

2021 / 2022

Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) Policy 2021 / 2022



St. Michael's College
Listowel, Co. Kerry

Reviewed	Ratified by the Board of Management	Review Date
	25 October 2019	5 th November 2021

Scope for the SPHE Policy

Schools play a vital role in the promotion of a young person's academic, physical, mental, emotional, social and spiritual development. Our education system is key to equipping young people with the knowledge, skills and competencies to deal with challenges that may impact on their wellbeing. In line with the Wellbeing Policy Statement and Framework for Practice and as set out by the Department's ambition and vision for wellbeing promotion St. Michael's College has developed and tailored a programme that supports and promotes the wellbeing and individual needs of our students.

Young people learn more effectively and have better academic outcomes if they are happy in their work, believe in themselves and feel acknowledged and supported in their schools. National and international research highlights that the wellbeing of our young people is critical to their success in education and in life. This framework will help guide us at St. Michael's College to identify our strengths, examine areas for further development and take ownership of our own development and improvement as set out in LAOS.

Having examined anecdotal evidence, St. Michael's College has adopted a whole school approach to Wellbeing. The nature of the school environment and connectedness has been found to be a key determinant of success in terms of wellbeing promotion. An environment that enhances competence and wellbeing is one that consciously fosters warm relationships, encourages participation, develops student and teacher autonomy and cultivates clarity about boundaries, rules and positive expectations.

We endeavour to promote Wellbeing in all aspects of teaching and learning. Young people spend most of their day in classrooms and, consequently, their daily experience of teaching and learning contributes greatly to their wellbeing. Our teaching and learning must be democratic, inclusive, engaging, differentiated, fostering expectations of high achievement

and providing opportunity for success. The importance of having a deliberate focus on the development of emotional and social competencies is also highlighted at St. Michael's College. The World Health Organisation (WHO), for example, recognises the need to promote wellbeing through interventions that promote competence and psychological strengths (WHO, 2005). Furthermore, social emotional learning programmes have been shown to significantly improve young people's social and emotional skills, attitudes, behaviour and learning performance (Durlack, Weissbert, Dymnicki, Taylor & Schellinger, 2011). Such programmes are delivered to our students as part of the SPHE curriculum.

In line with best practice, the Continuum of Support offers a flexible framework within which St. Michael's College can address all educational needs, including wellbeing needs.

This involves three levels:

Table 1: Continuum of Support



Rationale for this SPHE Policy

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 this short course 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. In SPHE, students have opportunities to revisit different themes which focus on developing self-awareness and respect for others, and the skills of self-management, communication, coping, decision-making and relating to others. This spiral approach of revisiting key ideas and topics is familiar from existing approaches to SPHE. This new course builds on this approach but also emphasises the importance of student agency and engagement in the learning process as key to learning in the affective domain. The skills involved are vital for self-fulfilment, for living in communities and for full engagement in learning beyond SPHE. Personal reflection, resilience and empathy are also promoted through SPHE. Relationships and sexuality education (RSE) is important for young people at this stage of their lives. They are exposed to a lot of information about relationships and sex from informal sources, the media and online. SPHE provides the context within which young people can learn about important physical, social, emotional, and moral issues around relationships, sexual health, sexuality, and gender identity, including where to get reliable information from trusted sources. It is important to build on students' learning in SPHE in primary education also. Learning in SPHE is essentially supported by a positive, empowering whole school environment and relevant school policies/guidelines including RSE, anti-bullying and substance-use policies, and child protection guidelines. This broader context for learning in SPHE helps to ensure that students learn to make informed decisions about their health and wellbeing. These decisions are further supported and encouraged by school, community and national policies and guidelines.

In Junior Cycle, six indicators are identified as being central to students' wellbeing – Active, Responsible, Connected, Resilient, Respected and Aware. SPHE provides learning opportunities designed to enhance each of these indicators thereby contributing significantly to the school's Wellbeing programme at Junior Cycle level.

Relationship of SPHE to St. Michael's College mission statement:

SPHE provides students with an opportunity to develop their understanding of themselves and others. It also allows them to make informed decisions about their health, personal lives, and social development. It helps students grow and develop as individuals and in their relationship to others.

Objectives of the SPHE programme

Building on the aims of SPHE in the primary school, at post-primary level SPHE aims:

- * To develop skills for self-fulfilment and living in communities.
- * To promote self-esteem and self-confidence.
- * 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.

Relationship to Characteristic Spirit and Ethos of the School

SPHE will provide young people with skills to evaluate critically the wide range of information, opinions, attitudes, and values offered today, in order that they will

make positive, responsible choices about themselves and about the way they live their lives. While the school acknowledges that the home is the natural environment for the social, personal and health development of children, the Education Act of 1998 (Section 9, subsection D) requires all recognised schools to promote the moral, spiritual, social and personal development of students and provide health education for them. This will happen in consultation with their parents and in the context of the Catholic ethos of the school.

Outcomes for our students

As outlined in the SPHE curriculum guidelines, a supportive school environment is important, in which,

- People feel valued
- Self-esteem is fostered
- Respect, fairness and tolerance are evident
- Those experiencing difficulty are supported
- Communication is open
- 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.

Participation

SPHE is a core curricular subject on the Junior Cycle curriculum, and it plays a central role in educating students in Wellbeing. Relationships and Sexuality (RSE) is one module of the subject. Each parent has the right to withdraw their child from RSE (see Relationships and Sexuality Education Policy). If a student is withdrawn from the lessons pertaining to the sensitive elements of the RSE programme, parents must give a notice in writing to the school that they are withdrawing their child. The student may be accommodated in another teacher's classroom in the school. However, it will be necessary for parents of any student opting out of RSE to make suitable arrangements with School Management for the welfare of their child at these times. It is important to be aware that in these circumstances the school cannot be responsible for information subsequently passed on by participating students.

Sensitive Issues

While it is acknowledged that teachers at St. Michael's College have a professional responsibility to impart the SPHE course content, the needs of the students will be addressed in a caring and supportive manner. Where it is appropriate, the school will refer students to other supportive links or services, internal or external to the school community e.g. Student Support Team (SST), Guidance Counsellor, etc. Class discussion will be of a general nature in accordance with the previously agreed ground rules and will not be personally directed. If any questions asked by students are deemed to be inappropriate, the teacher will refer the student to their parents or state that this information may be available at a later stage of the curriculum. Teachers

may choose to say that it is not appropriate to deal with that question at this time. If a teacher becomes concerned about a matter that has been raised, he/she should seek advice from the Principal. When deciding whether or not to answer questions the teacher should consider the age and readiness of the students, the SPHE / RSE programme content, the ethos of the school, the RSE policy and use their professional judgment.

The Safe Learning Environment.

For students to participate well in SPHE it is essential that a safe learning environment is established at the outset, and that ground rules are negotiated, understood, and respected by all. Unless this is done, students will feel vulnerable and may be reluctant to participate. From time to time throughout the year, when sensitive topics arise, teachers should revisit the ground rules.

Confidentiality

The normal limits of confidentiality will apply to any information coming to the attention of the teacher. However, every effort should be made to ensure that this information is dealt with in a sensitive and discreet manner. It is important that students are made aware of the limits of confidentiality and that teachers do not give unconditional guarantees of confidentiality. Confidentiality should be respected unless the teacher feels that the child is at risk or where there are reasonable grounds to believe that a law may be broken. In such a case, the appropriate action should be taken in accordance with the procedures set down in the Child Protection Procedures

for Post-Primary Schools, the College's Child Protection Policy / Child Safeguarding Statement and the Children First legislation (2017) or the school's Substance Use Policy, i.e., the teacher must inform the Designated Liaison Person and ensure that that all reporting procedures are complied with.

Staff Development, Training and Resources

The value placed on SPHE at the College will be evident by the commitment on the part of School Management to develop a core team of SPHE teachers. Continuing professional development is an integral part of this programme. School Management is responsible for the relevant training needs of SPHE teachers. As part of the core curriculum, SPHE will have a budgetary allocation in line with its stage of development and its teaching methodologies and timetabled allocation. School Management is committed to the appointment of an SPHE Co-ordinator and a Wellbeing Co-ordinator (as part of the middle management team at the College). School Management encourages and facilitates continuing professional development for new and existing teachers of SPHE.

Implementation Teaching & Learning Methods

As the SPHE programme is mainly skills based, teaching and learning styles will be of an active, experiential nature with an emphasis on discussion, reflection, and classroom participation. These teaching methods will be appropriate to the age and stage of development of the student. Creating a safe learning environment is vital. The

class atmosphere needs to be one of respect for the privacy of each individual student and of sensitivity and care.

Student Access and Class groupings

Junior Cycle S.P.H.E. is timetabled for one class period a week for 1st, 2nd, and 3rd years. All classes are of mixed ability and a common level.

RSE

The delivery of RSE at Junior Cycle occurs within the SPHE class.

Resources

General • <https://www.pdst.ie/pp/healthwellbeing/sphe> (this is the SPHE portal for all resources)

- On My Own Two Feet – educational resource materials for substance abuse prevention & workcards
- Working Things Out Through SPHE
- Relationships and Sexuality education: resource materials for teachers
- Teenspace: national recreation policy for young people
- Mental Health matters: a mental health resource pack
- Bodywise: responding to eating disorders and body image issues
- Think: teenage Health In Kerry booklet

Textbooks

- My Wellbeing Journey by Gill Education

The Role of Guest Speakers

The SPHE team will consult with the Principal in relation to the suitability of guest speakers prior to their invitation to the school. All guest speakers will be made aware of and requested to comply with the school SPHE policy and Visitor Policy. The presentations of guest speakers will be negotiated with the SPHE team before delivery to the students. It is normal practice for teachers to remain in the classroom while visitors are present. Preparatory and follow-up work, where possible, will be undertaken by the SPHE teacher subsequent to the presentation.

How Parents and Students will be informed

A full and complete syllabus, core resource materials and policy document will be available on request from the College's office if parents wish to review it. This policy will be available in hard copy on request the College's office and on the College's website. An appointment can be made with the SPHE Co-ordinator through the College's office. Parents will be informed of any substantial changes in the programme made by the Department of Education and Skills.

Continuous Professional Development

A number of staff members have attended training in SPHE and RSE and management will continue to support staff training in this area.

Outline of the Programme

The S.P.H.E. curriculum is delivered in ten modules at Junior Certificate. The Department of Education and Science recognises that each school has flexibility within this syllabus to plan and order the delivery of the SPHE Programme according to school or class needs and circumstances.

The Four Strands throughout the three year Junior Cycle are:

- Strand 1 – Who am I?
- Strand 2 – Minding Myself and Others
- Strand 3 – Team Up
- Strand 4 – My Mental Health

Cross-curricular links

The SPHE team is conscious of the potential for cross-curricular links in particular with RE, RSE, Guidance, Science and CSPE.

Health and Safety

Refer to the College's Health and Safety policy which are followed by each subject teacher.

Cultural Diversity

The understanding of cultural diversity is integrated across a range of modules in the S.P.H.E. programme, such as, belonging and integration, differences and similarities and friendship.

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 file in the office. It is each teacher's responsibility to review the file of the relevant students that they will be teaching for the up-coming year. Teachers are to keep this information in mind in the classroom so as to be sensitive when the need arises. Students with additional educational needs, may need more help than others in coping with the physical and emotional aspects of growing up; they may also need more help in learning what behaviour is and is not acceptable:

NCCA - Document for students with mild learning disability
(http://www.ncca.ie/uploadedfiles/PP_SPHE.pdf).

Assessment and Reporting

Reflection and research are encouraged linked to the class that day or the next day. Assessment takes the form of a CBA style approach. Each class group will complete up to two CBAs in SPHE (for assessment in December and / or in May). SPHE teachers will report on a student's progress on each Student Report (October Midterm, December and Summer reports). This will take the form of :-

- * a comment demonstrating progress and engagement
- * a CBA descriptor

Links to other policies

The following policies have been considered in the drafting of this SPHE /RSE policy:

- The Mission Statement of St. Michael's College
- The Wellbeing Policy
- The RSE Policy
- The Code of Positive Behaviour
- The Child Protection Policy / Child Safeguarding Statement
- The Acceptable Use Policy
- The Special Educational Needs Policy
- The Guidance Plan