

LORETO ABBEY SECONDARY SCHOOL, DALKEY



Social Personal and Health Education Policy

‘Our school is a caring Christian Community in which pupils have the opportunity to achieve academic excellence and to grow spiritually, emotionally, socially, creatively and physically in a healthy environment.’

1. Rationale:

1.1 Our vision of education gives priority to the integration of the spiritual, intellectual, moral, physical and emotional development of the individual student. The work of the school is not an endeavour conducted in isolation but is very much influenced by the cultural and social mores of the time. The school is therefore challenged to address the cultural reality in which the students live and must aim to equip students with the skills necessary to cope in a world that is challenging and presents choices all the time.

1.2 In Loreto Abbey, we hope to develop persons who feel confident in responding to such choices. Such young people are responsible and self-directed and choose freely in response to an informed conscience.

1.3 The SPHE programme in this school takes place within a Christian understanding of human development and sexuality and recognises the dignity of the individual. The programme addresses contemporary topics which are dealt with at a level appropriate to the age of the student and within a moral framework in keeping with the characteristic spirit of the school.

(A) Social Personal and Health Education

2. Aims:

2.1 The subject aims to develop students’ self-awareness, enabling them to be physically healthy, have good social skills and positive mental health. This is achieved through a structured, cyclical programme in accordance with the D.E.S. guidelines and the characteristic spirit of the school.

3. Subject Objectives:

- To enable students to develop skills for self-fulfilment and living in communities.

- To promote self-esteem and self-confidence.
- To enable 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.
- To enable students to develop personal and social skills

4. Class Organisation and Timetabling:

4.1 SPHE is allocated one hour class period per week for all Junior Cycle students, TY and 5th Year students. Classes are organised in mixed ability groupings.

4.2 An RSE programme is currently delivered to Sixth Year students as part of Religious Education. From September 2027, Sixth Year students will have one hour of SPHE timetabled as part of the Wellbeing programme, within which RSE will be delivered in line with the SPHE specification and Department of Education guidelines.

4.3 In organising the learning environment, the teacher will be careful to create an atmosphere which respects the privacy of each individual student and treats each student with sensitivity and care. Active learning methods are used to ensure that students actively participate in their own learning.

4.4 At Junior Cycle, students use a textbook and also have an SPHE efolder (Google Drive) for storing completed work, assessments and reflections.

4.5 All Junior students have a Wellbeing folder on Google Drive, which contains a folder for each Well Being subject: SPHE, PE, CSPE, Guidance and Wellbeing modules. The assessments uploaded to this folder will be viewed in order to complete the reporting on Wellbeing in the Junior Cycle Profile of Achievement.

4.6 Contemporary topics and issues which emerge in this class are dealt with at a level appropriate to the age of the student and within a moral framework, in keeping with the school ethos.

5. Planning for students with special needs:

5.1 Links are made with resource staff in connection with the RSE programme. Otherwise, links are made at the discretion of the teacher.

6. Content:

6.1 The Junior Cycle short course in SPHE is designed to enable students develop a positive sense of themselves and commitment to caring for themselves and others.

6.2 SPHE for Junior Cycle comprises four strands:

1. Understanding myself and others

This strand focuses on developing self-awareness, building self-esteem and self-management.

2. Making Healthy Choices.

This strand enables students to explore healthy lifestyle choices, including diet, sleep and the risks associated with alcohol, vaping and other addictive substances.

3. Relationships and Sexuality.

This strand explores cognitive, physical, emotional and social aspects of relationships, including friendship, family, sexual health, and consent, with a focus on respect and equality.

4. Emotional Wellbeing

This strand focuses on building positive mental health, examining young people's experience of mental ill health and learning how to support themselves and others in challenging times.

6.3 5th Year SPHE is timetabled for all students. This course consists of the following Strands

Strand 1: Health and Wellbeing

Focus areas include:

- Determinants of health and influences on wellbeing
- Mental health literacy and emotional regulation
- Social norms around alcohol, vaping and substance use
- Understanding addiction pathways and accessing help
- Recognising signs of stress, anxiety and low mood
- Skills for managing challenging social situations. Students learn to recognise influences on health, identify unhelpful thinking patterns, and practise self-regulation and help-seeking strategies.

Strand 2: Relationships and Sexuality

Students explore:

- Skills for healthy relationships (online and in-person)
- Consent, communication, respect, empathy and mutual pleasure
- Gender norms and media influence
- Coercive control and abusive relationship indicators
- Domestic, sexual and gender-based violence (DSGBV) and legal protections
- Pornography literacy
- Image-based abuse, sexual harassment and sexual assault
- Sexual health, fertility, contraception, reproductive choices, and access to services
- LGBTQ+ identities, relationships and families are integrated throughout teaching (not isolated into standalone lessons), and content is evidence-based and medically accurate.

Strand 3: Into Adulthood

Students develop:

- Self-management and independent living skills
- Strategies for coping with change, loss and adversity

- Understanding of rights and responsibilities before the law
- Advocacy and solidarity skills
- Awareness of discrimination and ways to challenge inequity. Students examine legal rights relating to consent, employment, alcohol/drugs, online communication and access to services, and learn how to advocate for themselves and others.

6.4 There are additional programmes that become available. Loreto Abbey will adopt the following criteria when considering a programme:

- A need has been identified through the school's Wellbeing Promotion Process that could be addressed by using a specific programme.
- The programme is consistent with the school's whole school approach to wellbeing promotion.
- The Board of Management has approved the delivery of the programme.
- The chosen programme is informed by research and/or evidence.
- The programme uses evidence based/informed methodologies and promotes active learning.
- All relevant staff members have been informed about the proposed programme.
- The programme is suitable to meet the needs of the targeted cohort of students.
- In the selection of programmes, the opinion of parents/carers and students have been ascertained.
- An evaluation form will be completed by students and staff. ○ The impact of the programme will be monitored.
- The programme delivery is sustainable over time within the school.
- Consideration has been given to the possible vulnerabilities of students and the minimising of any potential negative impact of the programme.
- Supports are available for the students during and after the programme delivery.

7. Methodologies:

7.1 The methodologies employed will include:

- Group Discussions
- Case Studies
- Brainstorming
- Role Play
- Artwork
- Narrative Expression
- Games – Icebreakers
- Games – Simulation
- Debates
- Project Work
- Assignments
- Mindfulness

- Case Studies

7.2 In the light of the advice contained in Circular 0023/2010, the following approaches will be avoided when teaching SPHE in Loreto Abbey:

- Scare tactics
- Sensationalist approaches
- Testimonials
- Information-only interventions
- Information that is not age-appropriate
- Once-off/short-term interventions
- Normalising young people's risky behaviour
- Didactic approaches

8. Confidentiality:

At the beginning of each academic year, students are informed that complete confidentiality cannot be guaranteed. Information may have to be passed on at the discretion of the SPHE teacher to the Designated Liaison Person (Principal) or to the Student Support Team.

9. Resources and accommodation for SPHE:

9.1 A wide range of resources can be found in the SPHE Resource Locker beside the staff room, which is easily accessible to all SPHE teachers. Junior Cycle and 5th Year classes use Edco's You've Got This 1, 2, 3, 5 (teacher resource book and student workbook). To complement these books, teachers use resources including X Hale Irish Cancer Society resource on smoking, resources on online safety from www.webwise.ie ('Lockers', 'Be in Ctrl', 'Be Safe', 'Be Webwise') and appropriate video clips. At Senior Cycle teachers use 'Mindout Resource (HSE)', 'B4 U Decide', 'Growing Up LGBT', Marie Keating Foundation's Cancer Awareness Pack and a selection of age-appropriate YouTube clips, RTE documentaries and TED Talks.

9.2 Resources are updated every year.

9.3 An appropriate budget is made available by school management each year to cover the cost of the department's requirements. This is negotiated on an annual basis according to the varying needs of the department.

9.4 The SPHE Department and the SPHE Support Group have been assigned a special notice board to highlight and promote the subject.

9.5 'Mind Your Mind' week, 'Stand Up Against Homophobic Bullying Week', and Bí Cineálta Week is included in the school calendar.

10. Cross-curricular links:

10.1 Links are made with the following departments:

- Home Economics re healthy living
- Religion re RSE
- Biology re RSE
- Art re posters to highlight issues, e.g. substance abuse
- Physical Education
- Student Support Team

11. Staff development and subject development

(See Staff Professional Development Policy)

11.1 The qualified classroom teacher is the best placed professional to work sensitively and consistently with students, and she/he has a powerful impact on influencing students' attitudes, values and behaviours in all aspects of Wellbeing education. This can be achieved through accessing continuing professional development (CPD), which includes the sharing of expertise and learning, and having opportunities to model and engage in collaborative working. The Board of Management will ensure that all staff have opportunities to engage in CPD to enhance the effective delivery of our programmes.

11.2 SPHE teachers are made aware of the courses each term and are encouraged to sign up on www.sphe.ie.

12. External Facilitators:

12.1 The school is informed in this regard by Circular 0043/2018, Best practice guidance for post-primary schools in the use of programmes and/or external facilitators in promoting wellbeing, consistent with the Department of Education and Skills' Wellbeing Policy Statement and Framework for Practice.

12.2 We recognise that external facilitators can play a valuable role in supplementing, complementing and supporting the school's Wellbeing process.

12.3 The following should be considered when organising an external facilitator:

- External facilitators should be approved by the Principal and Board of Management in consultation with the relevant teaching staff. All materials proposed for use by an external facilitator must also be
- All external facilitators must be compliant with the school's Child Protection Policy and other relevant school policies and procedures.

- All vetting obligations that arise under the Vetting Act and in line with Circular 0031/2016 are met.
- Programmes used are delivered by facilitators who are qualified to work within the specific area of content and with students for whom the programmes are designed.
- Relevant school staff liaise with facilitators in advance of delivery.
- External facilitators always work under the guidelines and supervision of the relevant classroom teacher, who retains overall responsibility for the class and the delivery of the subject matter. The teacher will normally remain present in the room during all sessions. However, in certain sensitive elements of RSE (e.g. sexual health education), and where deemed developmentally appropriate at TY and Senior Cycle, and in the best interests of student engagement and wellbeing, the teacher may adopt a supervisory role outside the immediate classroom space while remaining available and responsible for the group at all times.
- Relevant school staff are consulted and made aware in advance of the content of the programmes provided by external facilitators.
- Parents are consulted and made aware in advance of the content of the programmes provided by external facilitators.
- External facilitators and programmes are evaluated by students and teachers, with regard to the subject matter, messages communicated, methodology and proposed learning outcome.

12.4 When appraising the appropriate use of external facilitators, Loreto Abbey will consider the following criteria:

- Facilitators supply comprehensive information to the school about their organisation, programme content and programme methodology.
- Facilitators demonstrate an understanding of the Department's *Wellbeing Policy Statement and Framework for Practice* and appropriate educational training and qualifications.
- Facilitators demonstrate skills in facilitating and managing groups and students.
- Facilitators demonstrate an understanding of the general organisation and structure of schools.
- Facilitators show an understanding of the role of school management, school support structures, roles of support staff and other relevant support services in the event of a challenging situation arising.

13. Parents:

13.1 The school acknowledges the role of parents/guardians as the primary educators of their children. The programme seeks to support parents in this challenging task.

13.2 The Parents' Association organises three lectures for parents during the academic year on issues dealt with in SPHE lessons.

1.3.3 Parents are introduced to the SPHE/RSE programme and methodologies at the annual Parent Teacher meetings. Parents are given an overview of the syllabus during Parent-Teacher Meetings, and questions can be clarified.

13.4 Parents/guardians are informed of the programme content and are encouraged to engage with the SPHE/RSE programme through access to the school's SPHE policy, which is available on the school website. If parents require further discussion/clarification, this is accommodated by the school.

14. Assessment, record keeping and reporting:

14.1 All student work is kept in their Google Drive e-folder. Written work, general class participation and student presentations are used by the teacher to assess student engagement within the programme.

14.2 Students reflect on each SPHE class through a series of leading questions. Students also make a connection between the topics covered and the related well-being indicators at the end of each class.

14.3 Students will engage in a classroom-based assessment (CBA) in Third Year to assess their knowledge and understanding of the topics covered, e.g., alcohol awareness, social media, etc. This grade will appear on the student's Junior Cycle Profile of Achievement (JCPA).

14.4 Regular Department meetings take place and a record is kept of each meeting

14.5 Discussion and consultation takes place with school management when appropriate.

14.6 A comment on student participation in SPHE class is given on Junior Cycle and Senior Cycle school reports.

15. Whole School Support for SPHE:

15.1 Loreto Abbey is a health promoting school which supports the ideals of the SPHE programme. Some examples of this are:

- Healthy, nutritious lunches are available to students each day at a reasonable price.
- Sports programmes and fitness lessons are engaged in by a large number of students.
- 'Spirit Day' and 'Active School Week' both have activity-based components.
- The CARA programme helps develop social skills and community

building between Junior and Senior students. · Student support is a priority in Loreto Abbey Dalkey (see Student Support Policy).

16. SPHE Support Group:

16.1 The SPHE Support Group is made up of a representative number of Fourth, Fifth and Sixth Year students who act as a link between SPHE teachers and the student body. The aim of the group is to discuss topics that are relevant to young people and bring them to the attention of the SPHE teachers so they can discuss these topics with their classes. Their approach involves organising events, peer teaching and discussions as well as advising the SPHE teachers in relation to the curriculum.

17 (B) RELATIONSHIPS AND SEXUALITY EDUCATION PROGRAMME (RSE)

17.1 Why do we need the RSE programme?

17.1.1 Our students live in a world of many influences. From a young age, they are bombarded with conflicting value systems, each claiming to offer fulfilment and happiness. Fundamental values concerning relationships and sexuality in particular, are no longer as clear to our young people as they once were. There are many reasons for this lack of clarity. Research has indicated some possible explanations.

- Children receive informal and unsupervised information about relationships and sexuality.
- Such information may be inadequate and inappropriate.
- Young people are already exposed to a variety of sexual practices and attitudes through social media.
- Children are maturing physically at a younger age.
- The roles of women and men in society are changing.
- Young people are becoming sexually active at an earlier age than in the past.
- The nature of family life is changing in a way that places many pressures on children and young people.
- RSE provides an organised, yet informal, student-friendly way of responding to the above challenges.

17.2. RSE – Aims:

17.2.1 Relationships and sexuality education (RSE), which is located in the overall Specification of Social Personal and Health Education (SPHE) Short Course, has as its specific aims: 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.

- To help young people 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 young people to develop attitudes and values towards their sexuality in a moral, spiritual and social framework.
- To promote a positive and inclusive attitude towards the LGBTQ community at an age-appropriate level.

17.3 RSE – Learning Outcomes:

- 3.1 Reflect on the values, behaviours and skills that help to make, sustain and end relationships respectfully with friends, family and romantic/intimate relationships.
- 3.2 Examine benefits and difficulties experienced by young people in a range of relationships - friendships, family relationships, and romantic/intimate relationships
- 3.3 Identify signs of healthy, unhealthy and abusive relationships
- 3.4 Appreciate the importance of setting healthy boundaries in relationships and consider how to show respect for the boundaries of others.
- 3.5 Consider the importance of taking care of their reproductive health
- 3.6 Appreciate the breadth of what constitutes human sexuality, and how sexual orientation and gender identity are experienced and expressed in diverse ways
- 3.7 Explore the pressures to become sexually intimate and discuss ways to show respect for people's choices
- 3.8 Appreciate the importance of seeking, giving and receiving consent in sexual relationships, from the perspective of building caring relationships and from a legal perspective
- 3.9 Explain the importance of safer sexual activity with reference to methods of contraception and protection against sexually transmitted infections (STIs)
- 3.10 Discuss the influence of popular culture and the online world, in particular, the influence of pornography, on young people's understanding, expectations and social norms in relation to sexual expression (3rd Year)

3.11 Demonstrate how to access and appraise appropriate and trustworthy advice, support and services related to relationships and sexual health.

17.4. RSE Programme content:

17.4.1 Teachers will use materials deemed suitable and appropriate for students' needs and in accordance with school ethos.

17.4.2 Programme content falls under three headings:

a) Human Growth and Development

This consists of an age-appropriate understanding of the biology and psychology of the human life cycle. This is accompanied by a rationale for responsible behaviour in relationships and sexual activity.

b) Human Sexuality

Sexuality is an integral part of the human personality and has biological, psychological, cultural, social and spiritual dimensions. In this section, students are encouraged to develop a holistic understanding of sexuality as contributing to the development of personal well-being, enhancing personal and family relationships and ultimately contributing to the well-being of society.

c) Human Relationships

This section focuses on the importance of relationships for health and well-being. It examines how one relates to self and others, stressing the importance of self-esteem as a basis for worthwhile friendships and relationships. It addresses issues such as communication, influences, intimacy, sexual attraction and sexual expression in relationships consistent with personal and mental integrity.

17.5. Students:

17.5.1 The dignity and privacy of students is to be respected at all times. Students will not be asked to participate in any class activity, e.g. role play, or to respond to any questions that they do not feel comfortable with.

17.6. Time allocation:

17.6.1 Within the SPHE programme in operation in the school, six timetabled class periods per year are specifically allocated to the teaching of Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE). However, RSE is delivered as an integral component of the broader SPHE

curriculum and is supported through the exploration of related themes and issues across the SPHE programme. As such, aspects of RSE may arise naturally and appropriately outside of these designated lessons, in line with the aims and learning outcomes of the SPHE specification.

EVALUATION:

The SPHE/RSE programmes are evaluated regularly keeping in mind the changing cultural context. Students, parents and teachers are consulted in any evaluation.

This policy will be reviewed in 2029/2030

Signed: *Elis Humphreys*

Chairperson of the Board of Management

Date: 26/02/2026