

Athboy Community School



Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) & Relationships & Sexuality (RSE) Policy

Ratified November 2025

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1. Introduction

1.1 Mission Statement

Athboy Community School prides itself on creating a safe, caring, creative and culturally diverse environment and on offering an innovative curriculum which challenges students to achieve their full potential.

We promote an open culture in which relationships between staff and students are prioritised.

We commend and reward positive behaviour and encourage student participation in all aspects of school life so they can flourish academically, physically, emotionally, spiritually and psychologically.

“Mol an Óige agus tiocfaidh sí”.

1.2 Policy Aim

The aim of this policy is to provide a fully comprehensive consistent annual SPHE programme in the school’s curriculum to develop students positive sense of themselves and their physical, social, emotional and spiritual health and wellbeing. It also aims to build the capacity of young people to develop and maintain healthy relationships.

1.3 Definition of SPHE

Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) 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.

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 SPHE 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.

2. Aims

2.1 SPHE Aims

- To enable the students to develop skills for self-fulfilment and living in communities
- To promote self-esteem and self confidence
- To enable the students to develop a framework for responsible decision-making
- To provide opportunities for reflection and discussion
- To promote physical, mental and emotional health and wellbeing

With such support, students may 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. There is a growing recognition the social, personal and health education offered to students is as important as any other area of the curriculum.

2.2 Athboy Community School Care Structure

Care team: The care team comprises of the principal, deputy principal, guidance counsellor, chaplain and SEN coordinator. The care team meet weekly and respond to issues for students and their families. The care team liaise with relevant external agencies.

Year Heads: The year head oversees the personal and academic needs for their specific year group. The year head works closely with the relevant class teachers for that year group and they liaise with management and the care team accordingly.

Class Teacher: The class teacher meets with their assigned class regularly and assist students.

SNA's: The special needs assistants work daily in supporting and providing assistance for their assigned students. The SNA's work closely with class teacher's, Year Heads and the care team.

2.3 SPHE Short Course: Wellbeing

Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) provides a safe classroom setting where students can discuss and learn about important aspects of their lives. Within this space, students can grow in awareness, and develop the understanding and skills they need to maintain healthy lives, make healthy choices and build caring and respectful relationships. SPHE places a strong focus on developing the important life skills that young people need growing up in a fast changing and complex world. Specifically, it focuses on developing the social and emotional skills of self-awareness, self-management, responsible decision-making, social awareness and relations

SPHE is a key pillar of the junior cycle Wellbeing programme in school as it helps students identify actions they can take to protect and promote their own wellbeing and the wellbeing of others.

3. Class Organisation and Timetabling

3.1 Relevant Circulars

Circular M11/03

- All second level schools must timetable Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) as part of the Junior Cycle core curriculum from September 2003. The time allocation recommended is the equivalent of one class period per week.

Circular 0028/2023

- SPHE short course: 100 hours spread across first, second and third year (and must be provided in each of the three years). Students must follow the newly developed NCCA short course specification.

NCCA Information note: Senior Cycle SPHE Curriculum – September 2024

- The new Senior Cycle SPHE curriculum is available for implementation in schools from this school year. However, schools have until September 2027 to introduce the specification for all students entering fifth year, with the exception of students following the Leaving Certificate Applied. The new specification will replace Social Education modules I and II of the Leaving Certificate Applied and this change will apply for all LCA students entering 5th year in 2025.

Junior Cycle

In Athboy C.S, 1st, 2nd and 3rd years are timetabled for one hour of SPHE a week following the NCCA JC SPHE Specification (2023)

Senior Cycle

Transition Year students are timetabled for one hour of SPHE a week following modules of RSE, Healthy Lifestyles and Substance Abuse

5th years are timetabled for one hour of SPHE a week following the NCCA SC SPHE Specification.

6th years are timetabled for one hour of SPHE a week following modules of RSE, Healthy Lifestyles, Mental Health and Supporting Physical Health.

3.2 Context and Teaching Methodologies

Junior Cycle

Learning in the JC SPHE course is divided into four strands with each setting out important learning for students. These strands are:

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: Relationships 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.

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

Teaching and learning in SPHE focuses on

- awareness-building so that students understand their own thoughts, emotions, values and behaviour and how different factors influence these
- respectful dialogue which gives students opportunities to hear and to discuss a diversity of viewpoints and enlarge their understanding on topics of relevance to their lives.
- students reflecting on what they have learned and coming to informed thoughtful decisions about how the learning can help them in their lives now or in the future.

Senior Cycle

Strand 1: Health and Wellbeing

Within this strand students explore the factors that influence their physical, social, spiritual, emotional and mental health. They learn ways to stay as healthy as possible, with a particular focus on gaining awareness, skills, techniques and information to protect their mental health and wellbeing.

Strand 2: Relationships and Sexuality Within this strand students explore the wide range of relationships that are important for their lives, with a particular focus on learning how to create and maintain respectful, caring and healthy relationships. This strand also supports students in being able to recognise and be empowered to respond to instances of abuse or violence in relationships.

Strand 3: Into Adulthood

Within this strand 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 able to manage choices, developing skills that are needed to plan for the future, establishing and maintaining good habits, and setting 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 and express solidarity with those experiencing discrimination or inequality.

SPHE is primarily skills based and so teaching methods must be of an experiential nature with the emphasis on discussion, reflection and classroom participation. These teaching methods will be student centered and appropriate to the age and stage of development of the student. The class atmosphere must be one of respect for the privacy of the individual teacher and student and hallmarked by sensitivity and care. A respectful code of conduct is expected from all participants. Each class establishes ground rules which are referred to throughout the lesson.

Within the classroom, the teacher has flexibility to judge how and when topics should be taught, so that learning takes place in a way that is meeting the needs, stage of development and school context of their students

Teaching methodologies may include:

- group work

- role play
- brainstorming
- ice Breakers
- simulation
- narrative expression
- debating
- project work
- artwork
- multimedia materials
- case studies
- visiting speakers

The Department of Education and skills recognises that each school has flexibility to plan the SPHE programme in harmony with the students' needs and the school's resources.

4. Students with Additional Educational Needs

Children 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 sorts of behavior are and are not acceptable and in being warned and prepared against abuse by others.

For learning activities to be made meaningful, relevant and achievable for all students it is important that the teacher finds ways to respond to students diversity by using differentiated approaches and methodologies. In consultation with the special educational needs coordinator the following strategies will be adopted.

- Ensuring that objectives are realistic for the students and ensuring that the learning task is compatible with prior learning
- providing opportunities for interacting and working with other students in small groups
- spending more time on tasks and organising the learning task into small stages
- ensuring that the language used is pitched at the students level of understanding and does not hinder understanding of the activity
- using task analysis outlining the steps to be learned and completed in any given task
- posing key questions to guide students through the different stages and processes and to assist in self direction and correction
- Using graphic symbols as reminders to assist students in understanding the sequences and steps in any given task or problem
- modelling task analysis by talking through the steps of a task as it has being done
- having short and varied tasks
- creating a learning environment through the use of concrete and where possible everyday materials
- displaying word lists and laminated charts with pictures

A book list for teaching RSE to students with SEN is made available to parents and teachers if needed.

5. Cross Curricular Links

The following subject areas and other school provisions from cross curricular links with the SPHE programme:

- Physical education
- CSPE
- Guidance related learning
- Science
- Home economics
- Religious education
- Chaplaincy support
- Meditation space
- Pastoral care team
- Friendship week
- Wellbeing week
- Safe space in the
- Extracurricular activities
- Library at lunchtimes
- Student Leadership Programmes

6. Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) Junior Cycle

6.1 The RSE Framework

In the school setting, RSE will be taught in the context of SPHE class at Junior Cycle and Senior Cycle.

The draft guidelines for RSE (NCCA, June 1995) state that Social, Personal and Health Education is “spiral, development in nature and age appropriate in content and methodology”. The RSE programme is designed to follow this principle and pattern. RSE is addressed within the SPHE programme.

The aims of the RSE framework:

- To develop a sense of self-respect among students
- To help students understand and develop friendships and relationships
- To promote a positive attitude to one’s own sexuality and to make informed choices about their sexual health
- To promote knowledge of and respect for human reproduction
- To enable students to develop positive attitudes and values towards the sexuality of others

Athboy Community School recognises that the primary responsibility for the moral, spiritual, social and personal development of children lies with their parents and guardians. The school

has a long tradition of supporting parents in this role and SPHE and RSE is seen as complementary to this.

6.2 Organisation

The organisation and management of RSE within the school:

- The guidelines from RSE (NCCA, June 1995, 1.2) state that Social, Personal and Health Education is “spiral, development in nature and age appropriate in content and methodology.” The RSE program is designed to follow this principal and pattern.
- The programme will be delivered by teachers trained to create a learning environment which is respectful of the privacy of each student and which will allow each student to be treated with sensitivity and care.
- Class groups will be mixed and on occasions divided into single sex groups when content matter requires it.
- Teachers are to be released to attend RSE/SPHE training and teachers are to be consulted before being timetabled to teach.
- The school will purchase appropriate RSE teaching materials which have been identified by the staff as useful and which have been approved by the principal within the normal budgetary framework and as general resources allow.
- The school has an appointed coordinator of SPHE.
- Parents and guardians are given information on the content of SPHE/ RSE at parent teacher meetings and are consulted in the process of policy development.
- Parents and guardians may request that their child withdrawn from areas of the SPHE/RSE Programme which they consider sensitive if they wish to do so. The student can be supervised in an alternative classroom during SPHE/RSE time.
- Parents and guardians will be sent written notice of any visiting speakers who may have been invited to the school to talk to the students of a particular aspect of the SPHE/RSE programme. A summary of the content of the talk will be included in this written notice. Parents may request that their child is supervised in an alternative classroom during
- The school policy is that most of the SPHE/RSE programme be delivered by teachers who are known and trusted by pupils. However visiting speakers can enhance the quality of the provision as long as they are used in addition to and not instead of a planned program of SPHE/RSE. The SPHE/RSE coordinator will provide the speaker, well in advance of the visit, with a copy of this SPHE/RSE policy.
- If parents and guardians are concerned about any aspect of the SPHE/RSE curriculum, they are welcome to discuss their concern with the SPHE/RSE Coordinator.

6.3 School Ethos

Moral considerations and the school ethos:

- Schools are required to deliver all aspects of the RSE curriculum, including those in relation to sexual orientation, contraception, sexually transmitted infections. Spiritual, moral and ethical issues will arise when teaching RSE. Teachers of RSE understands

that it is their role to express the views of the whole school community on these sensitive issues and not their personal views.

- While it is important to create an environment in the RSE and SPHE Class in which students can discuss issues openly, teachers may not be able to answer all questions and can set appropriate limits. When answering questions on sensitive issues, teachers should use their professional judgment and be guided by the age of the student, the RSE curriculum and the RSE policy of the school.
- While students are not encouraged to disclose personal information about themselves, they may confide in a teacher on a matter of concern to them. Confidentiality should be respected unless the teacher considers the student to be at risk of any type of abuse or in breach of the law. Teachers must not guarantee absolute confidentiality and must indicate to the student that the incident being discussed may be conveyed to the principal and possibly the parents, if deemed in the best interest of the student. This practice is in accordance with the child protection guidelines for post primary schools.

It is advisable for teachers to give young people information on the age of consent which, following the passage of the criminal law sexual offences act in 2006, is 17 years of age for both males and females.

- The RSE curriculum guidelines state that the subjects of contraception and sexually transmission infections should be covered in senior cycle. However schools can use the discretion with regard to the age at which students receive any aspect of the RSE programme. It may be necessary to provide some information to students on these matters earlier than senior cycle.
- The RSE curriculum guidelines include the subject of sexual orientation. The school may decide the topics need to be addressed before senior cycle, however if homophobic bullying is an issue, the issue of homosexuality is best addressed under the topics of sexual harassment and equality legislation rather than as a separate topic.

7. Resources and Accommodation

A limited budget is available for SPHE and is used to purchase resources and/or textbooks and to facilitate workshops, guest speakers and awareness raising initiatives throughout the school year.

Resources include:

- SPHE JC Specification (2023) and Assessment Guidelines
- SPHE SC Specification (2024) and Guidelines to support the completion of Key Assignments
- Junior Cycle Wellbeing Guidelines
- You've Got This – 1st, 2nd, 3rd & 5th year
- Know the Score
- Health and Wellbeing 1,2 &3
- On my own 2 feet
- Before you decide just pack hydrocele leaflets and DVD's
- Growing up LGBT

- Belong to stand up resources
- Mental health matters
- Emotional health materials
- Working things out
- Body whys
- Lockers
- JC personal safety lessons
- SC personal safety lessons

*this list is not exhaustive

8. Staff Development and Subject Development

The value placed on SPHE by the school will be evident by the commitment on the part of management to developing a core of trained SPHE teachers preferably gender balanced and to appointing an SPHE coordinator. SPHE is enhanced when the appointment of teachers to the subject has been negotiated in advance of timetabling.

In-career development is an integral part of this programme. Management is responsible for responding to the relevant expressed and perceived training needs of SPHE teachers and whole staff.

9. Confidentiality and Referrals

9.1 Participation

SPHE at Junior Cycle and RSE at Senior cycle is a core curricular subject. Each parent has the right to withdraw their child from some or all RSE classes but parents are encouraged to provide alternative RSE at home. The school will respect their choice as their right. Where students are withdrawn from RSE the school cannot take responsibility for any versions of class content passed on to them by other students. Parents are invited to meet the SPHE Coordinator/Year Head in person to discuss their decision to withdraw their child from the SPHE/RSE module.

9.2 Sensitive issues

Class discussion will be of a general nature, and will not be personally directed, in accordance with the previously agreed class ground rules. Inappropriate questions will not be answered in class by the teacher, or from student to student. Only questions directly pertinent to the lesson content will be addressed in class. The SPHE teacher may also exercise his or her own professional judgment in deciding whether to answer the question privately after the class is finished. If a teacher becomes concerned about a matter that has been raised he or she should seek advice from the relevant year head, the guidance counselor, chaplain or any member of the care team and or principal.

9.3 Referral

While it is acknowledged that teachers have a professional responsibility to impart the SPHE course content, the needs of students will be addressed in a caring and supportive manner. Where it is appropriate, the teacher may refer students to other supportive links within the school. As far as possible this should be done in negotiation with the student. The teacher may inform the class of external services relevant to the class material. This should be done within the context of the Athboy Community School mission statement and ethos. SPHE teachers where in doubt as to a course of action, or to discuss the issue with the relevant year head, the guidance councillor, or chaplain or any member of the care team and our principal.

9.4 Child Protection/Confidentiality

While an atmosphere of trust is a pre-requisite of SPHE class, the following limits of confidentiality must be observed. These limits are:

- Child abuse- physical, emotional, sexual, neglect
- Intention to harm self or others
- Substance misuse
- Underage sexual intercourse

Any disclosure will be reported to the designated liaison person in compliance with the child safeguarding statement and the revised child protection procedures for primary and post primary schools 2017.

SPHE teachers will inform students around the limits of confidentiality at the beginning of the year, remind them at necessary points throughout the year and where possible before making a disclosure.

9.5 Visiting Speakers

Circular 0023/2010

National and international research has consistently shown that the qualified classroom teacher is the best placed professional to work sensitively and consistently with students that he or she can have a powerful impact on influencing students attitudes, values and behavior in all aspects of health education.

Research findings indicate that the following teaching approaches have limited effect and are currently productive to the effective implementation of SPHE:

- Scare tactics and sensationalist interventions
- Testimonials
- information only interventions
- short term/once off interventions
- Outside speakers can be a resource when used as part of a school's plant program for SPHE/RSE

Visiting speakers are seen as complementing and supporting the SPHE programme and school SPHE policy. Teachers inviting these speakers must:

- Inform the principal in advance
- make the speaker aware of the ethos and SPHE policy of the school
- agree the content of the presentation
- do preparatory and follow up work where possible
- remain with the class during the visit

10. Parents and Home School Links

The school accepts that it is in the interest of all parents that the child grows up in a healthy and mature fashion. The school will strive to keep parents informed of the contents of the SPHE programme and resources available for parents. An overview of SPHE RSE information and any relevant updates are given to parents at appropriate information evenings. The SPHE policy is available on the school website and on request to the school. Notifications regarding reviews are also available on the school website. Parents of incoming first years are informed of the availability of the SPHE policy along with the other relevant policies on the school website.

The involvement of parents at the core of every aspect of SPHE gives it extra impetus, depth and validity and from time to time training and/or input and development opportunities will be offered to parents in certain aspects of SPHE.

Links between home and school play a vital role in supporting the efforts of parents and guardians in the home and the work of the teachers in the classroom. Some links are particularly important in SPHE. Beginning with pre entry meetings before a student enters the school. Athboy Community School has well structured continuing links with the lives of the students outside the classroom and outside the school in their communities through our pastoral staff. Such links help inform an SPHE programme; they can help teachers to prioritise modules. These links can also provide parents with strategies for supporting the work of the school in its SPHE programme. Structured and continuing links contribute to an SPHE programme that is relevant to the needs of the students and the expectations of their parents and guardians.

11. Policy for Whole Staff

The SPHE policy will be available for all teaching staff and the teachers/staff handbook. Copies are given to each SPHE teacher by the SPHE coordinator. Any queries are to be directed to the principal.

12. SPHE assessment, record keeping and reporting

Every student, both Junior Cycle and Senior Cycle, have either an SPHE copy or folder that is kept by SPHE teachers. The folder contains worksheets handouts. At the end of a lesson students record a short reflection in the journal part of their copies. The folders are given to students at the end of junior cycle and at the end of senior cycle.

SPHE teachers report progress in SPHE for Junior Cycle students on the summative assessment reports. SPHE teachers also meet parents at parent teacher meetings.

The SPHE team meet at least once a term, to review, plan and evaluate SPHE in the school. Minutes of all meetings are recorded and contained in the SPHE subject folder in accordance with GDPR policy.

13. Whole School Support for SPHE

While specific teachers are trained in charge of the responsibility of delivering the programme, we see every teacher as a teacher of SPHE in that he or she may from time to time see opportunities to promote healthy lifestyle and encourage responsible and mature decision making with our students. There is generally a whole school approach to areas of SPHE and the school year has times earmarked when certain topics or issues are covered for example Wellbeing Week, Friendship Week, Stand Up Week, Multi-Cultural Week and more.

14. Review and Evaluation

The SPHE course is never static and must be examined and evaluated regularly and adapted to the needs of the students. The SPHE programme and policy will be reviewed and evaluated on an annual basis by the SPHE team.

The opinions of students will be included as SPHE teachers will liaise with the student representative council. The opinions of parents will also be included and SPHE teachers will liaise with the parents association. The opinions of the management will be included and the SPHE coordinator will liaise with the principal and the board of management.

Ratified by the BOM: _____

Policy effective: _____

Signed: _____ (PRINCIPAL)

Signed: _____ (CHAIR)