wellbeing, SPHE & RSE Policies

The culture of the school is foundational in providing the context for SPHE/RSE education as core values are developed and promoted through overall culture. We believe the ways in which every member of staff relates to one another and to the students, and the quality of relationships between the students themselves, form the foundation for personal and social development in a school.

Every teacher, every class and co-curricular/extracurricular activity offers opportunities for enhancing the personal and social development of the students. Fingal Community College aims to create an environment which fully supports SPHE and where:

- People feel valued
- Self-esteem is fostered
- Respect, tolerance, and fairness are evident
- High expectations and standards are promoted
- There is support for those with difficulties
- Open communication is the norm
- Effort is recognised and rewarded
- Uniqueness and difference are valued
- Conflict is handled constructively
- Initiative and creativity are encouraged
- Social, moral, and civic values are promoted.

Aims of the Relationships & Sexuality Programme

Relationships & Sexuality Education, which is in the overall framework of Social, Personal & Health Education, has the following as its specific aims:

1. To help students understand and develop friendships and relationships
2. To promote an understanding of sexuality
3. To promote a positive attitude to one's own sexuality and in one's relationships with others
4. To promote knowledge and respect for reproduction
5. To enable students to develop attitudes and values towards their sexuality in a moral, spiritual and social framework in keeping with the policy of the College
6. To provide opportunities for students to learn about relationships and sexuality in a manner that encourages them to think and act in a mature, moral, caring, and responsible way.

Scope of SPHE/RSE Policy

Scope of Policy:

This RSE policy was developed in accordance with:

- Guidelines as set out in Circular M4/95, M20/96, C23/10, C37/2010 and best practice guidance from the NCCA and Department of Education.
- The Education Act 1998, as it 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 which 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.
- Guidance from SPHE Department and SPHE Co-ordinator
- Consultation with Principal, Deputy Principal, BOM, teachers, students, and parents.

4. RSE Course Content

Biological Aspects of Sex Education

This policy recognises that the Science and Home Economics Departments cover the biological aspects of reproduction, but this must also be covered within the Relationships & Sexuality Education programme.

LGBTQ+ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual & Transgender and Queer People)

Teachers do not promote any one lifestyle as the only acceptable one for society and therefore it is natural that LGBTQ+ matters will be discussed age appropriately during the SPHE

programme. One of the advantages of exploring issues concerning LGBTQ+ is the opportunity it affords to correct false ideas, assumptions, and address prejudice.

The *Equal Status Act 2000* and the *Equality Act 2004* prohibit discrimination across nine groups including sexual orientation. Bullying, including Homophobic Bullying, is addressed throughout the SPHE programme and specifically during Anti-Bullying Week and Stand-Up Awareness Week.

Contraception

Contraception will be addressed in an age-appropriate and transparent manner, ensuring that students receive accurate information to guide them should they choose to become sexually active in the future.

Students with Additional Educational Needs

Students with intellectual disabilities usually progress through the stages of sexual development at the same age as other children but may lack the cognitive or emotional maturity to understand the physiological and psychosocial changes that they are experiencing. Children and young people with an intellectual disability may also lack the understanding or awareness of behaviours that may put them at risk of sexual exploitation.

SPHE/RSE teachers tailor the classroom content by utilising the AEN-specific resources and support. This approach enhances young people's understanding and learning, ensuring they grasp the material while also safeguarding their safety and wellbeing.

Visiting Speakers

Most of the RSE programme is best discussed openly with teachers who are known and trusted by the students. However, visitors can also enhance the quality of the provision of a planned programme of RSE. The SPHE Co-ordinator will provide the visitor, well in advance of the visit, with a copy of this RSE policy, as advised by Circular 43/18.

External facilitators are approved by the Principal and Board of Management in consultation with the relevant teaching staff. 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. Relevant school staff will be informed of the details of the programme being provided by external facilitators. Parents/carers will be made aware in advance of the content of the programmes provided by external facilitators. External facilitators and programmes are evaluated by students and teachers regarding the subject matter, messages communicated, methodology and proposed learning outcome.

External facilitators always work under the guidance and supervision of the relevant classroom teacher who remains in the classroom with the students at all times and

retains a central role in the delivery of the subject matter. Absence of the teacher may undermine the integrity of the curriculum, and the credibility and professionalism of the teacher. It may also compromise the safety of the students.

Monitoring, Evaluating & Reviewing

The College is committed to monitoring and evaluating the SPHE/RSE programme. This will be achieved by:

- Pupil feedback
- SPHE subject planning meetings
- Senior management review of department minutes

The College is further committed to monitoring and evaluating the SPHE/RSE policy. This will be achieved by:

- Staff review and feedback
- Parental review and feedback
- Pupil review and feedback
- Senior Management review and feedback
- Board of Management review and feedback

5. Parental Involvement in the RSE Programme

Informing & Involving Parents/Guardians

A group of parents are consulted on the design and review of the SPHE / RSE policy. The views expressed by parents will be considered when reviewing the policy.

The College recognises that parents/guardians are the primary educators of their children. Consequently, their role in SPHE and Relationships & Sexuality Education is considered very important by the College. A copy of this policy will be made available to parents via our school website. Information will also be provided to parents at the First Year Induction.

Parents have a responsibility to inform themselves of the SPHE /RSE programme content and to prepare their sons / daughters for the information they will acquire around the sensitive areas covered in RSE. The RSE policy is available to view or download from the school website or a copy may be requested by a parent/guardian from the school office. Parents are asked to familiarise themselves with the policy content.

Parents of all students are notified by letter at least one week in advance of RSE lesson commencement.

Participation and Parents Request for Withdrawal

If there is a request to withdraw a student from RSE, Parents/Guardians will be asked to attend a meeting in the College to discuss the nature of their concern(s).

RSE is a mandatory element of the SPHE programme, and schools are obligated to offer RSE lessons at both Junior and Senior Cycle. However, The Education Act 1998, Section 30 (2) (e) states that a student is not required to attend instruction in any subject which is contrary to the conscience of the parents. This also applies to students who are 18 or older, where the decision rests with the student themselves. Each parent therefore has the right to withdraw their child from some or all RSE classes. In such cases, it is recommended that parents offer alternative relationships and sexuality education at home to ensure their children still receive the necessary support for their personal growth and development.

6.Resources & Training for SPHE/RSE

Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) is a core element of our SPHE Programme. SPHE is delivered in a weekly SPHE lesson for First, Second and Third year classes. Teachers follow the Department of Education and NCCA guidelines to ensure that content and depth are developmentally appropriate. In Senior Cycle, age-appropriate RSE modules are taught during Life Skills classes, drawing on trusted materials such as BeLong To, Active Consent, Shout Out and HSE resources.

The Principal and Deputy Principal assign suitably trained staff to teach SPHE/RSE and actively support their continued professional development, facilitating attendance at relevant in-service training. Core teaching materials include a range of resources from the NCCA toolkit alongside the Educate.ie series of resources. All resources are shared through Microsoft Teams so teachers can collaborate easily. The College is committed to reviewing and updating these materials as required and to purchasing new resources identified by staff.

Advice on Sexual Matters

The function of RSE is to provide a general education about sexual matters and issues and not to offer individual directive advice, information, or counselling on aspects of sexual behaviour and contraception. Sources of professional information and advice will be identified when necessary and should be appropriate to the age of the student.

Answering Questions

The teacher is not obligated to answer all questions in class and may take time to consult with colleagues if unsure of the appropriateness of a question. It is important to remember that the teacher is not expected to have all the answers; their role is to facilitate student discussion rather than act as the sole expert. **Class discussions will maintain a broad focus and will not target individuals with personal questions, aligning with the established and agreed class contract.** Any inappropriate questions will not be addressed by the teacher or between students. SPHE teachers will use their professional judgment, considering factors such as student age, stage of development the SPHE/RSE specification and the RSE Policy when addressing questions. The SPHE teacher may also exercise his or her own professional judgement in deciding whether to answer the question privately after the class has finished. If a teacher becomes concerned about a child protection matter that has been raised by a student, he/she should seek advice from the Principal/ DLP.

6. Child Protection & Confidentiality (SPHE & RSE)

It is school policy that in circumstances where a pupil is considered at some risk of any type of abuse or in breach of the law; the teacher must refer immediately to the Designated Liaison Person who will take the appropriate course of action. In the case of underage sexual activity, the school will be guided by the *Child Protection Guidelines for Primary and Post Primary Schools 2023*, it states *that* ‘ Where a school becomes aware of underage sexual intercourse the school should take appropriate steps to inform the child’s parents’ 2.3.4

According to the *Criminal Law Sexual Offences Act 2006*, seventeen years is the legal age of consent.

Teachers must not promise absolute confidentiality. Teachers must indicate clearly to students when the content of a conversation cannot be kept confidential, giving the student the opportunity to decide whether to proceed or not. Teachers must use their professional judgement to decide whether confidentiality can be maintained having heard the information. Students must be made aware that any incident may be conveyed to the Principal and parents/guardians if the Principal decides that it is in the best interest of the student.

The *Child Protection Guidelines for Primary and Post Primary Schools 2023* states in 4.2.1 that:

In accordance with the best practice (non-statutory) requirement of the Children First National Guidance 2017, these procedures continue the previous requirement that any member of school personnel including a registered teacher who receives an allegation or has a suspicion that a child may have been, is being, or is at risk of being abused or neglected, is still required to report the matter, without delay, to the DLP in the school.

Appendix A

Junior and Senior Cycle Specifications:

Learning Outcomes explored in the Junior Cycle SPHE Specification 2023

Strand 1:

- 1.1 explore the physical, social and emotional changes that happen during adolescence
- 1.2 reflect on their personal strengths and values and how they bring these into relationships
- 1.3 explore the range of influences and life experiences that can impact on self-image and self-esteem and identify ways to nurture a positive sense of self-worth
- 1.4 recognise the factors and influences that shape young people's self-identity, such as family, peers, culture, gender identity, sexual orientation, race/ethnic background, dis/abilities, religious beliefs/worldviews
- 1.5 reflect on gender equity and how gender stereotypes impact on expectations, behaviour and relationships
- 1.6 discuss experiences/situations of bias, inequality or exclusion³ and devise ways to actively create more inclusive environments
- 1.7 communicate in a respectful and effective manner and listen openly and sensitively to the views/feelings of others
- 1.8 reflect on the meaning and importance of empathy and discuss ways that it can be expressed
- 1.9 demonstrate self-management skills, including setting personal goals, delaying gratification, and self-regulation of thoughts, emotions and impulses.

Strand 2:

- 2.1 consider the multifaceted nature of health and wellbeing, and evaluate what being healthy might look like for different adolescents, including how food, physical activity, sleep/rest and hygiene contribute to health and wellbeing
- 2.2 investigate how unhealthy products such as nicotine, vapes, alcohol, and unhealthy food and drinks are marketed and advertised
- 2.3 discuss societal, cultural and economic influences affecting young people when it comes to making healthy choices about smoking, alcohol and other addictive substances and behaviours, and how harmful influences can be overcome in real-life situations
- 2.4 demonstrate skills and strategies to help make informed choices that support health and wellbeing and apply them in real-life situations that may be stressful and/or involve difficult peer situations

2.5 discuss the physical, social, emotional and legal consequences of using addictive substances - immediate and long-term

2.6 consider scenarios where, for example, alcohol, nicotine, drugs, food and electronic devices might be used to cope with unpleasant feelings or stress, and discuss possible healthy ways of coping

2.7 assess the benefits and difficulties associated with their online world and discuss strategies for dealing with a range of scenarios that might arise

2.8 discuss how to share personal information, images, opinions and emotions in a safe, responsible and respectful manner online and in person

2.9 explore why young people share sexual imagery online and examine the risks and consequences of doing this 2.10 demonstrate how to access and appraise appropriate and trustworthy information, supports and services about health and wellbeing.

Strand 3:

3.1 reflect on the values, behaviours and skills that help to make, sustain and end relationships respectfully with friends, family and romantic/intimate relationships

3.2 examine benefits and difficulties experienced by young people in a range of relationships - friendships, family relationships, and romantic/intimate relationships

3.3 identify signs of healthy, unhealthy and abusive relationships

3.4 appreciate the importance of setting healthy boundaries in relationships and consider how to show respect for the boundaries of others

3.5 consider the importance of taking care of their reproductive health

3.6 appreciate the breadth of what constitutes human sexuality, and how sexual orientation and gender identity are experienced and expressed in diverse ways

3.7 explore the pressures to become sexually intimate and discuss ways to show respect for people's choices

3.8 appreciate the importance of seeking, giving and receiving consent in sexual relationships, from the perspective of building caring relationships and from a legal perspective

3.9 explain the importance of safer sexual activity with reference to methods of contraception and protection against sexually transmitted infections (STIs)

3.10 discuss the influence of popular culture and the online world, in particular, the influence of pornography, on young people's understanding, expectations and social norms in relation to sexual expression

3.11 demonstrate how to access and appraise appropriate and trustworthy advice, support and services related to relationships and sexual health.

Strand 4:

4.1 discuss the fluid nature of emotional wellbeing and ways to nurture and protect it 4.2 recognise and acknowledge their emotions and recognise the links between thoughts, feelings and behaviour

4.3 consider the impact of stress and draw upon a variety of techniques to help self-regulate emotions and cope with the day-to-day stresses of life

4.4 discuss ways to support themselves and others in challenging times and where/how/when to seek support, if needed

4.5 explore how emotional wellbeing can be affected by factors within our control, such as sleep, diet, exercise, substance use and online exposure, and factors beyond our control

4.6 recognise different kinds of abusive and bullying behaviour that can occur in interactions online and in person

4.7 explain why noticing and responding to different kinds of abusive or bullying behaviour that can occur in person and online is important and discuss appropriate responses including, why, how, where and when to report

4.8 identify actions young people can take, without putting themselves at risk, in situations where they are aware of incidents of abusive behaviour or bullying happening and explore the barriers to standing up

4.9 demonstrate how to access and appraise appropriate and trustworthy information and services aimed at supporting young people's emotional wellbeing and mental health.

Learning Outcomes explored in the Senior Cycle SPHE Specification 2024 Strand 1:

Health and Wellbeing

1.1 explore the determinants of good health.

1.2 investigate ways a person can influence their holistic health, including physical activity, food, sleep, social connections, positive self-image and connecting with nature, and discuss how these are related.

1.3 examine social norms, attitudes and beliefs related to alcohol, tobacco/vaping and substance use.

1.4 explore the factors that influence mental health and wellbeing, including the influence of family, community, peers, school, social media, digital technology, alcohol and mood altering drugs, and one's self-image and identity.

1.5 recognise helpful and unhelpful thinking patterns, including negative self-talk, and how these can affect emotions and behaviour.

1.6 describe and draw on a variety of strategies that can help regulate and manage thoughts and emotions in order to nurture positive mental health.

1.7 recognise the signs and symptoms of low mood, stress and anxiety in themselves and others and recognise when help should be sought, where to go and how to access help if needed.

1.8 discuss ways of responding to low mood, stress and anxiety.

1.9 explain the pathways towards addiction, the signs and consequences of different kinds of addictions and where to go and how to access help, if needed.

1.10 discuss and devise ways to safely manage social situations where their own or others' health or safety may be at risk.

Strand 2: RSE

2.1 demonstrate the awareness and skills needed for nurturing healthy in-person and online relationships, including respecting boundaries, communicating effectively, navigating difficult conversations, preventing and managing conflict and dealing with break-ups.

2.2 reflect on how their attitudes, beliefs, values and identity, and those of others, can influence the dynamics of families, friendships and romantic relationships.

2.3 discuss the need for consent and the importance of care, respect, empathy, trust and mutual pleasure within a sexual relationship.

2.4 examine how both positive and harmful attitudes around gender are perpetuated in the media, online, and in society and discuss strategies for challenging and changing harmful attitudes and narratives.

2.5 identify and consider common signs of abusive relationships, including coercive control.

2.6 explore the root causes and consequences of domestic, sexual and gender-based violence (DSGBV), and outline the supports and services available, and protections under the law.

2.7 investigate the possible influence of pornography on attitudes, behaviours and relationship expectations and what supports are available for those impacted by pornography.

2.8 discuss image-based abuse, sexual harassment, sexual assault and rape, and what to do and how to seek support if they or someone they know has experienced any of these.

2.9 understand the components of sexual health including fertility across the life-cycle, reproductive choices, sexual functioning, safer sexual practices, possible responses to an unplanned pregnancy, and how to access sexual health information and services.

Strand 3: Into Adulthood

3.1 consider strategies for self-care that can help maintain health and prevent ill-health.

3.2 demonstrate self-management skills necessary for life.

3.3 explore a range of life events where they might experience change, loss or heartache and discuss how to care for themselves and/or others during these times and where to find support.

3.4 summarise accurately their rights, responsibilities and protections before the law as a young adult with reference to online communicating, consent, alcohol and drug use, their work-place rights and right to access services.

3.5 demonstrate the confidence and skills needed to be their own person and be able to advocate for themselves and others, even if it means standing out from the crowd

3.6 recognise when people are experiencing discrimination and demonstrate the skills needed to express solidarity in a range of situation

Appendix B

Circular 0043/2018

<https://circulars.gov.ie/pdf/circular/education/2018/43.pdf>



Circular to Management Authorities of all Post Primary Schools: Secondary, Community and Comprehensive and the Chief Executive Officers of the Education and Training Boards

Best practice guidance for post primary schools in the use of programmes and/or external facilitators in promoting wellbeing consistent with the Department of Education and Skills' Wellbeing Policy Statement and Framework for Practice

This circular supersedes [Circular 0023/2010](#)

1. Introduction

The Department of Education and Skills has developed a Wellbeing Policy Statement and Framework for Practice which recognises the unique position of schools in promoting the wellbeing of students. **This policy requires that a Wellbeing Promotion Process is developed and implemented, through the use of the School Self-Evaluation (SSE) process, in all schools by 2023.**

School management, principals and teachers have a duty to provide the best quality and the most appropriate education in order to promote the wellbeing of their students. They also have a duty to protect students in their care at all times from any potentially harmful, inappropriate or misguided resources, interventions or programmes. The Department therefore wishes to advise management authorities of the necessity to adhere to best practice when implementing the [Wellbeing Policy Statement and Framework for Practice](#).

This circular offers best practice guidance in selecting wellbeing promotion programmes and/or external facilitators (both once-off speakers and those delivering programmes over a period of time), to support the implementation of the Wellbeing Promotion Process including, in particular, the selection for social, personal and health education (SPHE), and relationships and sexuality education (RSE) curricula. The advice provided in this circular applies with effect from the date of issue.



2. Responsibility of Schools

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www.education.ie

The Education Act (1998) states that:

A recognised school shall promote the moral, spiritual, social and personal development of students and provide health education for them, in consultation with their parents, having regard to the characteristic spirit of the school.

Schools are in a unique position to promote wellbeing, and social and emotional learning, and should ensure a whole school approach to wellbeing promotion and early intervention when considering appropriate use of external supports and services. Students flourish where there is a whole school approach to supporting their growth and where there is a shared belief in their potential for development, learning and wellbeing. Boards of management, school leaders and school staff are responsible for providing an environment that nurtures and supports students, and play a central role in providing leadership and direction for the implementation of a comprehensive and integrated approach to wellbeing promotion.

The Department's [Wellbeing Policy Statement and Framework for Practice](#) assists schools in ensuring that wellbeing promotion is embedded within the school's existing practice. The school's review and development process using the [Wellbeing Policy Statement and Framework for Practice](#) provides guidance and practical resources to assist in the further enhancement of whole school approaches to wellbeing promotion in the areas of:

- culture and environment
- curriculum (teaching and learning)
- policy and planning
- relationships and partnerships

To ensure effective implementation of a whole school approach the school needs a structure such as a student support team which has wellbeing promotion as part of its responsibility.

It is essential that school managers and all staff continue to develop their competence and confidence in the promotion of wellbeing. **The qualified classroom teacher is the best placed professional to work sensitively and consistently with students and she/he can have a powerful impact on influencing students' attitudes, values, and behaviour in all aspects of wellbeing education.** This can be achieved through accessing continuing professional development (CPD) which includes the sharing of expertise and learning, and having opportunities to model and engage in collaborative

working. The curricular elements of wellbeing promotion should be delivered by staff who are trained for this purpose having completed relevant CPD.

When a need is identified through the implementation of the Wellbeing Promotion Process and schools choose to select a programme or external speaker, it is important that best practice guidance as outlined in this circular is followed.

3. Supporting the School's Self-Evaluation Wellbeing Promotion Process with Programmes and/or External Facilitators

Use of programmes and/or external facilitators can play a role in supplementing, complementing and supporting a planned comprehensive approach to wellbeing promotion. Programmes and/or external facilitators are most likely to be effective when they:

- are part of a whole school approach and address an identified need
- are delivered to class groups with the involvement of school staff and the appropriate involvement of parents/carers
- enhance protective factors which predispose students to positive outcomes in the face of adversity such as: facilitating supportive adult/pupil relationships, strengthening life skills, helping students believe in their capacity to overcome hardship and building a sense of mastery over life circumstances
- adopt a planned implementation process, for example, incorporate needs analysis, use evidence informed programmes and track and evaluate outcomes for students
- are implemented and used in a school in a sustained way over a number of years in order to bring about lasting effects and benefits

4. Guidance for Engaging External Facilitators

When engaging external facilitators schools are advised to consider the following best practice criteria:

- External facilitators supplement, complement or support an identified component of the school's Wellbeing Promotion Process.
- External facilitators are approved by the principal and board of management in consultation with the relevant teaching staff. All materials

proposed for use by the external facilitator must also be agreed in advance by the principal and the board.

Appendix C: Circular 0027/2008

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) to 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.

Circulars M4/95, M20/96, M22/00 and M11/03 refer. These circulars required schools to begin a process of developing Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) policies and programmes, and to implement them for all students from First Year to Sixth Year. RSE is an integral element of the Social Personal and Health Education Programme for all students at junior cycle. A Senior Cycle SPHE Curriculum is currently being developed by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment.

1.2 Schools have an obligation to teach Senior Cycle RSE even in the absence of a time-tabled SPHE class. An interim curriculum for Junior and Senior Cycle RSE was produced in 1996. Teaching resources for Junior and Senior Cycle RSE were developed in 1998 and 1999. These resources are available to download at www.sphe.ie and set out comprehensive lesson plans and suggested activities to support the implementation of the programme.

1.3 It is the responsibility of the Board of Management of the school to ensure that an RSE programme is made available to all students. Under Section 9 of the Education Act 1998, schools are required 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. Regard must also be had to Section 30(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.

2. Relationships and Sexuality Education

2.1 Relationships and Sexuality Education is a lifelong process of acquiring knowledge and understanding and of developing attitudes, beliefs and values about sexual identity, 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 and which includes the integration of sexuality into personal understanding, growth and development.

2.2 Through Relationships and Sexuality Education, formal opportunities are provided for young people to acquire knowledge and understanding of human sexuality, through processes which will enable them to form values and establish behaviours within a moral and spiritual framework.

2.3 Aspects of contemporary life point to the need for a soundly based Relationships and Sexuality Education programme. There is broad agreement in Irish society on the need for Relationships and Sexuality Education in the formal education system.

3 Development and implementation of an RSE Policy

3.1 Schools are required to have a policy for RSE and are advised to contextualise their RSE policy in the overall subject plan for SPHE.

3.2 The effectiveness of an RSE programme is dependent upon a collaborative process of policy development involving teachers, parents/guardians, members of Boards of Management and students.

3.3 The RSE policy should reflect the core values and ethos of the school as outlined in the school's mission statement.

3.4 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.

4 Delivery of an RSE Programme

4.1 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.

4.2 While the RSE Interim Curriculum Guidelines and Resource Materials give guidance regarding the stage at which elements of the programme should be taught, schools can decide to teach topics at an earlier or a later stage, depending on the needs of the students.

4.3 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)

5. Evaluation of RSE

The evaluation report '*RSE in the Context of SPHE*' was published in March 2007 by the Department and the Crisis Pregnancy Agency, and has been distributed to schools. A copy is also on the Department's website at www.education.ie (see publications). The report shows

- Widespread support for both the broad principles and the content of the programme from teachers, parents and health professionals
- Strong levels of interest and support from parents and students as to the importance of Relationships and Sexuality Education in schools
- Increasing levels of implementation vis-à-vis earlier studies, with 76% of schools showing high or moderate levels of implementation, and with 90% of schools teaching RSE at some level.

