SPHE & RSE (ETSS Wicklow)

School Address: The Glebe, Wicklow Town

Roll number: 68345R

School Patron/s: Educate Together

Introduction:

This policy has been drawn up in consultation with the Board of Management and staff, staff, and school community. This updated policy replaces and supersedes all previous SPHE policies and follows the relevant guidelines and updated curriculum specifications as outlined by OIDE.

Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) is a subject which provides students with the opportunity to develop a sense of personal identity, self-esteem and the ability to make informed decisions about their health, personal lives and social development. SPHE is a core element to Wellbeing and encompasses all of the Wellbeing Indicators:



Curriculum Specifications across Cycles

SPHE and RSE operate across three distinct specifications in post-primary education:

- **Junior Cycle:** Junior Cycle SPHE Specification.
- **Transition Year & LCA:** Transition Year (TY) / LCA Specification (implementing the updated specification from 2025 onwards).
- **Senior Cycle:** Senior Cycle SPHE Framework.

Across all cycles, the curricular strands and learning outcomes are interwoven throughout the learning process rather than taught in isolated blocks.

Core Aims

- Build self-awareness, positive self-worth, and core social and emotional skills (self-management, responsible decision-making, social awareness, and relationship skills).
- Provide a safe, inclusive classroom environment to explore relationships, sexuality, gender identity, and healthy sexual expression.
- Empower students to understand legal frameworks, bodily autonomy, and respectful relationships.

Legal Frameworks & Curriculum Alignment

Teaching and learning in SPHE and RSE are directly informed by Irish statutory law regarding:

- Bullying and cyberbullying legislation
- Sexual harassment and assault laws
- Non-consensual sharing of intimate images (Harassment, Harmful Communications and Related Offences Act 2020)
- Violence and hate speech legislation
- Consent, legal age of consent, and sexual offences regulations
- The age of criminal responsibility and minimum age for prosecution

These legal parameters guide teachers' departmental planning and determine the age-appropriateness of when specific learning outcomes are taught.

Other relevant policies:

This policy operates alongside and complements the following school policies:

- Child Protection and Safeguarding
- Anti-bullying Policy: Bí Cinnealta
- Whole School Guidance Plan
- Substance Misuse Policy
- Acceptable Use Policy

School Ethos & Inclusivity:

SPHE contributes to the overall ethos at ETSS Wicklow by celebrating diversity, equality, and human rights. SPHE provides a unique opportunity where students can develop the skills and competences to learn about themselves, to care for themselves and others and to make informed decisions about their overall health and wellbeing. SPHE also provides the context within which students can learn about the important moral, physical, social and emotional issues around relationships and sex and sexuality, including how to get reliable information from trusted sources.

Educate Together is committed to Irelands' equality and human rights laws and regulations and is affiliated to many organisations that share our values and ethos, including the Children's Rights Alliance and Belong To – LGBTQ+ Youth Ireland.

All members of the school community (students, staff, and parents/guardians) who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, non-binary, or gender-fluid are supported to explore and express all aspects of their identity. Schools should be proactive in this regard, ensuring that staff and students respect each individual's chosen means of expressing their gender identity and sexual orientation (Educate Together 2023).

Class Organisation and Timetabling & Subject Status:

In line with Department of Education regulations and Oide guidelines:

- **Timetabling:** SPHE must be timetabled for a minimum of one hour per week across all year groups.

- **Subject Priority:** SPHE holds equal professional and academic status with traditional core subjects (such as English or Mathematics). SPHE classes will not be placed on subject rotation, nor will SPHE time be used to withdraw students for extra-curricular activities, academic catch-up, or external appointments.

Teaching Resources & Visiting Speakers

Curricular Resources

SPHE staff avoid relying on a single textbook. Primary teaching materials are sourced from approved NCCA and HSE resources (e.g., sexualwellbeing.ie, Webwise, Belong To). Textbook materials are used only on an occasional, supplementary basis until specific textbooks are formally recommended by the NCCA. The school may use published textbooks to support SPHE/RSE teaching and learning.
Current school resources include:

- The *'You've Got This'* range for First to Fourth Year.

- *'SPHE for Senior Cycle'* for Senior Cycle provision.

Textbooks are supplementary resources and do not replace the relevant curriculum specification or professional teacher judgement. No single textbook is sufficient as the

sole basis for the delivery of SPHE/RSE. Teachers may use relevant and appropriate materials from the NCCA, Oide, HSE and other reputable sources, as well as school-developed resources and suitable media.

All resources will be considered for:

- Accuracy and reliability.
- Relevance to the applicable learning outcomes.
- Age and developmental appropriateness.
- Respectful and inclusive representation.
- Suitability for the students and school context.
- Consistency with school policies and applicable guidance.

Teachers will exercise professional judgement when selecting resources and adapting materials to meet students' learning needs.

Junior Cycle SPHE is delivered in accordance with the current Junior Cycle SPHE specification.

The specification is organised into four strands:

1. **Understanding Myself and Others**
2. **Making Healthy Choices**
3. **Relationships and Sexuality**
4. **Emotional Wellbeing**

Learning experiences will be planned to address the relevant learning outcomes and to support progression across the three years of Junior Cycle.

SPHE in Transition Year will be planned with reference to the Transition Year Programme Statement and relevant NCCA and Oide guidance.

TY provision will support students to build on learning from Junior Cycle and prepare for the demands and experiences of Senior Cycle and adult life. Learning may include self-awareness, wellbeing, relationships, communication, decision-making, health literacy and personal responsibility, as appropriate to the programme being delivered.

The school recognises that TY is a distinct programme and that provision should be planned to suit its aims and the needs of the students.

SPHE is delivered through a school-designed TY SPHE programme, planning will identify the intended learning, relevant resources and opportunities for students to reflect on and apply their learning.

Senior Cycle SPHE will be developed and delivered in accordance with the Senior Cycle SPHE Specification 2024 and the applicable implementation arrangements.

The specification supports a minimum of **60 hours of SPHE learning over the final two years of Senior Cycle**, with the aim of preparing students for the opportunities, responsibilities and experiences of adult life. SPHE is timetabled for one hour per week in line with this.

The Senior Cycle specification includes three strands:

1. **Health and Wellbeing**
2. **Relationships and Sexuality**
3. **Into Adulthood**

The specification also identifies cross-cutting elements that support learning across the strands, including thinking critically and empathetically, exercising rights, responsibilities and inclusivity, and being health literate

SPHE and RSE will be taught using an integrated, developmental and spiral approach.

A spiral approach means that important ideas, skills and learning outcomes may be revisited over time, allowing students to deepen their understanding as they mature, gain experience and develop greater capacity for reflection and decision-making.

The strands within SPHE are interconnected rather than entirely separate. Learning outcomes from one strand may naturally arise while teaching another strand. For example:

- Learning about emotional wellbeing may involve relationships, communication, boundaries and help-seeking.
- Learning about healthy choices may involve peer influence, online behaviour, personal responsibility and decision-making.
- Learning about relationships and sexuality may involve identity, respect, equality, emotional wellbeing, consent and health.

Teachers may identify a particular strand as the main focus of a unit or lesson. **However, identifying a strand focus does not mean that learning from other strands will be excluded.** The learning needs of students and the connections between learning outcomes may require related issues to be addressed.

Consequently, the school cannot guarantee that every lesson or unit will address only one strand or that a unit focused on a different strand will contain no RSE-related learning.

Parents/guardians are encouraged to consult the relevant SPHE specification to understand the breadth of learning and how strands and learning outcomes connect

Teachers will use professional judgement to ensure that related content is relevant, age-appropriate, sensitive and consistent with the applicable specification.

Visiting Speakers & External Workshops

Guest speakers and external workshops may be utilized to complement the SPHE curriculum under strict guidelines:

- **Pre-teaching Requirement: We will aim for the** core topic to be taught in class by the SPHE teacher before the visiting speaker or workshop takes place. External providers support and reinforce prior learning; they should not introduce new topics.

- **Approval & Oversight:** All external visitors must be approved in advance by the Principal, briefed on the school's ethos and SPHE policy, and accompanied by the regular classroom teacher at all times.

Parent Information & Communication

In line with national guidelines, individual advance notification letters may not be sent prior to moving on to the specific RSE strand focus unit of learning, as RSE concepts are interwoven continuously throughout the SPHE strands. This policy is published on the school website and made available to parents/guardians upon enrolment. The policy is also re-circulated via email at the beginning of each academic year for clarity.

Opt-Out Policy & Procedure

Important Notice on Opt-Outs: Parents/guardians seeking to exercise their right to withdraw their child should opt out of the SPHE program as a whole.

- **Formal Request:** Any parent/guardian wishing to withdraw their child from SPHE must inform school management in writing at the beginning of the academic year in September. This must be done every year as there is no guarantee that a student will have the same SPHE teacher each year and the department heads may change.

- **Supervision & Responsibility:** The school does not provide alternative teaching or supervision for students who are opted out of SPHE. It is the sole responsibility of the parent/guardian to sign their child out and collect them from the school premises for the duration of the 1-hour SPHE class and return them promptly when the class concludes.

- **Class Attendance:** Unless the student is signed out by a parent/guardian before the tutorial on the day of SPHE, the student is expected to attend their scheduled SPHE class as there is no alternative supervision available.

- **Peer Content:** Where a student is opted out of SPHE, the school accepts no responsibility for class content passed on informally by peers.

Cross Curricular Links:

The following subject areas form the cross-curricular links with the SPHE programme:

- Visual Art
- Artistic Performance
- Physical Education
- Wellbeing
- Science
- CSPE
- Home Economics
- Ethical Education
- Guidance

Child Protection, Confidentiality & Mandated Persons:

Safeguarding Roles & Student Awareness

All students from 1st Year through 6th Year will be taught to identify:

- The Designated Liaison Person (DLP) and Deputy Designated Liaison Person (DDLP).
- What a Mandated Person is under the Children First Act, including their statutory duties to report child welfare concerns.

Limits of Confidentiality

While SPHE classrooms foster an atmosphere of trust and open discussion, staff cannot promise absolute confidentiality. Teachers must break confidentiality and follow child protection procedures when disclosures relate to:

- Child abuse (physical, sexual, emotional, or neglect)
- Intentional self-harm or harm to others
- Substance misuse
- Severe bullying or cyberbullying
- Disclosures of illegal activity or serious welfare breaches

All disclosures of this nature are referred immediately to the Designated Liaison Person (DLP) or Deputy DLP in accordance with Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools. Teachers will remind students of these boundaries at the beginning of the school year and before sensitive topics are explored.

Publication of the SPHE & RSE Policy:

This policy will be available on the school website and upon request at the school.

Whole School Support for SPHE:

While specific teachers are trained and hold the responsibility for delivering the programme, all teachers support the work of SPHE by promoting healthy lifestyles and encouraging responsible and mature decision making. There is generally a whole school approach to key areas of SPHE and the school year has times earmarked when certain whole-school initiatives are highlighted e.g. Kindness Week, Healthy Eating Week, Anti-bullying Week and Stand Up Week.

Review and Evaluation:

In accordance with Oide guidelines, a school's RSE and SPHE policy must be reviewed every year. This policy will be reviewed annually by the SPHE subject team, school leadership, and the Board of Management.

This policy was reviewed and ratified by the Board of Management on: **13th of October 2026**
The next annual review will take place in: **Autumn 2027**