

RSE POLICY



RSE Policy

Introduction:

Scoil Pól is a Catholic voluntary secondary school under the trusteeship of the Le Chéile Schools Trust. Inspired by the Le Chéile charism, our school is committed to the Gospel values of dignity, compassion, justice, inclusion and respect. This RSE policy has been developed in accordance with:

- The Scoil Pól Mission Statement
- Department of Education Circulars M04/95, M20/96, M11/03, 0023/2010, 0037/2010, 0043/2018 and relevant SPHE/RSE specifications
- Child Protection Procedures for Post-Primary Schools
- Bí-Cineálta policy
- Acceptable Use policy
- Wellbeing policy
- Guidance Plan
- Wellbeing Plan
- SPHE policy
- Consultation with the SPHE Department, RE Department and Student Support Team
- Input from students, parents/guardians, staff and the Board of Management
- Child Safeguarding Statement

This policy outlines the aims, organisation and management of the RSE programme in Scoil Pól and reflects its relationship to SPHE, Religious Education, Science and other relevant subjects.

Scoil Pól, 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.

RSE 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.

Scope

This policy applies to:

- All students (Junior and Senior Cycle)
- Teaching and non-teaching staff
- The Board of Management
- Parents/guardians
- Visiting speakers and external facilitators

The policy governs all teaching and learning relating to relationships and sexuality, whether delivered through:

- SPHE
- Science and Biology

- Guidance
- Other cross-curricular contexts

All staff should be familiar with this policy, as discussions relating to relationships and sexuality may arise beyond the SPHE/RSE classroom.

As outlined by the Department of Education and Skills in Circular 0037/2010, no aspect of the RSE programme including Sexually Transmitted Infection (STI's), family planning, pornography or sexual orientation can be omitted on the grounds of religious ethos. As we seek to promote the overall development of the student, this involves the integration of Relationships and Sexuality into personal understanding, growth and development within the context of our holistic educational ethos.

Definition of Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE)

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. Relationship and Sexuality education (RSE) aims to provide opportunities for students in the school to learn about relationships and sexuality in ways that help them think and act in a moral, caring and responsible way

Policy Context and 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). At Senior Cycle, RSE is delivered through the Social, Personal and Health Education programme (SPHE).

Circulars M4/95 M20/96 M11/03, M27/2008, 0023/2010 0037/2010 and Child Protection Circular 0065/2011 request schools to commence a process of RSE policy development.

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

The effectiveness of an RSE programme is dependent on a collaborative policy process involving teachers, students, parents, and members of the Board of Management.

RSE Policy Objectives

- To articulate the relationship of RSE to SPHE.
- To articulate the aims of the RSE programme.
- To ensure clarity and consensus on how RSE is taught in the school.
- To clarify the rights, roles and responsibilities of all within the school community, in relation to the RSE Programme, with reference to school staff, students, parents/guardians and the board of management/trustees.

- To ensure that teachers, parents/guardians and students understand how the teaching of RSE is linked to the school ethos.
- To provide information on the practicalities of delivering the programme.

Relationship of RSE to SPHE / Wellbeing

- The SPHE programme at both Junior and Senior Cycle levels, is a core element of the promotion of student wellbeing. RSE is an integral element of the SPHE programme at both levels.
- As outlined by the NCCA, "SPHE is a broad curriculum that supports children and young people to learn about themselves and to develop and maintain healthy relationships. Over time, it also gives them the knowledge and skills to be able to make responsible decisions in relation to their overall health and wellbeing." (Curriculum online, Junior Cycle SPHE Toolkit.)
- SPHE provides opportunities for pupils to learn basic personal and social skills which foster integrity, self-confidence and self-esteem while nurturing sensitivity to the feelings and rights of others
- SPHE covers areas such as self-esteem, assertiveness, communication and decision- making skills – all of which can contribute to the effectiveness of the RSE programme.
- SPHE adds the dimension to education of empowering people to manage their own lives. By providing RSE through an SPHE programme, we teach students personal skills to increase their personal effectiveness so that, in the context of their own lives, they are able to make informed decisions in relation to their sexuality and relationships with others.
- There is continued emphasis on health and well-being, responsibility, and decision-making throughout the RSE programme.
- RSE comprises Strand 3 of the Junior Cycle SPHE Specification: "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. " (NCCA Specification for Junior Cycle SPHE, p. 12)
- The Learning Outcomes for Junior Cycle RSE are listed on page 16 of the Specification: https://www.curriculumonline.ie/getmedia/ca8f8975-50ca-4dc3-bba5-a04e25b4f978/JC_SPHE_Short_Course_2023.pdf

At Senior Cycle, RSE comprises Strand 2 of the 2024 Senior Cycle SPHE Specification. "Within this strand 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." (NCCA Specification Senior Cycle SPHE, p.14)

The Learning Outcomes for RSE at Senior Cycle are listed on page 14 of the Specification: <https://www.curriculumonline.ie/getmedia/759a3a1d-9736-40d4-9f57-234443d2a344/SC-SPHE-Spec-JULY-24-p9.pdf>

The aims of the RSE programme:

- To help students understand and develop healthy friendships.
- To help develop students' understanding of sexuality.
- To develop a positive attitude towards and acceptance of sexuality.
- To promote a knowledge and respect for the opinions of others.
- To provide an opportunity to learn about relationships and sexuality.
- To encourage students to think and act in a moral, caring and responsible way.

Key Measures

- A- Provision of Training and Staff Development
- B- Inclusion of Parents/Guardians and Students.
- C- Ethical/Moral Considerations
- D- Practical Issues
- E- Withdrawing students from RSE programmes

Provision of training & staff development

- The Board of Management and Senior Management Team are committed to ensuring access to CPD opportunities for all teachers involved in RSE, and to providing relevant RSE school resources.
- Opportunities provided by the OIDE, and the Education Centres and other relevant bodies, e.g. HSE, will be brought to the attention of staff members. Teachers will be encouraged to attend CPD in RSE. Senior Management and the Board of Management will make every effort to facilitate teachers to participate in professional development opportunities, with due regard to the school budget and Supervision/Substitution rota, and the need for the ongoing teaching and learning programme of the school to continue with as little disturbance as possible.
- Application for in-school support from OIDE is sought when necessary.
- SPHE and RSE Department meetings are utilised as a platform for discussion and development of RSE materials.

Inclusion of parents/guardians and students

It is recognised by the school that the parents/guardians are the primary educators of the children and their role in education concerning relationships and sexuality is seen by the school as very important.

A copy of this policy is available to view on the school website. Parents/ guardians are encouraged and advised to read this policy as a way of informing themselves of the RSE policy and programme content.

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 18 years, the student.

Hence, parents have a right to opt their child out of the sensitive issues in RSE if they wish to do so. Additional information on how to withdraw consent to participating in RSE classes is outlined below (Practical Issues: Withdrawing Students from RSE programme).

The Parents' Association is consulted on the design and review of the RSE policy. The views expressed by parents will be taken into account when reviewing the policy.

Parents/ guardians have a responsibility to inform themselves of the RSE programme content and to prepare their son/daughter for the information they will acquire around the sensitive areas covered in RSE

The RSE policy is available to download from www.scoilpol.ie or a copy may be requested by a parent/ guardian from the school office.

The inclusion of student voice is integral to the planning and delivery of the SPHE and RSE programmes. The design of the RSE programme at junior and senior cycle will take into account the real and expressed needs of students. As outlined by the NCCA, " Consulting with students about the content of SPHE lessons and the methodologies for teaching and learning will produce valuable insights; finding out which topics a particular class or year group feels are most important to them at this moment in time will give you a very current picture of their needs; and the very act of consulting with your students will help foster positive teacher student relationships and shared responsibility for the learning. Listening to students' views can also

be a springboard for bringing parents into the conversation." (Curriculum Oline, Teaching SPHE toolkit).

RSE programmes will be under constant review, with student feedback forming an integral form of any adjustments made.

Additional Educational Needs/ 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.

Ethical/Moral Considerations:

RSE is a complex area of the curriculum. A school's RSE policy provides guidance for teachers on the moral and ethical framework within which the programme will be taught. In this regard, the policy committee has considered the following issues:

Answering Questions: While it is important to create an environment in SPHE/RSE in which students can discuss issues openly, teachers may not be able to answer all questions asked by students and can set appropriate limits. Students may ask questions about issues which are not included in the curriculum, on these, and on all questions, teachers will use their professional judgement, guided by the age of the students, the RSE curriculum and the RSE policy for the school. If a teacher has concerns about teaching the sensitive elements in RSE, they should consult with the principal. Any teacher has the right to opt out of teaching the sensitive elements of RSE. It is the responsibility of the B.O.M. to ensure content is covered by another teacher or an outside speaker.

In all RSE classes the roles of DLP & DDLP are highlighted.

Students are guided to in school supports should sensitive issues arise.

Offering Advice: The school's function is to provide a general education about sexual matters and issues and not to offer individual advice, personal opinion, information or counselling on aspects of sexual behaviour and contraception – however sources of professional information and advice will be identified if appropriate. Teachers may provide students with educational information about where and from whom they can receive confidential sexual advice and treatment, e.g., their doctor or other suitable agency. Advice offered must not be directive, must be appropriate to the age of the pupil, and must be consistent with the school ethos.

Some sensitive questions may be asked of the teacher and may be answered in a professional way. RSE teachers are encouraged to be factual in their answers, while also being mindful of providing answers in an age-appropriate way.

Explicit Questions: It may not be appropriate to deal with some explicit questions in class. In this case, teachers state, in a sensitive manner, 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 s/he should seek advice from RSE co-ordinator or the 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. A question box can be used throughout RSE classes. In this way teachers can prepare the answers in advance of the next class.

Confidentiality: From the outset students will draw up a set of acceptable ground rules for classroom behaviour and participation in SPHE and RSE classes. The purpose of these rules/

Class Contract is to create a class atmosphere which is safe, positive and productive. The issue of confidentiality will be addressed in the creation of this class contract. It will be made clear to students that there is no need, expectation or obligation to disclose personal or private information in RSE classes. Student opinions, thoughts and questions rather than their personal experience will form the basis for any classroom discussions. Students will be encouraged to continue the discussion about the topics covered in class with their parents/guardians at home. In the event that a student does speak about his/ her own experience, confidentiality will be respected unless a teacher becomes aware that a child is at risk, in which case the appropriate action should be taken e.g., 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 Use Policy, i.e., the teacher must inform the Designated Liaison Person and ensure that all reporting procedures are complied with. All students will be made aware of the limits of confidentiality and teachers will not give unconditional guarantees of confidentiality.

Consent/ Sexual Activity: The pace of social change in Ireland over recent years has been rapid. As a result, parents, students, and teachers may experience a sense of confusion in relation to sexual morals, relationships, personal boundaries, and consent. The religious ethos of a school may at times appear to be in conflict with the lived experience of students. Teachers will provide young people with factual information on the age of consent and the importance of consent in all relationships. Following the passage of the Criminal Law (Sexual Offences) Act 2006, the age of consent in Ireland is 17 years for both males and females.

Contraception: The post-primary RSE Curriculum Guidelines state that the subject of sexual health, of which contraception is a component, should be introduced within the Junior Cycle RSE programme and covered in more detail within the Senior Cycle RSE programme. The RSE programme requires that young people are provided with information about methods of contraception, but consideration will be given by teachers to the moral and values framework within which it is taught. Schools can use their discretion with regard to the age at which students receive any aspect of the RSE programme.

Sexual Orientation: In line with the terms of the SPHE specification published by the NCCA in September 2024, all the learning outcomes in SPHE and RSE "should be taught in a way that LGBTQ+ identities, relationships and families are fully integrated and reflected in teaching and learning, as opposed to being addressed within stand-alone lessons." (NCCA Curriculum Specification for Senior Cycle SPHE, p.13) Teachers will not promote any one lifestyle as the only acceptable one for society. The post-primary RSE Curriculum Guidelines include the subject of sexual orientation. RSE training courses delivered by the SPHE Support Service provide teachers with resource materials on this topic. The Equal Status Act, 2000 and the Equality Act, 2004 prohibit discrimination across nine grounds, including sexual orientation. Consideration will be given to the messages that are conveyed when the subject of sexual orientation is discussed. Should teachers need guidance on the parameters within which such a discussion will take place they should refer to the pastoral care team.

Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs): While awareness of STIs is one of the objectives of the Second and Third Year SPHE/RSE syllabus, STIs are mainly addressed in Senior Cycle. Given that rates of STI transmission are increasing, it is important that the subject is addressed in schools.

Pornography: Discussion will be framed in an awareness that pornography, which is freely accessible, has evolved over the years becoming more extreme, violent and damaging. There are two key messages to keep in mind – pornography presents violent and degrading behaviours that do not reflect healthy real-life relationships and exposure to pornography can have harmful effects.

Practical Issues

The programme will be taught to the students in the class groupings with which they are familiar. Arrangements regarding the teaching of the programme and deployment of staff will be made by the Principal.

SPHE is timetabled in all years and RSE is delivered within this subject.

The role of outside speakers

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. Outside speakers will be made aware of the schools RSE policy. Visiting speakers pertaining to RSE will be co-ordinated by the SPHE and Guidance teachers.

The RSE 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 RSE policy and Visitor Policy. The presentations of guest speakers will be negotiated with the relevant RSE 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.

Should we be aware of students who are pregnant, they will be informed of the lesson content in advance and issues will be dealt with in a sensitive manner.

Assessment/homework: Written homework is not encouraged in SPHE or RSE 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.

Withdrawing Students from 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/ guardians have a right, therefore, to withdraw their son/daughter from all or any aspect of RSE.

A letter pertaining to the RSE programme, which will specify the delivery dates for the most sensitive elements of the programme, will be published on the school website, prior to the commencement of the programme. A notification will also be sent to parents/ guardians via the school app prior to the commencement of the teaching of these elements.

Parents/ guardians must notify the principal or deputy principal of their wish to have their child withdrawn from all or part of the programme. Parents/ guardians do not have to give reasons for withdrawal, but we respectfully invite them to do so – we aim to resolve misunderstandings if possible.

Parents/guardians opting their child out of RSE must make suitable arrangements for their child's welfare and supervision during scheduled RSE classes. Options include collecting the child from school. Parents must submit written confirmation of their arrangement when notifying the school of opt-out. The school retains duty of care but is not obliged to provide alternative instruction or dedicated supervision.

It is important to be aware that in these circumstances the school cannot be responsible for information subsequently passed on by participating students or for information passed on outside of specific RSE classes. Sensitive topics are discussed at all stages of the SPHE programme.

Issues such as overpopulation and birth control are met in a minor way in subjects such as Geography, Home Economics, Science and Religious Education. 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.

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. Junior Cycle students have an SPHE textbook and the RSE content section will be covered within it. This will be supplemented with material from other state agencies or organisations with a proven educational track record in the area of SPHE and RSE e.g. HSE, Webwise, Dublin Rape Crisis Centre, Irish Cancer Society resources, In Senior Cycle, RSE teachers will be guided by ongoing CPD and by the resources recommended in the RSE toolkit available on the Curriculum online website, as well as other appropriate sources. The Body Right Programme is delivered in Senior Cycle RSE as is the All Right All Night & Bystander Intervention, the book let's Talk by Richie Sadlier is also used.

Junior Cycle topics covered

<u>First Year</u>	<u>Second Year</u>	<u>Third Year</u>
▪ Respectful Communication ▪ Friendships and relationships ▪ Anti-Bullying ▪ Staying Safe online ▪ Changes that take place during puberty ▪ Healthy & Unhealthy relationships in real life & online ▪ Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity ▪ From puberty to parenthood ▪ Managing Emotions ▪ Self-Care	▪ Self esteem ▪ Getting to know myself better ▪ Respectful Communication ▪ The nature of friendship- having a friend/being a friend ▪ Me & My family ▪ Understanding conflict ▪ Setting boundaries ▪ Respect for self, respect for others ▪ Review their understanding of human sexuality ▪ Appreciate what it is like to be someone who has questions about their sexuality ▪ Research an organisation that offers support to LGBTQ+ young people ▪ Revise the parts of the male and female reproductive systems ▪ Learn about fertility, conception, prenatal development and birth	▪ Respectful Communication ▪ Dealing with conflict respectfully ▪ Learn what 'sexting' means ▪ Understand the risks and consequences of sharing personal images online ▪ Recognise the link between sexting and cyberbullying. ▪ Appreciate the changing nature of relationships ▪ Explore values in relationships ▪ Characteristics of healthy and unhealthy relationships ▪ Analyse relationship difficulties faced by young people ▪ Discuss how to end a relationship respectfully ▪ Explore how to stay safe while in a romantic relationship ▪ Appreciate the importance of setting

	▪ Appreciate the importance of maintaining good health during pregnancy. ▪ How the media can influence me? ▪ Viewing media through a critical lens	- boundaries in relationships ▪ Understand what is meant by consent in the context of sexual activity ▪ Understand the law, in Ireland, relating to sexual consent ▪ Appreciate that seeking, giving and asking for consent is a key element in a healthy and respectful relationship ▪ Explore the different pressures faced by young people in relationships. ▪ Further explore aspects of ▪ Sexuality ▪ Think about what life is like for a young LGBTQ+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, questioning) person in Ireland today ▪ Appreciate that people in an LGBTQ+ relationship can face prejudice and discrimination, both personally and socially. ▪ Appreciate the importance of valuing one another's rights and responsibilities in a relationship ▪ Understand the responsibilities, consequences and risks of sexual activity ▪ Reflect on the challenges of being a teenage parent ▪ Understand the importance of safe sexual activity, with particular reference to contraception and STIs.
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		▪ Explore the influence of popular culture on teenagers' attitudes to relationships and sexuality ▪ Reflect on their use of social media ▪ Be critical of the ways in which different forms of media aim to influence their understanding of sex and sexuality ▪ Appreciate that promoting gender stereotyping and sexual objectification of women and men through social media is unhealthy ▪ Understand what we mean by 'pornography' ▪ Appreciate that pornography does not depict healthy and respectful relationships ▪ Explore ways of dealing with pressure to watch pornography
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▪ **Senior Cycle Topics Covered**

Transition Year	Fifth Year	Sixth Year
Gender Identity & Diversity: Gender construct, non- binary identities, stereotypes, dealing with negativity	Reproductive System Fertilisation Menstrual Cycle Vaginal Discharge	Dublin Rape Crisis Body Right Programme UCC Bystander Intervention Programme
Power, Consent & Healthy Boundaries: Consent, Healthy Relationships, Friendships	Endometriosis Setting boundaries Consent	
Healthy & Unhealthy relationships: Red Flags, Communications, green Flags, Conflict resolution, Assertiveness, Listening, Conflict resolution	Healthy Relationships Unhealthy Relationships Cocos Law Contraception The free contraception scheme PrEP	

Intimacy, Sexual health, Reproduction: Anatomy, Contraception, STI, resources	Sexually Transmitted Infections Pornography Intimate image sharing	
Consent, Sexual Violence Awareness, Bystander intervention	Testicle check Breast Check Cervical screening Marie Keating Foundation Irish Cancer Society	

Child Protection Considerations:

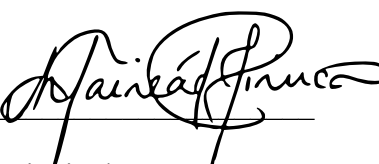
This policy is cognisant of all aspects of our current Child Protection Policy. The school follows the DES child protection guidelines and has a child protection policy with the principal as Designated Liaison Person (DLP) and the Deputy Principal as the Deputy DLP. Where a child protection concern is raised, the procedures outlined in the schools Child Protection Policy will be followed.

Monitoring & Review:

However, it will be necessary for parents of any student opting out of RSE to make suitable arrangements with parents/guardians for the welfare of their child at these time

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