

SPHE Policy



Scoil Pól

1. Mission Statement:

Scoil Pól is a co-educational, Catholic, voluntary secondary school. Founded by the Sisters of Charity of St. Paul the Apostle, the school is now under the trusteeship of the Le Chéile Schools Trust. Scoil Pól is committed to the provision of an inclusive broad-based education, within a Christian community, where mutual trust and respect facilitate personal, social, vocational, academic and spiritual development. Scoil Pól recognises that each person is unique and has different gifts and needs. In keeping with our school ethos and mission, we are committed to nurturing the holistic development of every student; spiritual, emotional, intellectual, social and physical. Scoil Pól seeks to nurture the dignity, wellbeing and potential of every child. S.P.H.E contributes to this mission by supporting students in understanding relationships, sexuality and personal responsibility within a moral, spiritual and social framework consistent with our ethos.

2. Relationship of SPHE to the school's mission statement:

- SPHE provides students with an opportunity to develop their understanding of themselves and others.
- It also allows them to make informed decisions about their health, personal lives, and social development.
- It helps students grow and develop as individuals and in their relationship to others.

Aims of S.P.H.E:

Building on the aims of S.P.H.E in the primary school, at post-primary level S.P.H.E aims:

- To develop skills for self-fulfilment and living in communities.
- To promote self-esteem and self-confidence.
- 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.

3. Relationship to Characteristic Spirit and Ethos of the School

S.P.H.E will provide young people with skills to evaluate critically the wide range of information, opinions, attitudes, and values offered today, in order that they will make positive, responsible choices about themselves and about the way they live their lives. While the school acknowledges that the home is the natural environment for the social, personal and health development of children, the Education Act of 1998 (Section 9, subsection d) requires all recognised schools to promote the moral, spiritual, social and personal development of students and provide health education for them. This will happen in consultation with their parents and in the context of the Catholic ethos of the school.

4. Rationale and Importance of our SPHE Policy

Early adolescence is a time of significant change for young people, physically, emotionally, and socially. Through the use of experiential methodologies and group work, students have the dedicated space and time in this short course to develop their understanding and skills to learn about themselves, to care for themselves and others and to make informed decisions about their health and wellbeing in a rapidly changing world. In S.P.H.E, students have opportunities to revisit different themes which focus on developing self-awareness and respect for others, and

the skills of self-management, communication, coping, decision-making and relating to others. This spiral approach of revisiting key ideas and topics is familiar from existing approaches to S.P.H.E. This new course builds on this approach but also emphasises the importance of student agency and engagement in the learning process as key to learning in the affective domain. The skills involved are vital for self-fulfilment, for living in communities and for full engagement in learning beyond S.P.H.E. Personal reflection, resilience and empathy are also promoted through S.P.H.E. Relationships and sexuality education (RSE) is important for young people at this stage of their lives. They are exposed to a lot of information about relationships and sex from informal sources, the media and online. S.P.H.E provides the context within which young people can learn about important physical, social, emotional, and moral issues around relationships, sexual health, sexuality, and gender identity, including where to get reliable information from trusted sources. It is important to build on students' learning in S.P.H.E in primary education also. Learning in S.P.H.E is essentially supported by a positive, empowering whole school environment and relevant school policies/guidelines including RSE, Bí Cineálta, Acceptable Use, Substance-use policies, and child protection guidelines. This broader context for learning in S.P.H.E helps to ensure that students learn to make informed decisions about their health and wellbeing. These decisions are further supported and encouraged by school, community and national policies and guidelines. In junior cycle, six indicators are identified as being central to students' wellbeing –Active, Responsible, Connected, Resilient, Respected and Aware. S.P.H.E provides learning opportunities designed to enhance each of these indicators thereby contributing significantly to the school's Wellbeing programme in junior cycle. S.P.H.E in senior cycle reflects the guiding principles of the senior cycle programme- Wellbeing and relationships, Inclusive education and diversity, Challenge, engagement and creativity, Learning to learn, learning for life, Choice and flexibility, Continuity and transitions, Participation and citizenship, Learning environments and partnerships. S.P.H.E provides a dedicated space and time where students can further develop the knowledge, understanding, skills, values and dispositions needed to support their physical, emotional, social and spiritual wellbeing, now and in their future lives. SPHE is grounded in values of respect, equality, inclusivity, responsibility, dignity, compassion and empathy.

5. The Safe Learning Environment

For students to participate well in S.P.H.E it is essential that a safe learning environment is established at the outset, and that ground rules are negotiated, understood, and respected by all. Ground rules will be compiled by each class group with their teacher at the start of the school year. These ground rules will be revisited throughout the year.

6. Participation

S.P.H.E is a core curricular subject on the Junior Cycle & Senior Cycle curriculum, and it plays a central role in educating students in Wellbeing. Relationships and Sexuality (RSE) is one strand of the subject. The school acknowledges that each parent/guardian is the primary educator of their son/daughter. Scoil Pól supports the work done at home in terms of wellbeing.

7. Sensitive Issues

While it is acknowledged that teachers have a professional responsibility to impart the S.P.H.E course content, the needs of the students will be addressed in a caring and supportive manner. Where it is appropriate, the school will refer students to other supportive links or services, internal or external to the school community e.g. Pastoral Care Team, Guidance Counsellor,

SST, SENCO, AEN, HSCL etc. Class discussion will be of a general nature in accordance with the previously agreed ground rules and will not be personally directed. If any questions asked by students are deemed to be inappropriate, the teacher will refer the student to their parents/guardians or state that this information may be available at a later stage of the curriculum. 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 principal. When deciding whether to answer questions the teacher should consider the age and readiness of the students, the S.P.H.E / RSE programme content, the ethos of the school, the RSE policy and use their professional judgment. The question box may be a tool deployed by the subject teacher from time to time. This will aid each teacher in evaluating the suitability of each question raised.

8. Confidentiality

The normal limits of confidentiality will apply to any information coming to the attention of the teacher. However, every effort should be made to ensure that this information is dealt with in a sensitive and discreet manner. 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). The teacher must inform the Designated Liaison Person and ensure that all reporting procedures are complied with.

9. Staff Development, Training and Resources

The value placed on S.P.H.E by the school will be evident by the commitment on the part of School Management to develop a core team of S.P.H.E teachers. Continuing professional development is an integral part of this programme. S.P.H.E teachers are encouraged to engage in relevant CPD. As part of the core curriculum, S.P.H.E will have a budgetary allocation in line with its stage of development and its teaching methodologies and timetabled allocation. School Management is committed to the appointment of an S.P.H.E Co-ordinator.

10. Implementation

Teaching & Learning Methods

As the S.P.H.E programme is mainly skills based, teaching and learning styles will be of an active, experiential nature with an emphasis on discussion, reflection, and classroom participation. These teaching methods will be appropriate to the age and stage of development of the student. Creating a safe learning environment is vital. The class atmosphere needs to be one of respect for the privacy of each individual student and of sensitivity and care.

11. Student Access and Class groupings

S.P.H.E is delivered at a common level. S.P.H.E. is timetabled for one class period a week for all years. LCA students receive S.P.H.E through Social Education. All classes are of mixed ability. The delivery of RSE happens through S.P.H.E (see RSE policy).

Parents/Guardians will be informed by the SPHE Coordinator of the dates on which the Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) components of the SPHE programme will be delivered. Parents/Guardians who wish to withdraw their son/daughter from RSE should arrange a meeting with school management to discuss and agree appropriate arrangements, in accordance with the school's RSE Policy.

12. Resources

The resources used in class will be guided by the advice given at Continual Professional Development (CPD). Resources will be in the form of textbooks, workbooks, appropriate video clips, brochures, worksheets etc. This will be supplemented with material from other state agencies or organisations with a proven educational track record in the area of S.P.H.E e.g., HSE, Webwise, Belong To, ISPCC, Body Whys, Shona Foundation booklets, NCCA toolkits, Irish Cancer Society, Dublin Rape Crisis Body Right programme, UCC Bystander Intervention programme, DCU FUSE anti-bullying programme etc.

13. The Role of Visitors

The S.P.H.E teacher will consult with the principal in relation to the suitability of guest speakers prior to their invitation to the school. All guest speakers will be made aware of and requested to comply with the school S.P.H.E policy and Visitor Policy. The presentations of guest speakers will be negotiated with the relevant SPHE teacher before delivery to the students. It is normal practice for teachers to remain in the classroom while visitors are there. Preparatory and follow-up work, where possible, should be undertaken by the class. Scoil Pól recognises that the best person to deliver S.P.H.E content is the classroom teacher.

14. How Parents/Guardians and Students will be informed

Policies relating to S.P.H.E and RSE are available to view on the school website. Junior Cycle textbooks are made available to parents/guardians through the students. The Parents' Council is consulted on the design and review of the S.P.H.E policy. The views expressed by parents will be considered when reviewing the policy.

15. Outline of the Programme

The Department of Education and Science recognises that each school has flexibility within the S.P.H.E specification to plan and order the delivery of the SPHE Programme according to school or class needs and circumstances. The Four Strands throughout the three-year junior cycle are:

- Strand 1 – Understanding Myself and Others
- Strand 2 – Making Healthy Choices
- Strand 3 – Relationships and Sexuality
- Strand 4 – Emotional Wellbeing

The three strands throughout the two-year senior cycle are:

- Strand 1- Health & Wellbeing
- Strand 2- Relationships & Sexuality
- Strand 3- Into Adulthood.

16. Additional Educational Needs (AEN) / Health Issues

At the beginning of the academic year teachers are orally informed of the additional need requirements of new entrants, most especially first years. All teachers have access to the AEN information available on each student on Vsware. It is each teacher's responsibility to review the file of the relevant students that they will be teaching for the up-coming year. Teachers are to keep this information in mind in the classroom so as to be sensitive when the need arises.

Students with additional educational needs, may need more help than others in coping with the physical and emotional aspects of growing up; they may also need more help in learning what behaviour is and is not acceptable: NCCA – Document for students with mild learning disability (http://www.ncca.ie/uploadedfiles/PP_SPHE.pdf).

17. S.P.H.E & the autism classroom in Scoil Pól:

The autism classroom in Scoil Pol (The Hub) promotes the wellbeing, inclusion and holistic development of students with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) through a safe, structured, predictable, and supportive environment. The wellbeing plan aligns with the Junior Cycle Wellbeing Framework, Level 1 and Level 2 Learning Programme Guidelines, and a strength-based approach. S.P.H.E. & Wellbeing is embedded across modules in junior cycle level 1 and level 2 - Personal Care, Living in a Community, Skills for Life, Numeracy and Communication and Literacy. S.P.H.E & Wellbeing is embedded across modules in senior cycle Level 1 and level 2- Communication and Literacy, Numeracy, Personal Care, Physical Education, Cookery, looking after my environment, My Life My Finances, Visual Art. Senior cycle students focus on- Preparation for Adulthood, Independence, and Post-school Pathways.

18. Assessment/homework

Written homework is not encouraged in S.P.H.E so as to avoid an academic link. Instead 'reflection' and 'research' is encouraged that will be linked to the class that day or the next day. Classroom Based Assessments are completed in 2nd year. Senior Cycle students will complete 8 key assignments across the two-year course. Transition Year students include reflective pieces in their portfolio.

19. Policy Review

This SPHE policy will be reviewed annually to ensure it remains current, effective, and aligned with:

- Department of Education circulars and guidelines
- Evolving student needs and school context
- Current best practice in SPHE delivery
- Feedback from staff, students, and parents/guardians

Review Process:

- Annual review conducted by SPHE Coordinator and relevant staff
- Consultation with Student Council and Parents' Association where appropriate
- Board of Management approval of any amendments
- Next scheduled review: May 2027

Policy ratified by Board of Management on: 23rd June 2026

Signed: 
Chairperson, Board of Management

Signed: 
Principal

Date: 23/06/2026

Date: 23/06/2026