



St. Patrick's College
Lacken Cross, Killala - Co. Mayo

SPHE Policy

St Patrick's College
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Killala
Co Mayo

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Contents

1. Rationale
- 2 Scope
3. Junior Cycle Social and Personal Health Education
 - 3.1 Aim of the SPHE Policy
 - 3.2 Junior Cycle Social, Personal and Health Education Aim
 - 3.3 Expectations for Students
 - 3.4 Assessment and Reporting
 - 3.5 Implementation
 - 3.6 Visiting Guests and External Facilitators
 - 3.7 SPHE and Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE)
4. Senior Cycle SPHE
 - 4.1 Aim
 - 4.2 SPHE Framework for Senior Cycle
 - 4.3 Implementation
 - 4.4 Learning and Teaching
 - 4.5 Child Protection and Safeguarding
- 5 Roles and Responsibilities in Developing, Implementing, Monitoring and Evaluating the SPHE Policy.
 - 5.1 Board of Management
 - 5.2 Principal and Deputy Principal
 - 5.3 SPHE Co-Ordinator
 - 5.4 SPHE Teachers
 - 5.5 Child Protection and Safeguarding
- 6 Cross Curricular links
- 7 Whole School Supports for SPHE
- 8 Additional Educational Needs (AEN) / Health Issues
- 9 Monitoring and Evaluation
- 10 Links to other Policies and Documents
- 11 Declaration
- 12 Appendices

1. Rationale

The teaching and learning of Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) provides a unique space where students can develop the knowledge, understanding, skills, dispositions and values needed to support their physical, emotional, social and spiritual wellbeing, now and in the future.

The SPHE specification is grounded in values of respect, equality, inclusivity, responsibility, dignity, compassion and empathy. In placing a strong focus on the development of these important life skills, students gain knowledge and skills to help them develop a strong sense of self, make informed and healthy decisions, be able to take care of themselves and others, and manage life's challenges.

Specifically, S.P.H.E. focuses on developing the core social and emotional skills of self-awareness, self-management, responsible decision-making, social awareness and relationship skills. These have been shown to determine how well people manage changing and challenging environments and can influence many important life outcomes.

Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) is an integral part of, and connects with, aspects of SPHE. It is of particular importance for students at this stage of their lives as they reflect on questions such as 'what kind of person am I?' and 'what matters for me in relationships?' As students continue to form their identity, they are making sense of life experiences, information, images and messages about relationships and sexuality from a range of informal sources such as their peers, family, the media and online world.

Having the opportunity to think about and discuss relationships, sexuality and healthy sexual expression within a safe classroom setting and with a skilled teacher is vitally important.

In Junior cycle, six indicators have been identified as central to students' wellbeing. Teaching and learning within the SPHE classroom can provide meaningful learning opportunities to foster all six indicators of wellbeing, helping students become more Active, Responsible, Connected, Resilient, Respected and Aware.

SPHE is thereby a core pillar of a school's Wellbeing programme in Junior cycle along with Civic, Social and Political Education (CSPE) and Physical Education (PE) This specification supports teachers in adopting an approach that is inclusive in accordance with principles of equality, human rights and responsibilities.

At Senior Cycle, SPHE 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. The SPHE specification is grounded in values of respect, equality, inclusivity, responsibility, dignity, compassion and empathy.

Senior Cycle SPHE also develops the capacity of young people to think and behave independently, develop their self-awareness, social and emotional skills while promoting a greater capacity for critical thinking and reflective thinking in their lives. Issues that are

pertinent to their lives such as social inequality, discrimination and violence can also be explored in a safe manner in the SPHE classroom. Through the supporting of young people's personal development and preparing them to be responsible adults, this course develops awareness that everyone is interdependent and that personal decisions and actions have consequences for others, thus fostering a sense of connection with and responsibility for people and communities beyond themselves.

This ensures that all students can see themselves, their families and their communities reflected across the learning and can learn to value diversity as a feature of humankind and as a source of enrichment. SPHE thus contributes to building a cohesive, compassionate and fair society; one that is inclusive of all genders, sexualities, ethnicities, religious beliefs/worldviews, social classes and abilities/disabilities.

It is accepted that the home and the parents are the primary educators of their children around Social, Personal and Health Education and Relationships and Sexuality Education. Programmes in these areas carried out in the school are extensions of the education already begun in the home.

In this policy document the term 'parent' is taken to include guardian.

2 Scope

This policy applies to:

- All students in Junior and Senior Cycle.
- All teachers delivering SPHE and RSE.
- School management.
- Parents/guardians.
- Any external facilitators or visiting speakers invited to contribute to the SPHE programme.

3. Junior Cycle Social and Personal Health Education

3.1 Aim

As stated in our school's Mission Statement;

We believe we can make a difference by providing quality education to our students in a caring and respectful environment.

We value respect, fair play and everyone's right to be himself or herself.

We aim to help our students to develop a sense of their own unique worth, to become their best selves and to respect the rights of others.

We strive for good relationships between our students, our staff and our parents.

We educate our students not only for now but for life.

3.2 Junior Cycle Social, Personal and Health Education

The Junior Cycle SPHE programme aims to:

- Build students' self-awareness and positive self-worth.
- Develop the knowledge, understanding, skills, dispositions and values that will support them to lead fulfilling and health lives.
- Empower them to create, nurture and maintain respectful and loving relationships with self and others.
- Enhance their capability to contribute positively to society.

3.3 Expectations for Students

Having completed the Junior Cycle course in SPHE students may expect the following learning outcomes;

- Understanding myself and others.
- Making healthy choices.
- Relationships and sexuality.
- Emotional wellbeing.

The Junior Cycle SPHE course employs a spiral approach that allows students to revisit important themes over the three years in order to allow for deeper engagement, relevant to the students' evolving needs and stage of development.

The 100 hours of student engagement is a progression of learning over the three years.

3.4 Assessment and Reporting

Assessment in Junior Cycle SPHE will optimise the opportunity for students to become reflective and active participants in their learning and for teachers to support this.

Assessments will be formative in nature and students will provide evidence of their learning through multiple means of expression, including oral, written, visual, digital and art-based pieces.

Students, with their teachers and peers, will reflect upon and make judgements about their own and others' learning by looking at the quality of pieces of work, and they will agree the next steps in their learning based on feedback they give and receive.

In this way, ongoing formative assessment can support the student in their learning journey and in preparing for the Classroom Based Assessment (CBA) related to this course.

CBA's will be communicated to parents/guardians in interim reporting and in the Junior Profile of Achievement (JCPA).

3.5 Implementation

Through the use of critical and participative pedagogies, SPHE can provide a safe, supportive and non-judgemental space where students' self-awareness and awareness of others can grow, and where they engage in reflection and dialogue, and identify actions they can take to protect and promote their own wellbeing and that of others.

By affirming and developing students' strengths and capacities as active agents in their own lives, SPHE can play an important role in enabling students to find their voice and develop self-efficacy.

3.6 Visiting Speakers / External Facilitators

Occasionally, external facilitators may be invited to contribute to the SPHE or RSE programme. In these cases:

- The SPHE teacher remains present in the classroom at all times.
- Content must be age-appropriate and consistent with school ethos and policy.
- All materials and presentations must be reviewed and approved by SPHE staff or school management in advance.
- External visits support, but do not replace, the core SPHE programme taught by school staff.

This ensures that visiting contributions enhance, rather than replace, effective and safe SPHE teaching.

3.7 SPHE and Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE)

SPHE is mandatory for all Junior Cycle students. Parents/Guardians have the right to withdraw their child from the Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) module.

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 18 years, the student. Hence, parents/guardians have the right to withdraw their child from the sensitive issues in RSE if they wish to do so on the understanding that as parents/guardians they take full responsibility for this aspect of their child's education.

Parents/Guardians will be informed about RSE classes and will be asked to make this request in writing to the Principal.

4. Senior Cycle SPHE

4.1 Aim

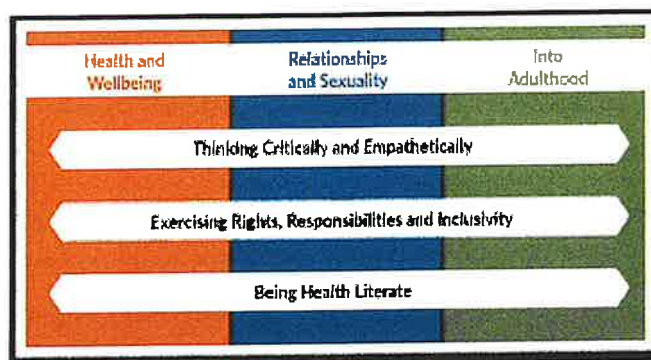
This course aims to develop the knowledge, understanding, skills, dispositions and values that will empower students to be healthy, resilient, confident, responsible and empathetic young adults; nurture respectful, loving and caring relationships; and prepare for the opportunities, responsibilities and experiences of life now and beyond school.

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

4.2 SPHE Framework for Senior Cycle

The framework is built around three areas of learning:

1. Health and Wellbeing.
2. Relationships and Sexuality.
3. Into Adulthood.



Visual Overview of Senior Cycle SPHE

4.3 Implementation

Transition Year students are timetabled for one period of SPHE per week

5th and 6th Year students are timetabled for one period per week of SPHE per week.

SPHE is mandatory for all Senior Cycle students. Parents/Guardians have the right to withdraw their child from the Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) module.

Fulfilling the aims of the SPHE programme, St Patrick's College will endeavour to provide a supportive school environment where:

- Members of the school community feel valued.
- Self-esteem is fostered.
- Respect, tolerance and fairness are evident.
- High expectations and standards are promoted.
- There is support for those with difficulties.
- Open communication is the norm.
- Effort is recognised and rewarded.
- Uniqueness and difference are valued.
- Conflict is handled constructively.
- Initiative and creativity are encouraged.
- Social, moral and civic values are promoted.

4.4 Learning and Teaching

Teaching and learning in SPHE provides a unique space where students can develop the knowledge, understanding, skills, dispositions and values they need to maintain healthy lives, make healthy choices and build respectful and caring relationships now and for the future.

At the heart of all teaching and learning is the relationship. Building supportive, caring and respectful classroom relationships which allow students to safely engage in dialogue and reflection and grow in awareness of themselves and others, is an essential foundation for effective SPHE.

This requires the teacher stepping out of the role of expert and assuming the role of facilitator; acknowledging that many of the topics addressed in SPHE may be sensitive and complex and may not have easy answers. It also requires adopting an open, non-judgmental disposition and at the same time being able to skilfully question and probe assumptions, behaviours and viewpoints, within youth culture or society at large.

Teaching and learning in SPHE is grounded in values of respect, equality, dignity, inclusivity, responsibility, compassion and empathy.

When planning SPHE lessons, it is important to design learning that fosters awareness, dialogue, reflection and action.

Awareness

Awareness is the ability to recognise and 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/cultural norms. This also includes an awareness that to be human is to be in relationships and that we all share a common humanity, dignity, 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 is about 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 to

discern 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.

4.5 Child Protection and Safeguarding

All SPHE and RSE teaching will be delivered in accordance with the school's Child Safeguarding Statement and the Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools (2017). Teachers will follow all mandated reporting and safeguarding responsibilities.

5. Roles and Responsibilities in Developing, Implementing, Monitoring and Evaluating the SPHE Policy.

5.1 Board of Management

The Board of Management will ensure that the St Patrick's College will ensure that the policy is in place and that it is reviewed every three years or whenever it is deemed necessary. The board will also consider recommendations for improvement where appropriate.

5.2 Principal and Deputy Principal

The Principal and Deputy Principals are committed to supporting all staff who deliver the SPHE programme and will facilitate all opportunities for Continuous Professional Development (CPD) for staff in the area of SPHE.

5.3 SPHE Coordinator

The SPHE coordinator works with the teachers of SPHE to ensure consistent and effective delivery of the SPHE programme as per the specifications.

The coordinator will maintain records of the work covered by the SPHE teachers in class during each academic year.

5.4 SPHE Teachers

Teachers will deliver the SPHE programme meeting its aims and objectives using a range of teaching and learning strategies. Teachers will attend SPHE department meetings and avail of relevant in-service when it is available.

6. Cross Curricular links

The following subjects may also deal with topics related to SPHE; Physical Education, Science, Home Economics, Biology and Guidance.

7. Whole School Support for SPHE

- Students Council.
- Pastoral Care.
- Wellbeing Class.

- Mentoring programme.
- Wellbeing initiatives.
- The many extra – curricular activities available to students.
- Information meetings for parents/guardians.
- Guidance department.
- Transition Year Support.

(This list is not exhaustive)

8. 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 VS Ware.

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 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).

9. Monitoring and Evaluation

This policy will be reviewed every three years, or earlier if required by changes in legislation, Department of Education guidance or school needs.


10. Links with Other Policies and Documents

This policy should be read in conjunction with:


1. RSE Policy
2. Code of Behaviour
3. Child Protection Guidelines
4. Pastoral Care Policy
5. Substance Misuse Policy
6. Whole School Guidance Policy
7. Child Safeguarding Statement
8. Bí Cinnealta Policy

11. Declaration

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

Signed: 
Chairperson

Date: 10/12/25

Signed: 
Secretary

Date: 10/12/25

Appendices

Appendix 1. 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.



ACTIVE

- Am I a confident and skilled participant in physical activity?
- How physically active am I?



RESPONSIBLE

- Do I take action to protect and promote my wellbeing and that of others?
- Do I make healthy eating choices?
- Do I know where my safety is at risk and do I make right choices?



CONNECTED

- Do I feel connected to my school, my friends, my community and the wider world?
- Do I appreciate that my actions and interactions impact on my own wellbeing and that of others, in local and global contexts?



RESILIENT

- Do I believe that I have the coping skills to deal with life's challenges?
- Do I know where I can go for help?
- Do I believe that with effort I can achieve?



RESPECTED

- Do I feel that I am listened to and valued?
- Do I have positive relationships with my friends, my peers and my teachers?
- Do I show care and respect for others?



AWARE

- Am I aware of my thoughts, feelings and behaviours and can I make sense of them?
- Am I aware of what my personal values are and do I think through my decisions?
- Do I understand what helps me to learn and how I can improve?

Appendix 2 - Junior Cycle SPHE Programme Strands

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 supports students in developing the knowledge, understanding, values and skills needed to build and maintain healthy, respectful and inclusive relationships. Students explore the influences on their emerging identity, the importance of consent, communication and personal boundaries, and the diversity of relationships and sexualities.

They learn how to make responsible, ethical choices that support their wellbeing and the wellbeing of others, develop the skills for managing attraction and intimacy, and become aware of accurate and reliable sources of information on relationships and sexual health. This strand emphasises empathy, respect, and the ability to form safe, caring and supportive connections with others.

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 3

SPHE Senior Cycle Framework – Five Areas of Learning

Senior Cycle Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) is designed to support schools in providing a minimum of 60 hours learning in SPHE over the final two years of senior cycle education.

Learning in SPHE aims to empower students to

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

Key Competencies in Senior Cycle

Key competencies is an umbrella term which refers to the knowledge, skills, values and dispositions students develop in an integrated way during senior cycle.

These competencies include;

Thinking and solving problems	Students become more skilful in critical and reflective thinking as they critique social and cultural norms and come to understand the various factors that can influence behaviour and decisions related to health, wellbeing and relationships.
Being creative	Students examine and evaluate options and consequences by engaging with relevant data, experiences and scenarios. This includes being able to accommodate ambiguity and uncertainty as they engage with questions of concern to their lives
Communicating	Students develop awareness and skills to effectively communicate opinions, feelings and needs in a respectful and empathic manner
Working with others	Through dialogical and participative learning students engage with different perspectives and appreciate how a diversity of backgrounds, identities, cultures and experiences can enrich their learning
Participating in society	Students are encouraged to recognise their own rights and responsibilities in relation to their health, wellbeing and relationships as well as an awareness of their social responsibilities. Students gain awareness of the socio-cultural factors that influence their wellbeing and how this is a matter of social justice, requiring both individual and collective responses
Cultivating wellbeing	Students explore the factors that influence their physical, social, emotional and mental wellbeing and learn strategies and techniques to help them take care of themselves and others
Managing learning and self	Students grow in awareness of their own thoughts, emotions, attitudes and values, and by providing opportunities for reflection, they come to recognise the insights and learning gained

Senior Cycle SPHE Strands

Strand 1: Health and Wellbeing

Strand outline: Within this strand students will explore the factors that influence their physical, social, spiritual,2 emotional and mental wellbeing and the relationships between these. They will learn ways to take care of themselves and stay as healthy as possible, with a particular focus on gaining awareness, skills, techniques and information to protect their mental health.

Strand 2: Relationships and Sexuality

Strand outline: 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.

Note: Each of the learning outcomes below 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.

Strand 3: Into Adulthood

Strand outline: 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 enabled to manage choices, develop the skills that are needed to plan for the future, establish and stick to good habits, and achieve goals. It also supports students in learning how to take care of themselves in times of change or challenge, understanding their rights and responsibilities before the law, and building the skills needed to advocate for and express solidarity with those experiencing discrimination or inequality.

Signed: _____

Chairperson

Date: _____

Signed: _____

Secretary

Date: _____