



# SOCIAL, PERSONAL & HEALTH EDUCATION POLICY INCLUDING RELATIONSHIPS & SEXUALITY EDUCATION POLICY (RSE)



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**Presentation Secondary School,  
Milltown, Co. Kerry**

## School Ethos & Mission

The values of Presentation Secondary School's ethos and mission will be at core of our SPHE programme. A holistic approach to the educational development of our students is a shared aim and shall form the basis of all SPHE classes/programmes/activities.

***Our school is a Catholic school which aspires to the full development of all its members according to Christian Principles. Every effort is made to ensure that each student develops according to his/her talents and potential: physically, spiritually, emotionally, intellectually.***

***We aim to develop fully integrated people who are aware of their own dignity as persons, who have Christian values, who are reliable, trustworthy, honest, truthful, caring, prayerful, devoted to duty, lovers of God and of neighbour; people who are prepared to reach out to those less fortunate than themselves.***

## Rationale for Policy

Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) provides students with a unique opportunity to develop the skills and competence to learn about themselves, to care for themselves & others, and to make informed decisions about their health, personal lives, and social development. All these decisions must be made in the context of the wider community.

SPHE enables students to participate as active and responsible young adults in the personal and social dimensions of society and to make responsible decisions that respect their own dignity and the dignity of others.

This policy is developed within the context of the school Mission statement and in the context of the CEIST core values particularly those of 'Promoting Spiritual and Human Development' and 'showing respect for every person'.

Section 4 of the 1998 Education Act, Rules and Programme for Secondary Schools 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.

The policy is also developed in the context of the DES circulars M48/00 - (Syllabus) M11/03, 0023/2010 and 0037/2010 and the Education Act (1998) which specifies 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'

Further to this, Circular 15/2017 'Arrangements for the Implementation of the Framework for Junior Cycle with particular reference to school years 2017/18 and 2018/19' The philosophy of the policy also draws on the NEPS document "Wellbeing in Post-Primary schools" and the Department of Education and Skills 'Junior Cycle wellbeing Guidelines'.

The school adopts and adheres to the DES Child Protection Procedures, Children First Legislation (2017) and has a Child Protection Policy / Child Safeguarding Statement.

The Principal as Designated Liaison Person (DLP) and the Deputy Principals as the Deputy DLPs.

This SPHE/RSE Policy is cognisant of all aspects of our current Child Protection Policy / Child Safeguarding Statement.

## Overall Aims of SPHE

The aims of the SPHE programme are

- To enable students to develop skills for self-fulfilment and living in community
- To promote self-esteem and self-confidence
- To enable the students to develop a framework for responsible decision-making
- To provide opportunities for reflection and discussion
- To promote physical, mental and emotional health and well-being.
- To contribute to the moral and spiritual development of students and to help them develop respect for the values and beliefs of others.
- To provide opportunities for reflection and discussion
- To promote physical, mental and emotional health and well-being.
- To prepare students for the responsibilities of citizenship in the national context and in the context of the wider European and global communities.

The general aim of education is to contribute to the development of all aspects of the individual for personal and family life, for living in the community and for leisure. Our commitment in Presentation Milltown to student formation in the area of personal and social development arises out of the holistic aim of education in our school and encompasses all the dimensions of life, including the physical, mental, emotional, spiritual, social and environmental, and the complex interplay between these dimensions, which contributes to personal wellbeing and to positive inter-personal relationships.

A young person who has a high degree of self-worth, a sense of security and a positive self-image will be more disposed to school life, will be more aware of the relationship between life- style, environment and health and be more conscious of the challenge to support personal, family and policy choices that promote health in all its dimensions.

The Social, Personal and Health Education offered to our young people is as important as any other area of the curriculum and is conducted in line with our whole school approach to 'Wellbeing', our ethos and our mission.

Social, personal and health education (SPHE) provides students with a unique opportunity to develop the skills and competence to learn about themselves and to care for themselves and others and to make informed decisions about their health, personal lives, and social development. Students develop skills to enable them to participate as active and responsible adults in the personal and social dimensions of society and to make responsible decisions that respect their own dignity and the dignity of others.

## The Needs of Students

SPHE must be considered in the context in which the students find themselves and the changing social and cultural milieu in which they form relationships and make decisions/choices. While the principle of relevance is one that should inform the whole curriculum, it has particular implications for SPHE.

Students should be challenged to critically examine this ever-changing context and given opportunities to learn the skills that empower them “to participate fully and creatively in their communities” (*Charting our Education Future*, p.10.)

Additional Needs - Students with special/additional educational needs may need more help than others in coping with the physical and emotional aspects of growing up. Some very vulnerable students may also need more help in learning what sorts of behaviour are and are not acceptable.

Where appropriate the SENCO and SNAs will be consulted and utilized.

The SPHE/RSE teacher will make themselves aware of students with special educational needs in their classroom. They will differentiate learning to allow all students to access the SPHE/RSE curriculum and seek advice from the Special Educational Needs Coordinator if unsure how to best support these students.

## Whole School Approach to SPHE

SPHE is an integral part of the school’s overall approach to promoting the positive wellbeing of all members of our school community. As such all members of staff have a role to play in the promotion of the core values and key elements promoted and instilled in our students through the SPHE programme.

Given the importance of the whole-school climate for successful SPHE, every teacher in our school is, in many ways, a teacher of SPHE. However, teachers directly involved in the timetabled SPHE programme have a particular responsibility and require particular support.

Class Tutors play an integral role in the teaching of SPHE and are actively encouraged to participate in CPD opportunities to help develop and strengthen their roles.

Teachers assigned to SPHE are provided with opportunities to engage in training & CPD to enable them to have a full understanding of the methodologies associated with education in this area. Training and In-service are provided regularly, and a collaborative approach is taken to encourage sharing of best practice through regular SPHE/Wellbeing meetings.

## Home School Links

The school acknowledges that the primary responsibility for the personal development of children rests with their parents. However, it also accepts, as outlined in the 1998 Education Act, the school’s role in supporting parents in this work.

Links between home and school play a vital role in supporting the efforts of parents and guardians in the home and the work of the teachers in the classroom. Such links are particularly important in SPHE.

Presentation Secondary School seeks to develop well-structured continuing links with the lives of the students outside the classroom and outside the school. Such links can inform an SPHE programme; they can help teachers to prioritise modules of particular relevance.

## SPHE Programme of Study

### **Junior Cycle**

The Junior Cycle SPHE Short Course is divided into four strands:

- **Strand One: Who am I?**  
This strand focuses on developing self-awareness and building self-esteem.
- **Strand Two: Minding Myself**  
This strand provides opportunities for students to reflect on how they can best take care of themselves and others.
- **Strand Three: Team up**  
This strand focuses on students learning about important relationships in their lives and building relationship skills.
- **Strand Four: My Mental Health**  
This strand focuses on building positive mental health, examining young people's experience of mental ill health and learning how to support themselves and others in challenging times.

Each Strand is addressed in each year of the three year cycle. Relationships and Sexuality Education is delivered through the SPHE programme at Junior Cycle.

The SPHE short course has been designed for approximately 100 hours of student engagement. The learning outcomes in this short course are aligned with the level indicators for Level 3 of the National Framework of Qualifications.

### **Senior Cycle**

At Senior Cycle and for Transition Year SPHE/RSE is taught through the RE programme and incorporates

- Alcohol & Substance Use Awareness
- Self-Management & Decision Making
- Gender Studies
- Physical Activity, Nutrition
- Mental Health & Wellbeing
- Relationships & Sexuality Education

## **Relationships and Sexuality Education**

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

RSE will be taught within the framework of the Catholic Ethos within our school. The programme will be delivered in full and in keeping with national guidelines as outlined by the Department of Education. Delivery of the programme will be underpinned by our school mission, values and ethos. This is an essential element of the teaching of RSE within our school as we aim to not only deliver the programme in a thorough and comprehensive manner but to also equip our students with an understanding of the core values inherently provided within the context of our ethos and of the relevance of those values to their individual development and lived experiences as morally mature, well informed and responsible adults.

### **Rationale for Relationships and Sexuality Education within SPHE**

Sexuality is a key element of healthy, social and personal development and it is, therefore, necessary to provide health, sexual, social and personal education for our students.

The Education Act, 1998 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 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. At junior cycle, the RSE programme is part of the SPHE programme and at senior cycle it is part of the Religious Education/SPHE/Guidance programme.

Circular 0023/10, issued by the Dept. Of Education and Science, outlines 'Best Practice Guidelines for Post-Primary Schools' in the mandatory implementation of SPHE/RSE in the junior cycle and RSE in the senior cycle.

### **Aims & Objectives of our Relationships and Sexuality Education Programme**

Relationships and sexuality education as taught in the framework of Social, Personal and Health Education has as its specific aims:

#### **Aims of RSE:**

- To enable our students to develop attitudes and values towards their sexuality in a moral, spiritual, social and personal framework.
- To help young people to understand and develop the skills necessary to form healthy friendships and relationships.
- To promote an understanding of sexuality and intimacy.
- To develop a positive attitude to one's own sexuality and to one's relationships with others.
- To promote a knowledge of and respect for reproduction.

**Objectives of RSE:**

- Acquire the understanding and skills necessary to form healthy friendships and relationships.
- Explore personal thoughts, values, attitudes and feelings about 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 to develop respect for difference between individuals.
- Understand human physiology with particular reference to the reproductive cycle, human fertility and sexually transmitted infections.
- Understand sexual development and identity and explore aspects of sexuality including sex role stereotyping, gender issues and cultural influences on sexuality.
- Develop students' understanding of sexuality and sexual orientation and the importance of an inclusive environment
- Promote empathy with others who have different cultural values, attitudes and beliefs about family, relationships, sex and sexuality
- Value family life and appreciate the responsibilities of parenthood.
- Develop strategies for decision making consistent with personal and moral integrity and strategies to promote respect for the rights and dignity of others.
- Develop skills for coping with peer pressure, conflict and threats to personal safety.
- Develop personal and interpersonal skills which support beginning, maintaining and ending relationships

**Involving Parents & Student Voice**

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. Parents will be invited to express their views when reviewing this policy. A copy of this policy will be made available to any parent on request to the School Office and can be downloaded from the school website.

Parents will be sent a notification shortly before the commencement of RSE units of work, informing them of when the units will take place and providing a brief summary of the content.

Parents will be informed of their right to withdraw their son/daughter from the RSE programme.

The views of students have also been considered in the development of this policy through the Student Council.

**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. Teachers may refer students to the Guidance Counsellor if the need arises.

## **Confidentiality**

Teachers strive to create a safe learning environment for all students. While students should not be encouraged to disclose personal or private information in RSE classes, there may be times when they talk about their own lives. It is important that students are made aware of the limits of confidentiality and that teachers do not give unconditional guarantees of confidentiality. Confidentiality should be respected unless the teacher feels that the child is at risk or where there are reasonable grounds to believe that a law may be broken. In such a case, the appropriate action should be taken in accordance with the procedures set down in the Child Protection Procedures for Post-Primary Schools, the school's Child Protection Policy / Child Safeguarding Statement and the Children First legislation (2017) or the school's Substance Abuse Policy, i.e. the teacher must inform the Designated Liaison Person [Principal] and ensure that that all reporting procedures are complied with.

In all cases, best practice in relation to Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post Primary Schools 2017 will be followed at all times.

## **Explicit Questions**

Teachers may take up written questions from students during one class and return to these questions at the next class. 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 this time. If a teacher becomes concerned about a matter that has been raised, he/she should seek advice from the SPHE coordinator or the Deputy Principal or Principal.

When deciding whether or not to answer questions the teacher should consider the age and readiness of the students, the RSE programme content, the ethos of the school and the RSE policy.

## **Sexual Activity**

Teachers should give young people information on the age of consent which, following the passage of Criminal Law (Sexual Offences) Act 2006, is seventeen years of age for both males and females. In all cases where the school becomes aware of underage sexual activity the school will take appropriate steps to inform the child's parents, in accordance with Children First legislation.

## **Out-of-School Factors**

The school also recognises the many out-of-school factors which affect the development of a positive attitude to sexuality during adolescence - the social lives of students, the relationships they form, their behaviour within these relationships, the peer expectations of relationships, the reading material of students, their exposure to sexually explicit material / pornography on video / smart phones, television and through music. The RSE programme will attempt to heighten the students' awareness of the influences of these forces on the development of their values and attitudes and empower them to make informed decisions and choices.

## **Sexuality, Gender Identity and Gender Health**

Teachers do not promote any one life-style as the only acceptable one for society and therefore it is inevitable and natural that sexual orientation, sexual identity and gender identity will be discussed during a programme of sex education. One of the advantages of exploring LGBT+ identities and issues is the opportunity to correct false ideas, assumptions and address prejudice. Discussion of sexual and gender identity and sexual orientation will be appropriate to the age of the students.

## **Other Sensitive Issues**

Many highly sensitive issues are covered as part of the RSE programme. Issues such as sexual activity, sexual orientation, abortion and contraception will be dealt with in a sensitive, age-appropriate, open manner, looking at all sides of the issues in a non-directive way, within the context of the school's ethos and DES-NCCA guidelines.

## **Withdrawing Students from the RSE programme**

The Education Act (1998; section 30, subsection (2)(e)) provides that a student is not required to attend instruction in any subject which is contrary to the conscience of the parent or in the case of a student who has reached the age of eighteen years, the student. Parents have a right therefore to withdraw their son / daughter from all or any aspect of RSE. Parents must notify the Principal in writing of their wish to have their child withdrawn from all or part of the programme.

Issues such as reproduction, overpopulation and birth control are also covered to some degree in subjects such as Science, Geography and RE. However, as any discussion is limited and set within the context of the other subject concerned, it does not constitute part of the formal RSE Programme.

Parents do not have to give reasons for withdrawal, but we respectfully invite them to do so - we aim to resolve misunderstandings if possible. Once a parent's written request to withdraw is made, that request will be complied with until revoked by the parent.

## **Visiting Speakers and Other Guests**

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, 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. All RSE workshops will be delivered by appropriately qualified professionals.

After gaining approval from the Principal for the visit, the organiser will make the visitor aware of the ethos of the school and the manner of delivery for the RSE programme. The SPHE Coordinator will provide any visiting speakers/facilitators with a copy of this RSE policy, well in advance of the visit.

Visiting speakers/facilitators will be given advance notice of the composition of the class and an idea of how their contribution fits into the scheme of work.

Regular Visiting Speakers/Facilitators in RSE include,

- 1<sup>st</sup> Year – Nurse Crean
- 2<sup>nd</sup> Year – South West Counselling
- 3<sup>rd</sup> Year – Nurse Crean
- 5<sup>th</sup> Year – South West Counselling

## SPHE / RSE Teaching Methodologies

Teaching methods should be of an experiential nature with the emphasis on discussion, reflection and classroom participation. These teaching methods will be student centred and appropriate to the age and development of the student.

The class atmosphere must be one of respect and privacy of the individual teacher and student, hallmarked by sensitivity and care; where the student feels that they are participants in a safe environment. Respectful conduct is expected from all participants. Every class group establishes ground rules which are referred to throughout the classes in the 'Class Contract' (Sample below).

Teaching Methodologies may include:

- Group work
- Role play
- Brainstorming
- Icebreakers
- Simulation
- Narrative expression
- Walking debates
- Project work
- Art work
- Multi-media materials
- Case studies
- Visiting speakers
- Written Assignments/Demonstration/Artwork

### Class Contract/Agreement - Example

The following basic rules should apply to SPHE classes/discussions. Teachers of SPHE will work with students to determine these, and others as may be suggested by students, as a classroom contract.

- **Confidentiality** - Personal details which may be revealed in the class are not discussed outside the group. I can talk about my learning in the class, the material being covered and the activities we are doing.
- **Responsibility** - I will take responsibility for my own sharing and make "I" STATEMENTS. and I will share responsibility for the progress of the class group.
- **Freedom** - I have the freedom to opt out or pass in discussions.
- **Participation** - I will participate and not dominate.
- **Listening** - I will listen when another person is speaking.
- **Respect** - I will respect others' views even when it is different from mine.
- **Request** - If I want something I will ask for it by raising my hand.
- **Time-keeping** - I will keep to the allotted time for the task.
- **Materials** - I will bring the materials needed for the class and complete any home task so that the group can progress to the next stage of the learning.
- **Punctuality** - I will be punctual.

## Literacy & Numeracy in SPHE/RSE

Through the teaching of SPHE teachers will endeavour to improve students' literacy and numeracy skills by:

### Literacy

- Completing Reflections at the end of class/module/topic
- Writing key terms for each topic on the board.
- Explaining key terms.
- Reading aloud in class.
- Group Work - Assigned roles-spokesperson, recorder etc
- Recording student feedback on the board
- Use of games to explore difficult concepts e.g. Walking Debate
- Use of crosswords/word searches to reinforce terminology in some topics

### Numeracy

- Time management when doing group work in class.
- Using numbers to formulate groups.
- Teaching students to understand the school timetable.
- Teaching students how to manage study/leisure time.
- Healthy eating / portion sizes/number of portions from food groups per day / food pyramid.
- Alcohol measurements/units.

## Assessment, Record Keeping & Reporting

### Classroom-Based Assessment:

Students will complete one Classroom-Based Assessment for SPHE. The Classroom Based Assessment should begin after work in at least three strands of the SPHE short course have been completed. It is envisaged that preparation for and completion of this Classroom-Based Assessment take place over approximately 6 hours of class time.

The Classroom-Based Assessment will be designed in consultation with the students. A particular purpose of the Classroom-Based Assessment will be to facilitate developmental feedback to students during their engagement with the task and at the end of the process. The Classroom-Based Assessment for the SPHE short course can be completed in second or third year. The Classroom-Based Assessment can be produced in written, digital, visual or audio formats and it may be supported in these formats through the use of an interview or presentation.

Having completed the project, students are required to complete an individual reflection. The reflection should include

- An explanation about how they, individually and collectively, completed the project
- A commentary about their learning from the project and if and how it has influenced their attitudes, values, opinions and behaviours
- Insights about the importance of the topic for young people's health and wellbeing.

In SPHE, one of the most important skills that students develop is their capacity to reflect on their learning in different strands and its meaning for them in their personal and social lives. The ability to reflect can be developed over time as students are encouraged to reflect regularly as part of their learning in SPHE.

As with all Junior Cycle subjects there are four level descriptors of achievement in the SPHE Classroom-Based Assessment:

- Exceptional
- Above expectations
- In line with expectations
- Yet to meet expectations

The descriptors awarded are used in reporting progress and achievement to parents and students as part of the school's reporting procedures and through the Junior Cycle Profile of Achievement (JCPA).

In general homework is not advocated by the department within the SPHE Programme except in the form of an activity or research activity/project.

Oral participation, class assignments and project/research work may be used by the teacher to assess students.

Students reflect in their Reflection/Response Journal which is monitored by the teacher as a means of assessing the students' level of awareness and insight into the various topics as outlined in the SPHE Programme.

A comment from the SPHE teacher/Tutor is included with Christmas and Summer Reports.

Teachers of SPHE are available to parents during parent teacher meetings in order to discuss each individual child's progress.

### **Confidentiality & Sensitivity in SPHE/RSE**

At all times the SPHE/RSE teacher will adhere to the Child Protection Procedures and comply with the guidelines with regards to confidentiality as outlined in "Children First" 2015 and the Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools 2017.

Teachers will establish boundaries and rules with the SPHE class to create a safe learning environment. While students should not be encouraged to disclose personal or private information in a classroom setting, there may be times when they do so. Students are encouraged to then seek support and advice on a one-to-one basis after class.

Confidentiality should be respected unless a teacher becomes aware that a child is at risk or in danger of becoming at risk, in which case the appropriate actions will be taken i.e. refer to the Designated Liaison Person [Principal] for Child Protection as outlined above.

## Evaluation & Review

The policy will be reviewed and evaluated every three years under the direction of the Board of Management. On-going review and evaluation will take cognisance of changing information, guidelines, legislation and feedback from parents, students, teachers and others. The policy will be revised as necessary in the light of such review and evaluation and within the framework of school self-evaluation and policy planning.

To review and evaluate the policy, it will be necessary to gauge the impact and effectiveness of the policy by examining the extent to which:

- SPHE and RSE is being successfully taught to all students.
- Resource materials are available to teachers.
- The timetable facilitates the implementation of the RSE programme.
- Appropriate professional development for teachers is available and being availed of.
- Staff are aware of the policy.
- Students are aware of the policy.
- Parents are aware of the policy.

Specifically, important to the review and evaluation of the SPHE and RSE Policy and Programme are:

- Student feedback.
- Staff review and feedback.
- Parental feedback.

Feedback is sought as part of our School Self-Evaluation process and helps to inform future planning.

## Future SPHE/RSE Development Priorities

- Development of school-led workshops for RSE
- Continued training and In-service for SPHE & RSE

*Ratified by Board of Management: Thursday 22<sup>nd</sup> April 2021*

*Review Date: April 2024*

## Parental Withdrawal From RSE

On receiving a parental request for withdrawal from the RSE programme:

- 1) At all times the right of parents/guardians to take full responsibility for the personal development of their son/daughter will be acknowledged and respected.  
  
The SPHE Coordinator and/or the Principal/Deputy Principal will discuss the nature of the concerns with the parent/guardian and if appropriate attempt to reassure them.
- 2) The Coordinator may consider whether the programme can be amended or improved in a way that will reassure parents - care is taken not to undermine the integrity of the RSE programme and the entitlement of the other students, e.g. it may be appropriate and desirable to have single sex classes for some sections of the RSE programme;
- 3) The Coordinator will discuss with parents that students who have been withdrawn may be vulnerable to feeling left-out – efforts will be made to ensure minimal discomfort to the student and minimal disruption to the programme;
- 4) The Coordinator will highlight that students may receive inaccurate information from their peers or online if they are not provided with the correct information in an appropriate environment;
- 5) The parents/guardians will be offered access to appropriate information and resources to assist in their decision making.
- 6) Every effort is made to ensure that where a student is withdrawn there is no disruption to other parts of their education,