










Scoil Mhuire, Trim

Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) Policy

Introduction:

An RSE policy is a written statement of the aims of the RSE programme, the relationship of RSE to SPHE, and the organisation and management of RSE within the school.

This policy was developed with reference to the following documentation and consultation with relevant personnel:

-  Relationships and Sexuality Education Policy Guidelines 1997
-  Template for developing and revising/updating the RSE policy.
-  Circulars M04/95, M20/96, M22/00, M11/03, 0037/2010, 0027/2008, 0023/2010
-  SPHE teachers
-  Senior Management team
-  Student Council
-  Parents Council

Our School:

Scoil Mhuire is an all-girls Voluntary Catholic Secondary School under the trusteeship of Catholic Education, an Irish Schools Trust (CEIST). It was founded by the Sisters of Mercy in 1936 and currently has a student enrolment of approximately 825, a teaching staff of approximately 60 and an ancillary staff of 10.

Our Mission Statement:

Scoil Mhuire seeks to provide a quality education for all its students in a challenging and positive environment. We are committed to holistic development and to the achievement of the full potential of each student, particularly those who are disadvantaged or marginalised.

Our Ethos:

Upholding our Mercy ethos, Scoil Mhuire promotes the core values of respect, courtesy, responsibility, and accountability, while ensuring that a holistic approach to the education of our students prevails. We are committed to promoting inclusion with a spirit of respect and welcome for diversity. We also acknowledge the unprecedented challenges in education, as we anticipate, define, and meet the evolving needs of today's young people.

Scope:

This policy will apply to all aspects of teaching and learning about relationships and sexuality. Discussion about relationships and sexuality also takes place in classes other than SPHE/RSE. It is therefore important that all teachers are familiar with the RSE policy.

Rationale:

- Sexuality is a key element of healthy social and personal development. Young people are exposed to a bewildering variety of messages about sexuality and sexual activity. Schools, in consultation with parents/guardians, need to reflect on how to provide for the needs of their 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 Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE).
- Circulars [0027/2008](#) and [0023/2010](#) request schools to commence a process of RSE policy development.
- The effectiveness of an RSE programme is dependent on a collaborative policy process involving teachers, parents/guardians, members of the board of management and students.

Relationship to characteristic spirit of the school:

- **The policy relates to the school's mission/vision/aims. It acknowledges the importance of SPHE/RSE being taught in the context of a whole school climate that is inclusive and respectful.**
- **The policy reflects the educational philosophy of the trustees and the core values and ethos of the school, as outlined in the school's mission statement above.**
- Spiritual, moral, and ethical issues will arise when teaching RSE. The RSE policy guides teachers in the treatment of such issues in accordance with the ethos of the school. Teachers of RSE understand that their role is to express the views of the whole school community on these sensitive issues, and not their own personal views. In this regard, it should be noted that:
 - ✓ Schools are required to deliver all aspects of the RSE curriculum, including those in relation to sexual orientation, contraception, sexually transmitted infections etc. This can be done within a context in which teaching of the programme is informed by the school's ethos.
 - ✓ A school can express its ethos while at the same time facilitating students in discussing a range of views in relation to topics within the RSE programme.

Defining Relationships and Sexuality Education:

Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) 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 education provision, which seeks to promote the overall development of the person, and which includes the integration of sexuality into personal understanding, growth, and development. Through RSE, formal opportunities are provided for young people to evaluate the wide range of information, opinions, attitudes, and values which they receive. In this way they can be helped to form values and establish behaviours within a moral framework. While parents are the primary educators in this area, schools have a key role to play. Ideally, parents/guardians and schools work in partnership to provide comprehensive relationships and sexuality education for young people.

The Objectives of Relationships and Sexuality Education programme:

RSE is part of the Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) programme. RSE should enable students to:

- acquire the understanding and skills necessary to form healthy friendships and 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.
- explore aspects of sexuality including stereotyping and gender issues.
- examine cultural influences on sexuality.
- appreciate the responsibilities of parenthood.
- develop strategies for decisions and actions consistent with personal moral integrity and respectful of the rights and dignity of others.
- develop skills for coping with peer pressure, conflict, and threats to personal safety.

KEY MEASURES OF THE RSE POLICY:

A) The Provision of Training / Staff Development:

- Arrangements regarding the teaching of Relationships and Sexuality Education will be made by the Principal.
- Teachers are consulted prior to being timetabled to teach SPHE/RSE
- All teachers of SPHE/RSE will receive a minimum of two days training.

- The Principal and/or the SPHE coordinator will be responsible for informing relevant staff members of continual professional development training.
- The Board of Management must inform all members of staff of any amendments to this policy should they arise.

B) The Inclusion of Parents / Guardians:

- Both staff, parent/guardian and student representatives were consulted in the making of the RSE policy.
- The RSE policy is available to view on the official Scoil Mhuire website www.scoilmhuiretrim.ie
- The [Education Act, 1998](#) provides that a student is not required to attend instruction in any subject which is contrary to the conscience of the parent/guardian or in the case of a student who has reached the age of 18 years, the student. Hence, parents/guardians have a right to opt their child out of the sensitive issues in RSE if they wish to do so. In such circumstances, the parents/guardians are asked to consult with, and make arrangements with the Principal about this withdrawal. Any requests for withdrawal must be made in writing.

C) Ethical / Moral Considerations:

The following is a list of guidelines on the moral and ethical considerations which may arise:

➤ **Answering Questions**

It is important to create an environment in RSE in which students feel comfortable to ask questions openly. However, teachers may not be able to answer all questions asked by the students and therefore, boundaries should be set appropriately. Teachers should use their professional judgement guided by the age, gender and needs of the students presented to them. The Child Protection Policy and the Ethos of the school must be upheld.

➤ **Confidentiality**

Students are not encouraged to disclose personal or private information in RSE classes but there may be times when they discuss their own lives. Confidentiality should be respected, unless the student is considered at risk, in which case the appropriate action should be taken e.g., follow the procedures set down in the Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post Primary schools 2017, notifying the Principal (Designated Liaison Person-DLP) or Deputy Principal (Deputy Designated Liaison Person-DDLP) immediately and/or refer to any of the school policies such as substance abuse, notify parents/guardians etc.

Teachers must not promise absolute confidentiality. Teachers indicate clearly to students when the content of the conversation can no longer be kept confidential. This is in line with Child Protection Procedures.

➤ **Sexual Activity**

Parents/Guardians and teachers should give students information on the age of consent, which is seventeen years of age for both males and females as legislated in The Criminal Law (Sexual Offences Act) 2006.

➤ **Aspects of Sexual Education that arise in school curriculum**

The curricula of other subject's deal with sensitive content in regard to relationships and sexuality. It is the discretion of the teacher to decide what information is appropriate to give in the context of the class. The subsequent discussion should be limited and set within the context of the subject curriculum.

➤ **Contraception/ Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs)**

The post-primary RSE Curriculum Guidelines state that the subject of Family Planning should be covered in detail within the Senior Cycle RSE programme. In line with the new JC SPHE specification 2023, the topic of contraception and STIs are introduced and taught in Stand 3, RSE. It is also covered in Junior Cycle Science, Home Economics and Leaving Certificate. Biology. The RSE programme requires that young people are provided with information on methods of contraception and an overview of the transmission and prevention of STIs. Both topics will be dealt with in a factual, open but age-appropriate manner.

➤ **Sexual Identity**

The subject of sexual orientation and gender identity is covered as part of the RSE programme at Senior Cycle, and with the discretion of the teacher at Junior Cycle. Under the Equal Status Act, 2000, and the Equality Act, 2004, associated discrimination is prohibited. Teachers must not promote any one gender identity or sexual orientation.

➤ **Visiting Speakers**

It is recommended that trained RSE teachers facilitate the programme. All visiting speakers must be approved by the Principal and provided with a copy of the RSE policy which they must adhere to. The Office should be informed of the date and name of the visitor and a record kept. All visitors must be welcomed at the door and accompanied by a teaching member of staff for the duration of the visit. Any issues arising from appropriateness of the content delivered must be brought to the attention of the Principal.

➤ **Special Needs**

Teachers of RSE should be aware of students with special educational or/and emotional needs and liaise with parents/guardian.

D. Practical Issues:

- All Junior Cycle students are timetabled for approximately 100 hours of SPHE over three years. The classes are in form groups of all girls, which range between 28 and 30 students. RSE is taught as part of SPHE.
- Aspects of RSE are taught through Science, Biology, Home Economics and may arise in other subjects.
- Where there is a written request from parents/guardians to withdraw a student from RSE, arrangements are made in consultation with the Principal, teacher, parent/guardian, and student.
- SPHE/RSE teachers meet at the beginning of the school year. A co-ordinator is appointed, and a Scheme of Work is agreed for the year.

Links to Other Policies:

Other School Policies which reference RSE are:

- Child Safeguarding Statement
- School Policy concerning the use of mobile phones and other electronic devices.
- Policy on Substance Abuse.
- Anti-bullying Policy.
- Acceptable Use Policy for Students.
- The School Guidance Plan.
- Code of Behaviour.

Implementation Arrangements, Roles, and Responsibilities:

Board of Management

The Board of Management supports the development of the RSE policy ensuring that the school ethos is reflected in the policy.

Principal and Deputy Principals

The Principal and Deputy Principals are committed to supporting all staff involved in the RSE programme.

They will facilitate and support continuous professional development in this area.

SPHE Co-ordinator

The SPHE coordinator will work with the SPHE teachers to coordinate the delivery of the RSE programme effectively during the academic year.

SPHE Teachers

The teachers of SPHE will deliver the RSE programme to students in the school. They will attend SPHE subject department meetings and participate in continuous professional development related to RSE.

RSE Policy reviewed and revised 5th December 2024

Appendix 2. SPHE and Wellbeing

SPHE is a core pillar of the junior cycle Wellbeing programme. The six indicators of wellbeing – Active, Responsible, Connected, Resilient, Respected and Aware - describe what is important for young people and their wellbeing. The SPHE course supports young people to develop all six indicators of wellbeing. The following image provides an overview of the six wellbeing indicators.



Appendix 3a. SPHE Programme at Junior Cycle (1st and 2nd Years 2024-2025)

The junior cycle course in SPHE is designed to support students in developing a positive sense of self and a capacity to care for themselves and others. It is designed around four interconnected strands and three cross-cutting elements.



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. 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.

Strand 3: Relationship and Sexuality.

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.

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.

Awareness

Awareness is the ability to understand one's own thoughts, emotions, values and behaviour. It includes understanding how different factors influence our sense of self and how we live our lives, including the influence of family, peers, the internet, gender, culture and social norms. This element also includes an awareness that to be human is to be in relationships and that we all share a common humanity and dignity, have rights and responsibilities.

Dialogue

Through dialogical teaching and learning students are facilitated to engage with a diversity of viewpoints; discuss and reflect on their own perspectives, values, and behaviours and those of others; enlarge their understanding of topics of relevance to their lives; and come to informed, thoughtful decisions based on their personal values, with due regard to their own rights and responsibilities and the rights and responsibilities of others. Respectful dialogue is aided by presuming a diversity of backgrounds, identities, cultures and experiences in every classroom and seeing this as a resource for learning.

Reflection* and action

This cross-cutting element focuses on students reflecting on what they have learned and coming to their own personal insights and conclusions in response to their learning. It enables students to consider how the learning can inform their choices, behaviour and relationships, and discerning what it means for their lives now or for the future. Learning in SPHE is a 'praxis'; an ongoing process of critical reflection and action, nurtured by dialogue with others.

*Reflection is "the ability to take a critical stance before deciding, choosing and acting, such as, by stepping back from the assumed, known, apparent, and accepted, comparing a given situation from other, different perspectives, and looking beyond the immediate situation to the long-term and indirect effects of one's decisions and actions. This enables individuals to reach a level of maturity that allows them to adopt different perspectives, make independent judgments and take responsibility for their decisions and actions."

OECD, 2020,

Technical Report: Curriculum Analysis of the OECD Future of Education and Skills 2030.

Appendix 3b. SPHE Programme at Junior Cycle (3rd Year 2024-2025)

The curriculum for SPHE in the Junior Cycle for the current 3rd year students is presented in ten modules.

- Belonging and Integrating
- Self-management: a sense of purpose
- Communication skills
- Physical health
- Friendship
- Relationships and sexuality
- Emotional health
- Influences and decisions
- Substance Use
- Personal safety

Modules	Topics
Belonging and integrating	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Coping with change 2. Joining a new group 3. Appreciating difference 4. Bullying is everyone's business 5. Coping with loss
Self-management: a sense of purpose	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Organising myself 2. Organising my work at home and in school 3. Balance in my life
Communication skills	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Express yourself 2. Learning to listen 3. Passive, assertive and aggressive communication
Physical health	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Body care 2. Healthy eating 3. Exercise
Friendship	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Making new friends 2. A good friend
Relationship and sexuality	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Me as unique and different 2. Friendship 3. Changes at adolescence 4. The reproductive system 5. Images of male and female 6. Respecting myself and others
Emotional health	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Recognising feelings 2. Respecting my feelings and the feelings of others
Influences and decisions	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. My heroes
Substances Use	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Why use drugs? 2. Alcohol: the facts 3. Smoking and its effects 4. Smoking: why, why not?
Personal safety	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Looking after myself

Appendix 4. SPHE Senior Cycle Framework – Five areas of learning

Mental Health

The objectives of this area of learning are to:

1. develop students' confidence and competence to act in support of mental health and wellbeing
2. develop students' self-awareness about the attitudes, values and beliefs that underpin healthy personal lifestyle behaviours and choices
3. develop students' capacity to empathise with others through a greater understanding of different life experiences, motives and feelings of other individuals and groups
4. examine the factors which impact on mental health and wellbeing and develop young people's ability to act on behalf of personal and group health and wellbeing

Gender Studies

The objectives of this area of learning are to:

1. develop students' knowledge and understanding about the influence of gender on one's experience of health and wellbeing
2. explore personal experience of gender and gender stereotyping and the impact of these experiences on their lives
3. explore the differences and similarities between both genders in their approach to health and wellbeing
4. develop personal and interpersonal skills which support the development of respectful, dynamic relationships for both genders
5. examine the different influences on sex-role stereotyping and the implications for health and wellbeing
6. examine how different males and different females support or hinder their own and others' effective participation in education.

Substance Use

The objectives of this area of learning are to:

1. enhance students' knowledge and understanding about substance use and misuse
2. develop awareness of personal experiences, values, attitudes and feelings which influence lifestyle choices about substance use
3. develop students' personal and interpersonal skills so that they might have the confidence to act appropriately in the face of social pressures to behave differently
4. examine life stories associated with the harmful use of substances to develop understanding and empathy with those involved
5. examine the external influences on substance use including the media, peers and community

Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE)

(Please refer to the Scoil Mhuire RSE Policy, Appendix 1)

The objectives of this area of learning are to:

1. explore personal thoughts, values, attitudes and feelings about relationships
2. develop an understanding of the different types of relationships, what is important in them and the skills to enhance relationships

3. promote empathy with others who have different cultural values, attitudes and beliefs about family, relationships, sex and sexuality
4. develop students' knowledge, understanding and skills in support of sexual and reproductive health
5. develop students' understanding of sexuality and sexual orientation and the importance of an inclusive environment
6. develop personal and interpersonal skills which support beginning, maintaining and ending relationships
7. develop skills for coping with peer pressure, conflict, and threats to personal safety

Physical Activity and Nutrition

The objectives of this area of learning are to:

1. provide students with opportunities to reflect on personal experiences, attitudes, values and beliefs about nutrition and physical activity
2. enhance students' knowledge and understanding about the role of physical activity and nutrition in a healthy lifestyle
3. develop the confidence and competence to make and maintain healthy lifestyle choices about physical activity and nutrition
4. examine the concept of body image, including an understanding of how students can promote a positive body image for themselves and others
5. explore the social and environmental factors which enhance or hinder the adoption and maintenance of healthy lifestyle choices about physical activity and nutrition.