



Coláiste Pobail Acla

Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE)

&

Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) Policy

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Table of Contents

Introductory Statement:.....	
Mission Statement:	
Ethos statement.....	
Wellbeing statement.	
Scope of the Policy:.....	
Rationale for Policy:.....	
Policy Context:	
Section 1	
Definition of Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE)	
Definition of Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE).....	
JC SPHE Policy Aims: (2023 Specification).....	
LC SPHE Policy Aims: (2024 Specification).....	
Section 2	
The SPHE Programme at Junior Cycle (2023 Specification).....	
The RSE Programme at Senior Cycle (Current 2025/2026)	
The SPHE Programme at Senior Cycle (Sep 2026 onwards)	
The SPHE Programme at Transition Year.....	
Section 3	
Resources for SPHE/RSE:	
Teacher Training:.....	
Cross-curricular Links:	
Whole School Supports for S.P.H.E :.....	

Section 4.....

Class Organisation:

Participation:

Confidentiality:.....

Sensitive Issues:.....

Methodology

Workshops and Visiting Speakers:

Section 5

Communication of the Policy to the School Community

Staff

Parents:

Withdrawing students from the RSE programme:

Section 6

Assessment, Record Keeping and Reporting:

Monitoring, Evaluating and Reviewing the SPHE programme:.....

Ratification

Introductory Statement:

The SPHE/RSE policy is a written statement of the aims of the programmes and the organisation and management of SPHE/RSE within the school.

Mission Statement:

At Coláiste Pobail Acla we strive to motivate our school community to realise its full potential academically, spiritually, physically and emotionally in a safe, supportive environment.

We promote inclusivity and equality among all our stakeholders. Our school community does not discriminate on the grounds of; gender, marital or family status, sexual orientation, religion, age, disability, race or membership of any ethnic minority.

Vision

At Coláiste Pobail Acla we build on past traditions, affirm current good practices, and encourage innovation. We work to create an environment where all members of the school community feel safe, protected and supported; a place where learning and teaching is enjoyed; an environment where hard work, participation and contribution is rewarded.

We expect tolerance, respect, politeness, courtesy and cooperation for all members of our school community. Our school endeavours to create a stimulating learning environment where academic study and intellectual pursuits are cherished and valued. We want our students to be questioning, reflective young people who can appropriately use their knowledge to understand, interpret and interact in today's world.

Ethos statement

ETB schools are state, co-educational, multi-denominational schools underpinned by the core values of Excellence in Education, Care, Equality, Community and Respect.

Wellbeing statement

Our School Wellbeing Plan aims to create a positive, inclusive, and nurturing environment where every student feels safe, supported, and valued. We recognise that student wellbeing is central to academic success and personal development. Through a whole-school approach, we promote resilience, confidence, positive relationships, and future readiness.

This plan reflects Department of Education (DES) expectations, aligns with Looking at Our

School 2022 (LAOS) domains, and is informed by evidence-based, student-centred practice.

Scope of the Policy:

The policy will apply to all aspects of teaching and learning about SPHE and RSE within our school. The policy will apply to all school Staff, Students, Board of Management, Parents/Guardians, Visiting Speakers and External Facilitators.

Rationale for Policy:

The teaching and learning of SPHE provides a unique space where students can develop the knowledge, understanding, skills, dispositions, and values needed to support their physical, emotional, social, and spiritual wellbeing. The SPHE specification is grounded in values of respect, equality, inclusivity, responsibility, dignity, compassion, and empathy.

Policy Context:

This policy is informed by:

- The Mission Statement of Coláiste Pobail Acla
- The Code of Behaviour
- Child Safeguarding Policy (2025 guidelines)
- The Acceptable Use Policy
- The SEN Policy
- The Guidance Plan
- The Education Act 1998
- EPSEN Act 2004
- Department of Education and Skills 'Junior Cycle Wellbeing Guidelines'
- Circular 'Arrangements for the Implementation of the Framework for Junior Cycle'
- Cinealtas: Action Plan for Bullying Implementation Plan 2023 - 2027

The school adopts and adheres to the DES Child Protection procedures and has a Child Protection Policy with the Principal as Designated Liaison Person (DLP) and the Deputy Principal as the Deputy DDLP. Where a child protection concern arises, the procedures outlined in the Child Protection Policy are followed.

Section 1

Definition of Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE):

Social, personal and health education (S.P.H.E) 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 can be enabled 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.

Definition of Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE):

RSE is a lifelong developmental process of acquiring knowledge and an understanding of human relationships and sexuality. The school recognises that Parents/Guardians are the primary educators, and home is the natural environment in which Relationships and Sexuality Education should take place.

JC SPHE Policy Aims: (2023 Specification)

The aims of the S.P.H.E. programme as outlined by the Specification for Junior Cycle 2023:

- To build student' self-awareness and positive self-worth
- To develop the knowledge, understanding, skills, dispositions, and values that will support them to lead fulfilling and healthy lives
- To empower them to create, nurture and maintain respectful and loving relationships with self and others
- To enhance their capacity to contribute positively to societies

LC SPHE Policy Aims: (2024 Specification)

The aims of the S.P.H.E. programme as outlined by the Specification for Leaving Certificate 2025:

- To be healthy, resilient, confident, responsible, and empathetic young adults
- To nurture respectful, loving, and caring relationships
- To prepare for the opportunities, responsibilities, and experiences of life now and beyond school

Section 2

The SPHE Programme at Junior Cycle (2023 Specification):

The SPHE course has been designed for 100 hours of student engagement to be taught over the three years of Junior Cycle. This course offers opportunities to support all the Junior Cycle Key Skills; Being Literate, Managing Myself, Staying Well, Managing Information and Thinking, Being Numerate, Being Creative, Working with Others, Communicating.

The Junior Cycle programme is composed of 4 interconnected strands:

1. Understanding Yourself 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

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. Students will also practice the skills needed for making healthy decisions and come to understand contextual factors, such as family, peer, media and social pressures, that influence decisions

3. Relationship 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.

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.

In Junior Cycle, six indicators have been identified as central to students' wellbeing. Teaching and learning within the SPHE classroom can provide learning opportunities to foster all six indicators of wellbeing - Active, Responsible, Connected, Resilient, Respected and Aware. SPHE is thereby a core pillar of a school's Wellbeing programme in Junior Cycle.

The RSE Programme at Senior Cycle (Current 2025/2026):

Senior Cycle RSE incorporates the Curriculum and Guidelines for RSE prepared by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment and approved by the Department of Education and Science. The materials provided are not prescriptive, rather they provide a menu of options for classroom lessons from which teacher can choose.

Topics covered at Senior Cycle RSE:

- Communication
- Assertive Communication
- Dealing with Feelings
- Living with Loss
- Human Reproduction
- Human Sexuality
- Family Planning/Planning for the Future
- Responsible Parenthood
- Implications of Sexual Activity
- Sexually Transmitted Infections
- Loving Relationships
- Marriage
- Life Supports
- Challenging Roles/Gender Roles
- Sexual Orientation
- Sexual Harassment, Abuse, Rape, Assault
- Bereavement
- Consent

*The Senior Cycle SPHE Programme is currently under review and will be updated in 2026/2027 to reflect the new specification.

The SPHE Programme at Senior Cycle (Sep 2026 onwards)

Senior Cycle SPHE supports young people as they manage the demands of life now and prepare for the opportunities, responsibilities and experiences of life beyond school. It builds the knowledge, understanding, skills, dispositions and values to enable them to flourish both now and in the future.

The SPHE Specification is designed for a minimum of 60 hours of class contact time over the final two years of senior cycle education.

The Senior Cycle SPHE Programme is comprised of 3 strands:

1. Health and Wellbeing

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 particular focus on gaining awareness, skills, techniques and information to protect their mental health.

2. Relationships and Sexuality

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

3. Into Adulthood

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 SPHE Programme at Transition Year

Transition Year SPHE incorporates the Curriculum and Guidelines prepared by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment and approved by the Department of Education and Science. The materials provided are not prescriptive, rather they provide a menu of options for classroom lessons from which teacher can choose.

Topics covered in Transition Year:

- Identity
- Personality
- Learning Styles
- Support Systems
- Mental Health V Physical Health
- Child Safeguarding
- Emotions
- Bullying
- Bullying online
- Dangers of social media
- Addiction (gambling, phone use)
- Alcohol and drug abuse
- Different forms of leadership

*The Senior Cycle SPHE Programme is currently under review and will be updated in 2026/2027 to reflect the new specification.

Section 3

Resources for SPHE/RSE:

The SPHE department records any resources on the Long-Term Plan on SharePoint. All resources are accessible to all SPHE Teachers.

The textbooks currently being used have a range of digital resources available:

1st Year: SPHE for Wellbeing 1

2nd Year: SPHE for Wellbeing 2

3rd Year: SPHE for Wellbeing 3

TY: Online SPHE tools

5th/6th: (Skilly)

To be confirmed in 2026/2027

Teacher Training:

Teachers of SPHE/RSE are encouraged to attend continuous professional development (CPD) courses offered in the region by the HSE and OIDE. School management will encourage and facilitate SPHE teachers to attend training to support the delivery of the programme. A record of courses attended can be found in the SPHE Department folder on SharePoint. Sharing of best practice and resources among SPHE teachers in Coláiste Pobail Acla is also encouraged and is facilitated during SPHE Department meetings.

Cross-curricular Links:

All subjects/subject departments support S.P.H.E/RSE particularly:

- Art
- Biology
- Home Economics
- Science
- Physical Education
- Guidance Department
- CSPE
- IMBVE

Whole School Supports for S.P.H.E:

Coláiste Pobail Acla is a health promoting school which supports the ideals of the SPHE programme. This includes:

- First Year Induction Programme
- Guidance Department
- Internet Safety Module
- Extra-Curricular Physical Education Programme
- Evening talks for Parents/Guardians
- LGBTQ+ supports in place within the school for students in line with Gender Studies (LGBTQ+ & Allies Group, LGBTQ+ Student Support Team, LGBTQ+, Cultural inclusion activities)

Section 4

Class Organisation:

The SPHE teacher will carefully plan to create an environment where respect is at the fore.

Contemporary topics and issues which may arise in class are dealt with at a level appropriate to the age of the student and in line with the learning outcomes of the specification.

Teaching methods are of an experiential nature with an emphasis on discussion, reflection, and classroom participation. Teaching methods are student-centred and are appropriate to the age and educational needs of the student.

The class atmosphere is one of respect for the privacy of each student and hallmarked by sensitivity and care. Establishing SPHE classroom rules collaboratively between the teacher and students to ensure respect for one another and confidentiality within the learning environment.

Participation:

S.P.H.E is mandatory for all students who attend Colaiste Pobail Acla. However, in line with Section 30 of the Education Act 1998, parents have a right to have their children opt out of the classes which are contrary to the conscience of the parent. Each parent therefore has the right to withdraw their child from some or all of the RSE classes, but parents are encouraged to provide alternative RSE at home. Should a Parent/Guardian wish to withdraw their child, the Parent/Guardian is responsible for their supervision during the scheduled class time. Parents wishing to withdraw their child from RSE must inform the Principal of their decision in writing to info@cpacla.ie Otherwise, the student will be expected to participate in the RSE classes. Where students are withdrawn from RSE, the school cannot take responsibility for any versions of class content passed on to them by other students.

Confidentiality:

The S.P.H.E teacher will establish boundaries within the S.P.H.E class to create a safe learning environment. While students are not directly encouraged to disclose personal or private information in a classroom setting, there may be times when they do so. Confidentiality is respected by teachers however at the beginning of each academic year, students are informed that complete confidentiality cannot be guaranteed. Information disclosed may have to be passed on at the discretion of the SPHE teacher to the Designated Liaison Person (Principal) and Deputy Designated Liaison Person (Deputy Principal).

Sensitive Issues:

Class discussions will be of a general nature and will not be personally focused. Inappropriate questions will not be answered by a teacher in class. The S.P.H.E teacher may use their own professional judgement in answering questions.

Methodology

A variety of experiential teaching methods will be used to teach the S.P.H.E. programme. These methods are child- centered and appropriate to the age and stage of development of the student and reflect the aims and ethos of the school.

Workshops and Visiting Speakers:

Pobail Acla recognises that visiting speakers have a vital role in supplementing, complimenting, and supporting the S.P.H.E programme. Visitors/visiting groups are required to adhere to the following guidelines for good practice:

- All visits to the school will be planned in line with the relevant RSE/S.P.H.E programmes
- Visitors to the school will be made aware of the S.P.H.E/RSE policies and any other relevant policies
- Talks and programmes delivered by an external speaker/agency must be consistent with the ethos of Pobail Acla. All visits must be planned with school personnel.
- A teacher(s) must remain in the classroom with the student group.
- All programmes, talks, interventions and events should be evaluated by students and teachers in terms of the subject matter, messages, structure, and proposed learning outcomes.

Section 5

Communication of the Policy to the School Community

Staff

Staff are kept abreast of the aims of S.P.H.E. and the need for this programme to help students develop in a holistic manner. The school is mindful of the need to develop an awareness of the S.P.H.E programme among the whole staff and will avail of opportunities at staff meetings to appraise staff of developments in the area.

Parents:

Pobail Acla acknowledges the role of Parents/Guardians as the primary educators of their children. The Programme seeks to support Parents/Guardians in this challenging task.

Parents/Guardians are welcome to discuss the programme with the SPHE teacher and school management at any time.

While all partners in the school community - teaching staff, students, parents/guardians, and management are agreed on the programme, we recognise, the right of any parent who so wishes to request that their child should not participate in the RSE programme.

Withdrawing students from the RSE programme:

The Education Act (1998; Section 30, subsection (2e) 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 to therefore withdraw their child from all or any aspect of RSE. Parents must notify the Principal in advance of their wish to have their child withdrawn from all or part of the programme. This request must be in writing to the

Principal to info@cpacla.ie Parents are welcome to make an appointment to visit the school to discuss the nature of their concerns. A copy of the policy will be made available to any Parents/Guardians on request.

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 must be compiled with until revoked by the parent. If a student is withdrawn from the RSE component, it is the responsibility of the Parent/Guardian to supervise the child during this time.

Section 6

Assessment, Record Keeping and Reporting:

Junior Cycle

Assessment in Junior Cycle SPHE takes a formative approach. Written work, reflections and class participation is used by the teacher to assess student engagement with the programme. A Classroom Based Assessment is completed in Year 2 or Year 3. SPHE Department meetings occur on a regular basis and a record of each meeting is kept within the subject folder on SharePoint. SPHE teachers engage in SLAR meetings in relation to the CBA's. SLAR reports are provided to management and stored in the Department Plan. Discussion and consultation take place with school management as required.

Senior Cycle

There is no final written examination in SPHE. All students who engage in Senior Cycle SPHE (whether following Leaving Certificate Establish (LCE) or Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) programmes) are assessed through key assignments.

Key assignments in SPHE consist of a number of learning experiences and reflection activities that are derived from the learning outcomes across the three strands of the SPHE curriculum

The key assignments are not marked or graded although satisfactory completion of key assignments is required, and students will receive teacher feedback. Evidence of key assignments can be presented in a variety of forms: audio, written, digital, poster, photography, etc.

The key assignments are designed to enable students show evidence of their growing capacity to

- find reliable and relevant information about health and services • make judgements, and propose solutions or strategies in relation to different scenarios
- show awareness of both the personal and social impacts of decisions and behaviours
- recognise the various influences on health and wellbeing • reflect on what they are learning and how this learning is relevant in their lives both now and in the future
- integrate and apply their learning in relevant social and personal contexts.

Monitoring, Evaluating and Reviewing the SPHE programme:

Senior Management and SPHE teachers are committed to monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of the programme. Specifically important to the SPHE programme are:

1. Student Feedback: Feedback is sought from the students by teachers. A confidential survey of students administered by the teacher is conducted at the end of each year.
2. Staff review and feedback
3. Parental feedback: Feedback is received during parent-teacher meetings and Parents' Association meetings. Feedback helps to inform future planning.

It is planned that the SPHE/RSE policy will be reviewed annually at Coláiste Pobail Acla. Ongoing review and evaluation will take cognisance of changing information, guidelines, legislation and feedback from parents/guardians, students and teachers.

Declaration

This Coláiste Pobail Acla Policy was formed following consultation with all staff, members of the Board of Management, Parents/Guardians and the Student Council. It is recommended that this policy be reviewed every three years or whenever it is deemed necessary by School Management. It was adopted by the Board of Management of Coláiste Pobail Acla on:

Signed: _____

Mr. Martin O'Reilly

Chairperson of the Board of Management

Date: _____

27/5/26

Signed: _____

Mr. Jason Ó Mongáin

Board Secretary & School Principal

Date: _____

27-05-26