



St Gerald's DLS College
Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE Policy)

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1. Mission Statement and School Context

St Gerald's De La Salle College Castlebar is a Catholic voluntary secondary school for boys under the trusteeship of Le Chéile. Inspired by the charism of St John Baptist de La Salle, we provide holistic education rooted in faith, respect, quality teaching, inclusive community and social justice.

We recognise parents as primary educators and work in partnership with families to support each student's spiritual, intellectual, physical, emotional and social development, enabling them to become confident, compassionate and responsible citizens.

This RSE Policy reflects our De La Salle and Le Chéile ethos and complies with:

- Education Act 1998
- Children First Act 2015
- Child Protection Procedures for Schools 2025
- Circular 0037/2010 – Relationships and Sexuality Education
- Updated Junior Cycle SPHE Specification (2023)
- Bí Cineálta Procedures (2024), where relevant
- Relevant Department of Education/NCCA/Oide guidance

This RSE Policy is written in conjunction with the SGC Child Safeguarding Statement, Anti-Bullying / Bí Cineálta Policy, Acceptable Use Policy, SPHE Policy, RE Policy and our Code of Behaviour.

2. Definition and Rationale

Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) is a lifelong process of acquiring knowledge, understanding, attitudes, beliefs and values about sexual identity, relationships and intimacy. RSE promotes overall personal development and integration of sexuality into understanding, growth and maturity within a moral, spiritual and social framework.

Circular 0037/2010 requires schools to provide RSE as an element of SPHE at Junior Cycle and as an RSE programme at Senior Cycle. The school will provide RSE in accordance with the relevant curriculum specification and Department of Education requirements. The new Senior Cycle SPHE Specification 2024 provides for 60 hours of SPHE learning over the final two years of Senior Cycle and will be implemented by the school in accordance with the national implementation timeline.

The RSE programme will be delivered in accordance with the relevant NCCA curriculum specification and Department of Education requirements, while being taught in a manner consistent with the school's characteristic spirit, Catholic ethos and values, including respect for human dignity, responsibility, care, justice and the formation of conscience.



3. Relationship to SPHE and Wellbeing

Junior Cycle: RSE is delivered through the **Updated Junior Cycle SPHE Specification (2023)**. SPHE contributes to the school's Junior Cycle Wellbeing programme. The updated 2023 SPHE specification provides 100 hours of learning over the three years of Junior Cycle.

SPHE develops skills for self-fulfilment, healthy relationships, responsible decision-making and physical, mental and emotional wellbeing.

Senior Cycle: RSE is currently provided within the school's Senior Cycle programme in accordance with Circular 0037/2010. The school is also preparing for implementation of the Senior Cycle SPHE Specification 2024. The new specification provides 60 hours of SPHE learning over the final two years of Senior Cycle and must be introduced for students entering fifth year no later than September 2027. The school's current RSE provision will be reviewed and adjusted as necessary to align with the implementation of the new specification.

4. Aims of RSE Programme

Junior Cycle aims:

- Understand and develop healthy friendships and relationships
- Promote positive attitudes to sexuality and identity
- Build knowledge of human reproduction and respect for life
- Develop values within a moral, spiritual and social framework
- Enable informed decision-making
- Address consent, boundaries and personal safety

Senior Cycle aims:

- Deepen self-awareness and capacity for reflection
- Enhance understanding of relationships, intimacy and commitment
- Develop critical thinking about sexuality, media influences and societal attitudes
- Promote relationship skills: communication, empathy, conflict resolution
- Understand legal, health and ethical dimensions of sexual behaviour
- Support resilience, wellbeing and responsible citizenship



Link to Wellbeing programme – The RSE programme is designed to support the Wellbeing programme and therefore should help to develop students who are active, responsible, connected, resilient, respected, aware.

5. Content Overview

Junior Cycle (SPHE 2023 Specification)

Topics are delivered across the 2023 strands are **Understanding Myself and Others; Making Healthy Choices; Relationship and Sexuality; Emotional Wellbeing.**

Examples of learning addressed through the Junior Cycle SPHE/RSE programme include:

- Puberty, adolescence and physical development
- Understanding emotions and emotional wellbeing
- Self-esteem, body image and media influences
- Friendship, peer relationships and peer pressure
- Gender identity, sexual orientation and respect for diversity
- Communication skills and assertiveness
- Consent, personal boundaries and bodily autonomy
- Online safety, digital relationships and image-based abuse
- Understanding reproduction and pregnancy
- Recognising abuse and accessing help

Senior Cycle (TY, 5th & 6th Year)

RSE continues to be provided in accordance with Circular 0037/2010. The Department of Education has approved the Senior Cycle SPHE Specification 2024, which provides for 60 hours of teaching and learning over the final two years of Senior Cycle. Schools have until September 2027, or earlier at their discretion, to introduce the new specification for students entering fifth year. The school will provide RSE within its existing Senior Cycle provision pending implementation of the new Senior Cycle SPHE specification and will organise provision in accordance with the implementation requirements when introduced.

Human Development:

- Structure and function of reproductive systems



- Fertility awareness and family planning methods
- Pregnancy, foetal development and healthcare

Human Sexuality:

- Understanding sexual identity: heterosexual, gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, gender fluid identities
- Gender roles, equality and stereotypes
- Sexual behaviour, values and societal attitudes
- Sexual health: STIs, HIV/AIDS prevention, safe practices
- Contraception (factual information within moral framework)
- Sexual harassment, coercion and consent
- Legal aspects: age of consent, sexual offences legislation

Human Relationships:

- Nature of love, intimacy and commitment
- Marriage and lifelong relationships
- Family diversity and family life
- Conflict resolution and communication
- Ending relationships respectfully
- Accessing support services

Additional Topics:

- Mental health and relationships
- Pornography and its impact
- Alcohol, drugs and consent capacity
- Social media and relationship expectations

Special class adaptation:

- Specialised materials have been purchased for dealing with this topic with ASD students and this will be presented in O-4 by a trained RSE teacher who works normally in O-4 with the students.



Content is delivered within the values framework of our Catholic, De La Salle and Le Chéile ethos, promoting respect, dignity and informed conscience formation. Teachers will develop materials and practical scenarios which they will share using the SGC shared drive and will give time for self-reflection journals, quizzes and questions to ensure that material is fully understood.

6. Organisation and Management

Staffing: RSE is taught by trained SPHE and RE teachers. The Principal, in consultation with the SPHE Coordinator, allocates teaching responsibilities.

- All teachers teaching RSE are expected to complete / have completed RSE training.
- Short term substitute teachers are not permitted to teach RSE.
- If a class is taught for an extended period by a substitute teacher and a suitable teacher–student relationship has been established, and the substitute has completed the RSE training, it is acceptable for them to deliver the programme as planned for that year group

Timetabling:

- 1st–3rd Year: The school provides the 100 hours of Junior Cycle SPHE learning across the three years, with RSE embedded within the programme
- 5th–6th Year: should be explicitly described as **current school provision pending implementation of the 2024 Senior Cycle SPHE specification**, otherwise it could be interpreted as the national requirement.

Resources: Resources and materials are selected by the SPHE/RSE team from NCCA, Oide, HSE, Department of Education and other reputable sources. Resources are reviewed for accuracy, age-appropriateness, developmental suitability, curriculum alignment, safeguarding, inclusivity and consistency with the school's characteristic spirit and relevant policies.

Professional Development: Teachers are supported to access CPD through PDST, Oide, Le Chéile Trust and other recognised providers.

7. Procedures for Parental Engagement

7.1 Information and Consultation





Parents are informed about RSE through:

- This policy (available on school website)
- Written notification to parents of incoming 1st Year, TY and 5th Year students at start of academic year outlining RSE modules, topics and timing (via Compass)
- Parent information meetings on request
- Opportunities to view resource materials by appointment or by return email / online.

7.2 Right to Withdraw

Section 30(2)(e) of the Education Act 1998 provides that a student may not be required to attend instruction in a subject that is contrary to the conscience of the parent/guardian, or, where the student has reached 18 years of age, the student.

Parents/guardians may request that their child opt out of learning within SPHE/RSE where they consider that the learning is contrary to their conscience, in accordance with section 30(2)(e) of the Education Act 1998.

Parent/guardian submits a written request to the Deputy Principal (msduffy@geralds.ie) identifying the SPHE/RSE learning from which they are seeking withdrawal.

Students who are withdrawn will remain under the supervision of the school and will not be disadvantaged or penalised for exercising this right.

Withdrawal Procedure:

1. Parent/guardian submits written request to Principal stating intention to withdraw student from RSE
2. School invites parent to discuss concerns and clarify RSE content etc.
3. If parent proceeds, Deputy Principal confirms withdrawal in writing
4. Alternative supervised arrangements made during RSE / SPHE lessons
5. Parent may revoke withdrawal at any time in writing

Template letters: Available from school office and website. (Appendix 1)



7.3 Responding to Parental Concerns

Concerns are addressed through:

- Meeting with Teacher / SPHE Coordinator or Deputy Principal
- Clarification of curriculum requirements and school ethos
- Review of teaching materials and methodologies
- Reference to DES guidelines and school policy

8. Sensitive Issues and Protocols

8.1 Confidentiality and Child Protection

Teachers cannot guarantee absolute confidentiality. Where a student discloses information giving rise to a child protection or welfare concern, the matter will be dealt with in accordance with the Child Protection Procedures for Schools 2025, the school's Child Safeguarding Statement and applicable reporting requirements. Students will be made aware, in an age-appropriate manner, that information concerning a risk of harm may need to be shared with the DLP or other appropriate person in accordance with these procedures.

8.2 Explicit Questions

- Teachers will offer students the opportunity to ask questions that they may not want to share aloud, through the use of a question box in their classroom or through written feedback which they will take during the module.
- Teachers will respond professionally, considering student age, curriculum content and school ethos.
- Questions requiring individual advice are redirected to appropriate services (GP/ guidance counsellor / Year-head).
- Teachers may defer inappropriate questions and consult the Principal / Deputy Principal.

8.3 External Facilitators

External speakers/facilitators must:

- Be Garda vetted (Circular 0031/2016)



- Receive advance briefing on school ethos, policy and class profile
- Have a teacher present throughout all sessions
- Receive feedback forms from students after the external presentation
- Use content approved by Principal/SPHE Coordinator
- Complement, not replace, planned RSE curriculum
- Parents / Guardians should be given appropriate notice of an external facilitation presenting on this topic.

8.4 Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity

LGBTQ+ identities are addressed respectfully, factually and age-appropriately, correcting misconceptions and challenging prejudice. Maintaining dignity, respect and inclusion for all is promoted in all classes / curricula in SGC. Resources include Department of Education guidance and relevant current resources on inclusion and LGBTQ+ students and *Belonging to Our School Community* (2022) and staff teaching SPHE / RSE are encouraged to complete LGBTQ+ training to ensure inclusion. All students are supported in a welcoming, inclusive environment as per our BÍ Cinealta Policy.

Contact details for different support organisations may be referred to:

- LGBT Ireland (1800 929 539)
- Text About It (50808)
- MyOptions (1800 828 010)
- Belong To youth services

8.5 Students with Additional Educational Needs

- Students with AEN receive differentiated support through collaboration between SPHE teachers and the SEN Department, ensuring appropriate access to RSE content and safeguarding information. Specialised materials have been purchased for dealing with this topic with ASD students and this will be presented in 0-4 by a trained RSE teacher who works normally in 0-4 with the students.

8.6 Students from diverse cultures / minority faiths

- Staff will be delicate and cognisant of attitudes towards this content in other cultures and in some faiths. While a student will have parental permission to be



present, the teacher may need to have discussions with the student / parent about their willingness to participate in groupwork about certain topics etc. especially if the subject is something that is not in line with their belief system.

9. Monitoring, Evaluation and Review

9.1 Review

This policy is reviewed biennially by staff, Student Council, Parents' Association and Board of Management, evaluating:

- Programme effectiveness and student learning
- Resource adequacy and teacher CPD needs
- Policy awareness among stakeholders
- Compliance with legislation and guidance
- Feedback from Student Council, focus groups and online Compass feedback from Parents / Guardians.

9.2 Complaints re content delivered

Complaints about RSE content or delivery by a member of staff are handled by Mr Burke and should be emailed him (mrburke@geralds.ie)

Signed:

Chairperson

Principal

Date: Ratified

Date of next review: January 2028

The policy will be reviewed earlier where there are significant changes to legislation, Department of Education requirements, NCCA curriculum specifications, child protection procedures or other relevant national guidance.

**APPENDIX 1: copy of permission letter for parents / guardians****St Gerald's DLS College**

Newport Road, Castlebar, Co. Mayo, F23 WV66

Tel: 094-9021383

Email: info@stgeraldscollege.comWebsite: www.stgeraldscollege.com

Roll No: 64580H

THIS IS A SHARED DOCUMENT

PLEASE COPY AND PASTE

DO NOT EDIT HERE

[DATE]

Re: SPHE Curriculum

Dear Parent/Guardian,

I am contacting you in relation to your child's SPHE course. As part of the National SPHE Curriculum, the course covers a module on RSE [Relationships and Sexuality Education]. In line with St Gerald's DLS College SPHE Policy, parents and guardians may request their child be removed from class during RSE which will take place on [DATE].

If you are happy for your child to take part in the RSE Curriculum, there is no need to reply to this message. If you wish for your child to not take part in RSE, please contact me by [DATE].

For further information on the national SPHE & RSE Curriculum, please visit:

<https://www.curriculumonline.ie/Junior-Cycle/Short-Courses/SPHE/?lang=en-ie>

Kind Regards,

[TEACHER NAME]