

**Edmund Rice College, Carrigaline, Co. Cork**  
**Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) Policy**  
**incorporating Draft Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE)**

**Introduction to Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE)**

SPHE in Post-Primary schools is a compulsory programme for students in the Junior Cycle and builds on the experience of all children at Primary level. It supports the personal development, health and well-being of students and helps them to create and maintain supportive relationships. The holistic aim of education is complemented by a similarly holistic view of health. Good health is not simply the absence of illness and disease. Physical health is one element but it cannot be considered in isolation from emotional, spiritual, mental, social and sexual health. A young person who has a high degree of self worth, a sense of security and a positive self-image will be more pre-disposed to school life and to the variety of learning situations it offers.

**Aims of the SPHE Programme (Extract from DES CL 22/00)**

- To enable the students to develop personal and social skills
- 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 well - being.

**Edmund Rice Schools Trust Charter**

The aims of the SPHE programme relate closely to the ERST Charter which states that *“The Edmund Rice school recognizes that the human person has personal, physical, intellectual, social, spiritual, moral, emotional and aesthetic dimensions and seeks to promote the student’s development in all these areas” (page 12).*

**Responsibility of Schools**

The Education Act (1998) states that *“A recognised school shall promote the moral, spiritual, social and personal development of students and provide health education for them, in consultation with their parents, having regard to the characteristic spirit of the school. School management, principals and teachers have a duty to provide the best quality and most appropriate social, personal and health education for their students. They also have a duty to protect students in their care at all times from any potentially harmful, inappropriate or misguided resources, interventions or programmes.”*

Department of Education and Skills Circular Letter 37/2010 states that *“Schools are required to teach RSE as an integral component of Junior Cycle SPHE up to Third Year, as outlined in the Junior Cycle SPHE Curriculum Framework produced by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA, 2000). Schools are also required to teach Senior Cycle RSE even in the absence of a timetabled SPHE class. Schools are required to teach all aspects of the RSE programme, including family planning, sexually transmitted infections and sexual orientation.*

*Elements of the programme cannot be omitted on the grounds of school ethos; however, all aspects of the programme can and should be taught within the ethos and value system of the school as expressed in the RSE policy."*

### **Content of Junior Cycle SPHE**

The Junior Cycle SPHE programme consists of a series of modules which are delivered in sequential format. The themes of the modules are as follows:

- Belonging and Integrating
- Self Management
- Communication Skills
- Physical Health
- Friendship
- Relationships and Sexuality Education
- Emotional Health
- Influences and Decisions
- Substance Use
- Personal Safety

### **Class Organisation and Timetabling**

SPHE is delivered throughout the school year and, in line with DES CL 11/03, is allocated one class period per week (40 minutes) for all Junior Cycle students. Students are organized in mixed ability base classes for SPHE class. Some students with special educational needs may need more help and support to cope with the physical and emotional aspects of growing up and this support is available for students both within the SPHE class and outside it via the SPHE teacher, Guidance Counsellor, Year Head and Special Needs Assistant.

### **Methodology**

As outlined in the SPHE support service handbook, "SPHE is person-centered rather than subject-centered". With this in mind, the teaching of SPHE within the classroom is student-centered and appropriate to the age and development of the student. The class atmosphere is one of respect for the privacy of each individual student and marked by sensitivity and care.

The methodology employed in SPHE is broad based. It encompasses individual and group work, group and class discussions, brainstorming, role play, written assignments, artwork, games, ice breakers, individual and group projects, collage, demonstration, experiential learning and active participation in class activities.

### **Lesson Plans, Student Workbooks and Resources**

SPHE lessons delivered are based on the Lesson Plans and Student Workbooks developed by the Health Promotion Department of the HSE West.

Each SPHE teacher is provided with a Teachers' Resource pack which contains the lesson plans and support material. The Teachers' Resource Pack must be returned at the end of the school year.

Each student is provided with a student workbook (1<sup>st</sup> year – Healthy Living, 2<sup>nd</sup> year – Healthy Times, 3<sup>rd</sup> year – Healthy Choices).

The school will purchase appropriate SPHE teaching materials which have been identified by teachers as useful and which have been approved by the Principal, within the normal budgetary framework and as general school resources allow.

### **Cross-Curricular Links**

SPHE is one of many health promoting aspects of the school curriculum and every staff member contributes to the SPHE programme through the respectful and supportive relationships that are developed and promoted in our school community. Strong cross-curricular links exist between the SPHE and a number of subjects including RE, Science, Home Economics, English, Art and PE.

### **Staff Development**

Staff members are encouraged to engage in SPHE related professional development. The PDST provides training in a wide range of areas related to the SPHE programme and staff members are facilitated in attending. Sharing of best practice and resources amongst SPHE teachers in Edmund Rice College is also encouraged and is facilitated through timetabled subject department meetings.

### **Confidentiality and Sensitivity**

Teachers establish boundaries and rules with the SPHE class to create a safe learning environment. While students are not directly encouraged to disclose personal or private information in a classroom setting, there may be times when they do so. Students are encouraged to seek advice and support for personal issues on a one to one basis after class. Confidentiality is respected by teachers unless a teacher becomes aware that a student needs support or may be at risk, in which case the appropriate actions will be taken i.e. refer to the guidance counsellor or designated liaison person for child protection. The SPHE teacher will act as facilitator and not counsellor. The usual limits of confidentiality as specified above, will apply to any information coming to the attention of the teacher. The teacher will ensure that the information is dealt with in a sensitive and discreet manner.

### **The Role and Involvement of Visitors**

Guest speakers can supplement and enhance the SPHE programme. Presentations delivered by visitors to SPHE classes are consistent with and complementary to the aims of the SPHE programme and the ethos of the school.

The SPHE teacher remains in the classroom throughout the visit and retains a central role in delivery of the core subject matter of the SPHE/RSE programme. The presence of the classroom

teacher ensures that the school follows appropriate procedures for dealing with any issue(s) that may arise as a result of the external input(s).

### **Partnership with Parents/ Guardians**

Parents/ guardians are informed in writing at the start of the school year of the topics to be covered in the SPHE programme for their son/ daughter's class group. The ten themes of the modules within the SPHE programme are listed earlier in this policy. Parents/ guardians are welcome to discuss the programme with the SPHE teacher and school management at any time.

### **Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE)**

RSE is one of ten modules covered in the SPHE programme and is explored for a number of lessons in each year. 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. Lessons are developmental in nature and age appropriate in terms of content and methodology.

Along with the specific RSE lessons the SPHE programme covers other areas which are pertinent to the development of a healthy attitude to sexuality in oneself and one's relationship with others. These include self-esteem, assertiveness, communication and decision making skills.

### **Aims of RSE (Extract from DES CL 27/ 2008)**

RSE, which is located in the overall framework of Social, Personal and Health Education, has as its specific aims:

- To help students understand and develop friendships and relationships
- To promote an understanding of sexuality
- To promote a positive attitude to one's own sexuality and in one's relationship with others
- To promote knowledge of and respect for reproduction
- To enable pupils to develop attitudes and values toward their sexuality in a moral, spiritual and social framework in keeping with the policy of the school
- To provide opportunities for pupils to learn about relationships and sexuality in ways that help them think and act in a moral, caring and responsible way.

### **Responsibility and Role of the School in RSE**

Department of Education and Skills Circular Letter 27/ 2008 states that *"It is the responsibility of the Board of Management of the school to ensure that an RSE programme is made available to all students"*.

The role of the school in the delivery of RSE is to provide a general education about sexual matters and issues and not to offer individual advice, information or counselling on aspects of sexual behaviour and contraception. However, sources of professional information and advice will be identified when appropriate. Teachers may provide students with education and information about where and from whom they can receive confidential sexual advice and

treatment, e.g. their doctor or other suitable agency. Advice offered is not directive and is appropriate to the age of the student.

### **Explicit Questions**

On occasion a question posed in class by a student may be too explicit to be answered directly by the teacher. The teacher may choose to say that it is not appropriate to deal with that question at this time. If the teacher becomes concerned about a matter that has been raised he/she should seek advice from the SPHE 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.

### **Withdrawal of Student from RSE**

RSE is an important element of secondary education and students are encouraged to participate fully in all lessons. However, the right of parents/ guardians to withdraw their child from RSE is recognized and the following procedures are followed on receipt of such a request:

- The parents/ guardians of the student concerned are invited to discuss the nature of their concerns with the SPHE teacher, Year Head and/ or Principal
- Consideration is given as to whether the programme can be amended in a way that reassures the parents/ guardians concerned. Care is taken not to undermine the integrity of the RSE programme and the entitlement of the other students to experience the RSE programme in full.
- Parents/ guardians are informed of the fact that students who are withdrawn from class can be vulnerable to teasing and open to questions from other students. Every attempt is made to minimize embarrassment to the student and to cause minimal disruption to the programme.
- Parents/ guardians are informed of the possibility of students receiving inaccurate information from their peers rather than accurate information from their RSE teacher.
- Suitable arrangements for the supervision of the student withdrawn from class are put in place subject to school resources. Parents/ guardians may be required to supervise their child during RSE class time.

### **Lifestyles**

Teachers do not promote any one lifestyle as the only acceptable one for society and therefore it is inevitable and natural that homosexuality and same sex relationships will be discussed during a RSE programme. One of the advantages of exploring issues related to different lifestyles is the opportunity to correct false ideas, assumptions and address prejudice. Discussion is always age appropriate for the students concerned.

The topic of contraception is dealt with in an age appropriate, open manner, looking at all sides of the issues in a non-directive way.