



# **SPHE/RSE Policy**

## **Coláiste De Lacy**

## School Ethos:

Coláiste De Lacy is a school of academic excellence and as such, it implements a modern and innovative approach to teaching and learning. It aims to provide the best educational experience and developmental opportunities for its students. There is an incessant focus on teaching and learning within the school for everyone (Ag foghlaim le chéile). Students are encouraged to strive for individual excellence in a happy, supportive, positive, caring and challenging environment. The Coláiste De Lacy values include: effort, hard work, respect, positivity, personal responsibility, integrity and kindness. Coláiste De Lacy aims to foster these values and promote a growth mindset in students. The school also aims to nurture a sense of belonging for students.

## Coláiste De Lacy Mission Statement:

Coláiste De Lacy is a community of learners and leaders working together in a safe and inclusive learning environment that fosters positive relationships, good learning habits, growth mind-set, respect, and personal growth for all. Through the combined efforts of the whole school community, Coláiste De Lacy aims to nurture curious minds, caring hearts and responsible citizens.

Suaitheanthas Choláiste De Lacy (The Coláiste De Lacy Crest)

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Although Coláiste De Lacy's philosophical foundations are strong. The philosophical principles of the school are as follows:

- Fás (growth as individuals and as a learning community)
- Ag foghlaim le chéile (a continual focus on learning for all)
- Caidrimh dhearfacha (positive relationships between all members of the school community will nurture its growth and ensure that it is a happy, safe and well-ordered place of optimal learning)
- Solas agus Soirbheachas (an emphasis on the positives and joy in life and learning).

**Aims:**

The SPHE programme aims to enhance students' understanding of themselves and foster a positive sense of self-worth. It aims to equip students with the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values necessary for leading enriching and healthy lives. The programme is designed to empower students to establish, foster, and sustain respectful and loving relationships with themselves and others. Additionally, it seeks to strengthen their ability to make a constructive contribution to society.

**Objectives:**

The policy will ensure clarity and consensus on how SPHE and RSE is taught in Coláiste De Lacy.

- It will articulate the relationship of RSE to SPHE.
- It will articulate the rationale of the RSE programme.
- It will clarify the rights, roles, and responsibilities of all within the school community in relation to the RSE programme with reference to school staff, students, parents/guardians, and the Board of Management/patron.
- It will ensure that teachers, parents/guardians, and students understand how the teaching of RSE is linked to the school ethos.
- It will provide information on the practicalities of delivering the programme.

**Scope and Applicability of Policy:**

This RSE policy was developed in accordance with:

- Guidelines as set out in Circular M4/95, M20/96, C23/10, C37/2010 and best practice guidance from the NCCA and Department of Education.
- The Education Act 1998, as it requires that schools should promote the social and personal development of students and provide health education for them.
- Section 4 of the Rules and Programme for Secondary schools which requires schools to have an agreed policy for RSE and a suitable RSE programme in place for all students at both Junior and Senior cycle.
- The School Ethos and Vision (Ár bhFís)
- Guidance from SPHE Department and SPHE Co-ordinator
- Consultation with Principal, Deputy Principal, BOM, teachers, students, and parents.

This policy document is designed to clearly articulate the methods and principles guiding the teaching of SPHE in Coláiste De Lacy. Its primary aim is to ensure that BOM/ patron, teachers, parents, and students are fully informed of the dedicated approach and the procedures in place in delivering a comprehensive SPHE curriculum in Coláiste De Lacy.

Beyond the specifics of the SPHE programme, this document serves a broader purpose common to educational policies: to establish a transparent, consistent framework within which the school operates. Such policies are essential for setting clear expectations, providing guidelines for behaviour and procedures, and ensuring that the educational journey of every student is enriched and supported. By articulating these details, Coláiste De Lacy aims to build a strong partnership between the school, its students, and their families, ensuring that collective efforts lead to a meaningful and impactful educational experience.

### **Rationale and Purpose of SPHE/RSE Policy:**

SPHE offers a vital framework for students to acquire the necessary knowledge, skills, and values essential for their overall wellbeing, encompassing physical, emotional, social, and spiritual aspects. It emphasises principles like respect, equality, inclusivity, and empathy, setting a foundation for young individuals to navigate their development positively.

Adolescence marks a critical period of identity formation and self-discovery, prompting the need for guidance in making informed decisions, developing a strong sense of self, and handling life's challenges effectively. SPHE aids in fostering these capabilities, equipping students with the skills to manage their lives with confidence.

The programme emphasises the cultivation of crucial life skills such as self-awareness, self-management, responsible decision-making, social awareness, and relationship skills. These competencies are key in adapting to the complexities of a rapidly changing world and achieving positive outcomes in various life situations. Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE), a significant component of SPHE, plays a critical role during this phase by encouraging young people to explore and understand their identities and values in relationships, facilitated by open discussions in a safe, educational environment. 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.

SPHE utilises interactive and reflective teaching methods to create a supportive space for students to enhance self and social awareness, promoting personal growth and wellbeing. It aligns with junior cycle education's focus on wellbeing indicators - Active, Responsible, Connected, Resilient, Respected, and Aware - making it a central element of a school's Wellbeing programme. By advocating for an inclusive approach that respects diversity and human rights, SPHE contributes significantly to forming a compassionate, equitable society, recognising the richness brought by diverse backgrounds and perspectives.

### **Key Measures:**

#### **A. Provision of Training and Staff Development**

Arrangements regarding the deployment of staff for teaching SPHE and RSE are overseen by the Principal, with a preference for assigning teachers who show a

genuine interest in these areas. It is understood that not all teachers need to be experts on the subjects addressed within SPHE/RSE, but they should possess a sensitivity to the group's needs, the ability to answer questions openly and honestly, and a willingness to seek expert advice when necessary. The general skills developed through teaching are applicable to RSE as well.

To support the specialisation of SPHE teachers, a core team has been developed. This initiative aims to bolster the capacity of teachers to navigate the various topics covered in SPHE with confidence and expertise. Ongoing training will be provided to ensure that teachers are well-equipped to handle the curriculum's demands. Coláiste De Lacy is committed to facilitating access to expert training for its teachers within the constraints of the overall budget. This training is essential for maintaining the high quality of the teaching and learning programme.

Teachers will be encouraged to pursue professional development opportunities by both the Principal and the SPHE coordinator. Furthermore, Coláiste De Lacy will ensure that appropriate teaching resources are made available to the staff of Coláiste De Lacy, albeit subject to budget limitations. This comprehensive approach to teacher support and development is designed to enhance the effectiveness of the SPHE/RSE curriculum, ultimately benefiting the student community.

## **B. Inclusion of Parents/Guardians**

Parents/guardians are the primary educators of their children and their role in education concerning relationships and sexuality education is seen by Coláiste De Lacy as very important. The policy has been designed in consultation with the parents' representatives and the views expressed by parents will be taken into account when the policy is being reviewed.

A copy of this policy will be made available to any parent/guardian on request to the general office and available on the Coláiste De Lacy website.

### **Participation and Parents Request for Withdrawal:**

RSE is a mandatory element of the SPHE programme, and schools are obligated to offer RSE lessons at both Junior and Senior Cycle. However, The Education Act 1998, Section 30 (2) (e) states that a student is not required to attend instruction in any subject which is contrary to the conscience of the parents. This also applies to students who are 18 or older, where the decision rests with the student themselves. Each parent therefore has the right to withdraw their child from some or all RSE classes. In such cases, it is recommended that parents offer alternative relationships and sexuality education at home to ensure their children still receive the necessary support for their personal growth and development.

### **Classroom Withdrawal:**

**Please note: Throughout the school year, subjects pertaining to relationships and sexuality are integrated into various classroom discussions.**

Throughout the school year, teachers will naturally and organically integrate themes from relationships and sexuality education into their lessons, as many aspects of RSE overlap with the other three strands: making healthy choices, understanding myself and others, and emotional wellbeing. Topics specific to the RSE Strand at junior cycle, such as puberty, reproduction, personal hygiene, sexual orientation, gender identity and romantic relationships are generally addressed in a concentrated timeframe later in the year. This timing allows teachers to ensure a safe and comfortable classroom environment has been established.

#### Procedure for Withdrawal:

1. Should a parent or guardian decide to exempt their child or children from certain components of the SPHE/RSE programme, **they are required to notify the school at the start of the academic year.** This policy is in place to prevent situations where a student might attend a class and inform the teacher that they are not permitted to learn about the topic being taught. In such cases, the teacher would not have the means to promptly verify this with the parents, making it challenging to organise alternative arrangements on short notice. **The school needs prior notice to ensure that appropriate accommodations can be made for the student.**
2. If a parent or guardian decides to exempt their child from certain SPHE/RSE lessons, they should reach out to the school's reception and request to speak with the SPHE coordinator/ class teacher. The SPHE coordinator/class teacher will then engage with the parent or guardian to discuss the specific topics they prefer their child to be excused from. **This process guarantees that parents' preferences are acknowledged and respected, while also ensuring that students have access to the portions of the SPHE/RSE programme that their parents/guardians approve of them participating.**
3. After this conversation, parents or guardians **must furnish the school with a letter detailing the specific areas from which they wish to withdraw their child/children.**
4. For these specific lessons, parents can choose to pick up their child from school and bring them back after the lesson has ended. Alternatively, the school can make other arrangements. The student may join a different class or if that is not possible, they can stay in the bay area near reception for the duration of the lesson.

#### Please note:

1. Coláiste De Lacy is unable to assume responsibility for any information from the SPHE/RSE lesson that students might share with their peers after the lesson has concluded.
2. Parents'/ guardians are encouraged to have a conversation with their child/children about being withdrawn from parts of the SPHE/RSE programme. This discussion can help ensure that they understand the reasons for the withdrawal, preventing any unexpected confusion or surprise should they be directed to a different location during those class times.

### **C) Additional Considerations:**

The SPHE/RSE policy at Coláiste De Lacy is designed to offer clear guidance to teachers on their roles, responsibilities, boundaries, and expectations while teaching SPHE/RSE, ensuring a uniform approach is maintained across all year groups.

#### **Developing and maintaining a safe classroom environment:**

Developing and maintaining a safe classroom environment is crucial for fostering an atmosphere of trust, respect, and engagement, which are essential for effective learning, especially in subjects as sensitive as SPHE/RSE. A safe classroom ensures that all students feel valued, understood, and free to express their thoughts and feelings in a respectful manner. This kind of environment encourages open dialogue, critical thinking, and personal growth, allowing students to explore complex topics related to their social, personal, and health education with confidence.

One practical method of achieving this is through the creation of a class contract, a collaborative agreement developed between teachers and students that outlines mutual expectations, behaviours, and norms for classroom interaction. This contract serves as a tangible reminder of everyone's commitment to upholding a positive and respectful learning space. By involving students in the creation of the class contract, teachers empower them to take ownership of their learning environment, further enhancing the sense of safety and community in the classroom. Regularly revisiting and, if necessary, revising the class contract ensures that it remains relevant and effective throughout the year, adapting to the evolving dynamics of the class.

#### **Teacher versus Facilitator:**

In the context of SPHE, the role of the teacher evolves more into that of a facilitator rather than an all-knowing expert. This approach acknowledges that the subjects covered within SPHE are areas where experiences and perspectives vary widely among students. The facilitator stance taken by SPHE teachers is crucial in encouraging a participatory and inclusive classroom dynamic, where the focus is on exploring topics collaboratively, rather than delivering definitive answers. Through this approach, students learn to engage with complex issues in a thoughtful and respectful manner, reflecting the real-world diversity of opinions and experiences.

#### **Confidentiality**

While an atmosphere of trust is a pre-requisite of RSE, 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 from a student will be reported to the Designated Liaison Person in compliance with the Child Protection Procedures (2017), school's Child Protection Safeguarding Statement and Risk Assessment.

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

### **Answering Questions**

The teacher is not obligated to answer all questions in class and may take time to consult with colleagues if unsure of the appropriateness of a question. It is important to remember that the teacher is not expected to have all the answers; their role is to facilitate student discussion rather than act as the sole expert. **Class discussions will maintain a broad focus and will not target individuals with personal questions, aligning with the established and agreed class contract.** Any inappropriate questions will not be addressed by the teacher or between students. SPHE teachers will use their professional judgment, considering factors such as student age, stage of development the SPHE/RSE specification and the RSE Policy when addressing questions. The SPHE teacher may also exercise his or her own professional judgement in deciding whether to answer the question privately after the class has finished. If a teacher becomes concerned about a child protection matter that has been raised by a student, he/she should seek advice from the Principal/ DLP.

### **Sexual Activity**

The pace of social change in Ireland over the last number of years has been rapid. **The school's function 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, contraception, and sexually transmitted infections - however sources of professional information and advice will be identified when appropriate.** Teachers may provide pupils 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.

RSE classes will inform students of the age of consent which, following the passage of the Criminal Law (Sexual Offences) Act, 2006, is **17 years of age** for both males and females.

Contraception will be addressed in an age-appropriate and transparent manner, ensuring that students receive accurate information to guide them should they choose to become sexually active in the future. At the teacher's discretion, demonstrations of condom use may be conducted using condom demonstrators and condoms.

**Condoms will not be distributed to students to take home.** Additionally, teachers may utilise visual aids to showcase different types of contraception methods, enhancing the learning process for students.

As the rates of STI transmission continue to rise, it is imperative that this topic is addressed within schools. The discussion on STIs will be conducted in an age-appropriate manner, emphasising education rather than resorting to fear-inducing tactics. **It is important to note that visuals of STIs will not be presented in the SPHE/RSE classroom setting.**

## **Sexual Orientation**

The most common age for young people to identify themselves as LGBTQ+ is 12, and the most common age for young people to tell someone that they are LGBTQ+ is 16.<sup>1</sup> This is a crucial time for LGBTQ+ young people. SPHE teachers address both heterosexuality and homosexuality equally, promoting acceptance and understanding of diverse sexual orientations among students. When discussing sexual activity, teachers provide definitions of the three types of sexual intercourse (anal, oral, and vaginal) but **refrain from discussing specific behaviours or acts.** The focus of these lessons is to educate students on definitions rather than delve into details of sexual behaviour.

## **Gender Identity**

Gender identity is referred to as ‘a person’s felt internal and individual experience of gender, which may or may not correspond with the sex registered at birth.’<sup>2</sup> In the context of discussing gender identity, it is important to acknowledge that while most people’s gender identity matches their sex registered at birth, this is not the case for everyone. Students will be offered opportunities to appreciate how gender identity is experienced and expressed in diverse ways in the SPHE classroom through exploring case studies and discussions. **Teachers will refrain from soliciting students to share personal experiences in a classroom environment, as this is considered inappropriate practice.**<sup>3</sup> Additionally, teachers are not required to engage in

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<sup>1</sup> Curriculumonline. Available at: [https://www.curriculumonline.ie/getmedia/ca8f8975-50ca-4dc3-bba5-a04e25b4f978/JC\\_SPHE\\_Short\\_Course\\_2023.pdf](https://www.curriculumonline.ie/getmedia/ca8f8975-50ca-4dc3-bba5-a04e25b4f978/JC_SPHE_Short_Course_2023.pdf) (Accessed: 23 April 2024).

<sup>2</sup> Social, Personal & Health Education (SPHE). Available at: [https://www.curriculumonline.ie/getmedia/ca8f8975-50ca-4dc3-bba5-a04e25b4f978/JC\\_SPHE\\_Short\\_Course\\_2023.pdf](https://www.curriculumonline.ie/getmedia/ca8f8975-50ca-4dc3-bba5-a04e25b4f978/JC_SPHE_Short_Course_2023.pdf) (Accessed: 23 April 2024).

<sup>3</sup> Curriculumonline. Available at: [https://www.curriculumonline.ie/getmedia/ca8f8975-50ca-4dc3-bba5-a04e25b4f978/JC\\_SPHE\\_Short\\_Course\\_2023.pdf](https://www.curriculumonline.ie/getmedia/ca8f8975-50ca-4dc3-bba5-a04e25b4f978/JC_SPHE_Short_Course_2023.pdf) (Accessed: 23 April 2024).

**classroom discussions regarding complex medical aspects of gender.**<sup>4</sup> If questions arise regarding topics such as intersex identities or medical transition treatments, it is advisable to gently acknowledge their complexity and suggest discussing them with a medical professional.

### **Pronouns:**

If a student requests a change of name or pronoun, Coláiste De Lacy responds compassionately and empathetically, engaging the student's parents or guardians to determine the best support and approach for the individual student.

In the school environment, some teachers, students, and auxiliary staff choose to use pronouns as a way to express their identity. From an educator's perspective, the decision to share one's own pronouns rests with the individual teacher, reflecting a personal choice to disclose this aspect of their identity. This approach not only respects the autonomy of teachers but also models a culture of consent and individual discretion within the classroom setting.

By navigating pronoun sharing with sensitivity and care, teachers can foster a more inclusive and understanding environment for all.

### **Sexting and Sexual Imagery:**

The term 'sexting' was coined in early 21st century; it is a concatenation of the words sex and text. It was originally used to describe the exchange of sexual content, text, and images, on mobile phones. In the last few years, it has come to cover the sharing of sexual text, video, and photographic content using mobile phones, apps, social networking services and other internet technologies. Technical definitions sometimes include the exchange of pornographic content. It can be very distressing when explicit self-created images, initially exchanged in confidence, are shared without consent with a wider audience. Students who are the victims of non-consensual sharing (often referred to as revenge porn; a practice where sexting content is maliciously distributed, without consent, to gain revenge and cause public humiliation) or sextortion (a form of extortion where the criminal threatens to distribute explicit content of the victim unless the victim pays a sum of money or sends more explicit content) might suffer from depression or anxiety and could be in immediate danger.

Research which looks at the sexting behaviours of adolescents in Ireland has found that almost half have been asked to send sexually explicit images at some point. An investigation into sexting behaviour and behavioural problems in adolescents (15-18)

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<sup>4</sup> *Curriculumonline*. Available at: [https://www.curriculumonline.ie/getmedia/ca8f8975-50ca-4dc3-bba5-a04e25b4f978/JC\\_SPHE\\_Short\\_Course\\_2023.pdf](https://www.curriculumonline.ie/getmedia/ca8f8975-50ca-4dc3-bba5-a04e25b4f978/JC_SPHE_Short_Course_2023.pdf) (Accessed: 23 April 2024).

was carried by the National Antbullying Research and Resource Centre in 2021.<sup>5</sup> The research found that:

- More than half of teenagers surveyed have been asked to send naked pictures of themselves through text, email or via an app, with 44% saying they have been asked frequently and 12% only been asked once.
- Mostly, sexts were asked, sent, and received by a romantic partner (boyfriend or girlfriend, followed by someone they had a crush on).
- More girls (29%) than boys (15%) have been asked to send a sexually explicit image.
- Boys are more likely to ask for and receive sexually explicit images.
- 30% of students had frequently received a sexually explicit image (a sext) when they did not want to receive it.<sup>6</sup>

### **Pornography:**

Online pornography is easily accessible and often free. Research continues to show a growing number of young people accessing pornography, and at a younger age, with children as young as seven accidentally encountering pornography online. A report by the British Board of Film Classification (2020)<sup>7</sup> found that 51 per cent of 11- to 13-year-olds, 66 per cent of 14- to 15-year-olds and 79 per cent of 16- to 17-year-olds had seen pornography.<sup>8</sup>

In the majority of cases, young people's first-time viewing pornography was accidental. Over 60 per cent of children aged 11 to 13 who had seen pornography said that their viewing of it was unintentional. Only 18 per cent of this age group had looked for it intentionally, increasing to 29 per cent by ages 16 to 17. The most common unintentional routes include:

- typing words into search engines, such as 'sex' or 'porn,' without knowing what they mean
- receiving links from friends to pornographic websites without knowing the content
- seeing adverts or pop-ups from other websites (often streaming, sports or games websites)
- being shown content on a friend's phone.

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<sup>5</sup> O Foody, M., Mazzone, A., Laffan, D. A., Loftsson, M., & Norman, J. O. H. (2021). "It's not just sexy pics": An investigation into sexting behaviour and behavioural problems in adolescents. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 117, 106662.

<sup>6</sup> O Foody, M., Mazzone, A., Laffan, D. A., Loftsson, M., & Norman, J. O. H. (2021). "It's not just sexy pics": An investigation into sexting behaviour and behavioural problems in adolescents. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 117, 106662.

<sup>7</sup> Bbfc. Children see pornography as young as seven, new report finds [Internet]. BBFC; 2019 [cited 2024 Apr 23]. Available from: <https://www.bbfc.co.uk/about-us/news/children-see-pornography-as-young-as-seven-new-report-finds>

<sup>8</sup> Martellozzo, E. et al. (2016). 'I wasn't sure it was normal to watch it.' A quantitative and qualitative examination of the impact of online pornography on the values, attitudes, beliefs and behaviours of children and young people. ResearchGate. DOI: 10.6084/m9.figshare.3382393

## The impact of pornography on teenagers:

Research has found that pornography affects teenagers in the following ways:

- Many teenagers frequently witness men being portrayed as dominant (70 per cent, compared to 17 per cent for women) and women being subjected to derogatory language (36 per cent for women, compared to 7 per cent for men).<sup>9</sup>
- Teenagers who view pornography experience increased dissatisfaction with their sexuality and bodies. A notable number of young people who have seen pornography expressed concerns about body image due to not resembling the actors they see.<sup>10</sup>
- Viewing pornography is linked to lower satisfaction in interpersonal relationships, suggesting cause-and-effect relationship. Long-term and frequent pornography use tends to have a more significant impact on satisfaction.<sup>11</sup>
- Pornography consumption contributes to teenagers' preoccupation with sex and a performance-oriented mindset.<sup>12</sup> This may hinder the development of genuine sexual connections and personal wellbeing, potentially leading to dependence or addiction.
- Teenage pornography consumption has been associated with engaging in risky sexual behaviours such as having unprotected sex.<sup>13</sup>
- Pornography consumption increases the likelihood of some individuals engaging in sexually coercive or aggressive behaviour. It also decreases people's inclination to intervene as positive bystanders in risky situations.

In the SPHE classroom, topics such as sexting and pornography are addressed with the aim of providing students with essential knowledge and skills to navigate the digital world safely and responsibly. By discussing these topics, students are equipped with the tools to recognise harmful behaviours, set boundaries, and make informed decisions regarding their online activities. Discussing these topics empower them with the knowledge needed to protect their emotional and mental wellbeing.

Through discussions on the portrayal of sexuality in media and the impact of explicit content on relationships and self-esteem, students gain a deeper understanding of the potential consequences of engaging in these activities. Through open dialogue and providing accurate information, teachers help students develop resilience and assertiveness in resisting peer pressure and societal norms surrounding these issues.

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<sup>9</sup> Davis, A. C. et al. (2018). What behaviors do young heterosexual Australians see in pornography? A cross-sectional study. *The Journal of Sex Research*, 55(3), 310–319. DOI: 10.1080/00224499.2017.1417350

<sup>10</sup> Peter, J. & Valkenburg, P. M. (2009). Adolescents' exposure to sexually explicit internet material and sexual satisfaction: A longitudinal study. *Human Communication Research*, 35, 171–194. DOI: 10.1111/j.1468-2958.2009.01343.x

<sup>11</sup> Wright, P. J., Steffen, N. J. & Sun, C. (2017). Is the relationship between pornography consumption frequency and lower sexual satisfaction curvilinear? Results from England and Germany. *The Journal of Sex Research*, 1–7. DOI: 10.1080/00224499.2017.1347912

<sup>12</sup> Peter, J. & Valkenburg, P. M. (2008). Adolescents' exposure to sexually explicit internet material and sexual preoccupation: A three-wave panel study. *Media Psychology*, 11(2), 207–234. DOI: 10.1080/15213260801994238

<sup>13</sup> Tokunaga, R. S., Wright, P. J. & Vangeel, L. (2020). Is pornography consumption a risk factor for condomless sex? *Human Communication Research*, 46(2–3), 273–299. DOI: doi.org/10.1093/hcr/hqaa005

**Important Note: Under no circumstances will pornographic or explicit images be shared in the SPHE classroom.**

## **D) Practical Issues:**

### **Curriculum and Class Organisation**

In the Junior Cycle, each student is allocated one hour per week for SPHE classes. RSE forms an integral part of the SPHE curriculum and is incorporated throughout the duration of the programme. In Senior Cycle, SPHE is also allocated one hour per week in Transition Year and 5th Year. RSE is structured on a modular basis for 6th year students. RSE is taught as part of the Social Education Programme in 5th and 6th Year LCA.

### **Resources:**

The SPHE Team has gathered a collection of current and relevant resources and supports for use in the SPHE/RSE classroom. Appendix B provides a sample of resources used in teaching SPHE/RSE at Coláiste De Lacy. These are routinely reviewed and updated.

These resources are accessible to parents for review. Should parents have any questions about the content of these resources, a member of the SPHE team will be available to discuss these matters further.

### **Visiting Speakers**

Most of the RSE programme is best discussed openly with teachers who are known and trusted by the students. However, visitors can also enhance the quality of the provision of a planned programme of RSE. The SPHE Co-ordinator will provide the visitor, well in advance of the visit, with a copy of this RSE policy, as advised by circular 43/18.

External facilitators are approved by the Principal and Board of Management in consultation with the relevant teaching staff. All programmes and events delivered by visitors and external agencies must use appropriate evidence-based methodologies with clear educational outcomes.

Such programmes are best delivered by those specifically qualified to work with young people for whom the programmes are designed. Relevant school staff will be informed of the details of the programme being provided by external facilitators. Parents/carers will be made aware in advance of the content of the programmes provided by external facilitators. External facilitators and programmes are evaluated by students and teachers regarding the subject matter, messages communicated, methodology and proposed learning outcome.

**External facilitators always work under the guidance and supervision of the relevant classroom teacher who remains in the classroom with the students at all times and retains a central role in the delivery of the subject matter. Absence of the teacher may undermine the integrity of the curriculum, and the credibility and professionalism of the teacher. It may also compromise the safety of the students.<sup>14</sup>**

### **Supporting Students with AEN (Additional Education Needs)**

Children and young people with Additional Education Needs may need additional support in SPHE/RSE lessons. This may include offering alternative formats for learning materials, such as visual aids or simplified language, to accommodate different learning styles. Additionally, teachers can provide additional time for comprehension, repetition, or clarification of concepts, ensuring that all students have the opportunity to fully engage with the curriculum. Collaborating with special education teachers or support staff can also be beneficial in identifying specific accommodations or modifications that may be required.

Students with intellectual disabilities usually progress through the stages of sexual development at the same age as other children but may lack the cognitive or emotional maturity to understand the physiological and psychosocial changes that they are experiencing. Children and young people with an intellectual disability may also lack the understanding or awareness of behaviours that may put them at risk of sexual exploitation.

SPHE/RSE teachers tailor the classroom content by utilising the AEN-specific resources and support. This approach enhances young people's understanding and learning, ensuring they grasp the material while also safeguarding their safety and wellbeing.

### **E) Links to other Policies:**

The policies at Coláiste De Lacy are closely intertwined, collaborating to establish a unified and cohesive structure. Below is a list of policies that complement the RSE Policy at Coláiste De Lacy, and reciprocally, the RSE Policy complements them.

- Child Safeguarding Statement and Risk Assessment
- Anti-Bullying Policy
- Code of Conduct
- Substance Misuse Policy
- ICT Acceptable Use Policy
- Health and Safety Statement

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<sup>14</sup> Circular no. 0043/2018 [Internet]. [cited 2024 Apr 23]. Available from: <https://circulars.gov.ie/pdf/circular/education/2018/43.pdf>

- Data Protection Policy
- Critical Incident Management Plan

### **Code of Conduct and Anti- Bullying Policy:**

The priority in Coláiste De Lacy is to ensure a safe, positive, supportive and optimal educational environment for all. The Code of Conduct helps the school community to promote the school ethos, relationships, policies, procedures and practices that encourage dea- iompair (good behaviour for learning) and prevent unacceptable behaviour. The Code of Conduct helps muinteoiri (teachers), other members of the foireann (staff), students and parents/ guardians to work together for a happy, effective and safe school.

The Anti-Bullying Policy acknowledges the impact of bullying behaviour on individuals, noting that it undermines and dilutes the quality of education. Research shows that bullying can have short- and long-term effects on the physical and mental wellbeing of students. Bullying is defined as ‘unwanted negative behaviour, verbal psychological or physical, conducted by an individual or group against another person (persons) and which is repeated over time.’<sup>15</sup>

Both of these policies hold significance within the SPHE classroom. It is crucial for students to recognise that while they have the freedom to express their opinions, their words can have a profound impact on others. Thus, it is imperative that students articulate their thoughts in a manner that respects the feelings and rights of their peers. **Teachers must diligently oversee discussions in the SPHE/RSE classroom to ensure that opinions are conveyed with respect. If not, prompt action will be taken in accordance with the above policies.**

### **F) Monitoring and Review:**

This policy will be made available to school personnel, the parent’s association and members of the school community. The implementation of the policy shall be monitored by the Principal and updates reported to the Board of Management when necessary. The policy will be revised as necessary in the light of such reviews and evaluation and within the framework of school planning. On-going review and evaluation should take cognisance of changing information or guidelines (e.g. from the Department of Education), legislation and feedback from parents/guardians, students, school staff and others.

The RSE programme will be reviewed and evaluated on a regular basis by the SPHE team and adopted by the Board of Management. The opinions of staff, parents and

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<sup>15</sup> Anti Bullying Procedures for Primary and Post Primary Schools 2013 [Internet]. [cited 2024 Apr 23]. Available from: <https://www.gov.ie/pdf/?file=https%3A%2F%2Fassets.gov.ie%2F24429%2F3b6f3db2de154ebaa1f69a0856c97c8e.pdf#page=null>

students will be included as part of the review. The RSE policy will be reviewed every two years.

**Ratification of the RSE Policy:**

This policy was adopted by the Board of Management on:

By and on behalf of Board of Management: 3<sup>rd</sup> December 2025

Date of Implementation: 4<sup>th</sup> December 2025

Date of next review: November 2026

## **Board of Management Policy Consultation Log**

***Please present this form to your BOM when considering the policy at BOM level for ratification***

<b><i>School:</i></b>	<b><i>Coláiste De Lacy, Ashbourne</i></b>
<b><i>Policy:</i></b>	<b><i>RSE Policy V2:2025</i></b>

### ***Staff Consultation:***

<b><i>Date of Final Consultation:</i></b>	<b><i>3<sup>rd</sup> December 2025</i></b>
<b><i>Proposed By:</i></b>	<b><i>David Hopkins (Staff Member)</i></b>
<b><i>Seconded By:</i></b>	<b><i>Anna Burmeister (Staff Member)</i></b>

### ***Student Consultation:***

<b><i>Date of Final Consultation:</i></b>	<b><i>24<sup>th</sup> November 2025</i></b>
<b><i>Proposed By:</i></b>	<b><i>Keeva Donnelly (Student)</i></b>
<b><i>Seconded By:</i></b>	<b><i>Okey Chidiebube (Student)</i></b>

### ***Parents Consultation:***

<b><i>Date of Final Consultation:</i></b>	<b><i>1<sup>st</sup> December 2025</i></b>
<b><i>Proposed By:</i></b>	<b><i>Anne Marie McCarrick (Parents Association Member)</i></b>
<b><i>Seconded By:</i></b>	<b><i>Catherine McDonnell (Parents Association Member)</i></b>

**BOM & LMETB Ratification/Resolution Process for  
RSE Policy V2:2025**

**BOM Ratification**

<i>Date Ratified by the Board of Management:</i>	<i>3<sup>rd</sup> December 2025</i>
<i>Proposed By:</i>	<i>James O'Neasa</i>
<i>Seconded By:</i>	<i>Samantha Hickey</i>
<i>Signed:</i>	
<i>Scheduled Date for Review of the Policy:</i>	<i>August 2026</i>

**LMETB Ratification/Resolution of the ETB Board**

<i>Date of Resolution of ETB Board</i>	
<i>Signed</i>	<i>[Signature]</i> <i>AKING.</i> <i>(Chairperson)</i>

COLÁISTE DE LACY  
03 DEC 2025

## **Appendix A: Junior and Senior Cycle Specifications:**

### **Learning Outcomes explored in the Junior Cycle SPHE Specification 2023**

#### Strand 1:

- 1.1 explore the physical, social and emotional changes that happen during adolescence
- 1.2 reflect on their personal strengths and values and how they bring these into relationships
- 1.3 explore the range of influences and life experiences that can impact on self-image and self-esteem and identify ways to nurture a positive sense of self-worth
- 1.4 recognise the factors and influences that shape young people's self-identity, such as family, peers, culture, gender identity, sexual orientation, race/ethnic background, dis/abilities, religious beliefs/worldviews
- 1.5 reflect on gender equity and how gender stereotypes impact on expectations, behaviour and relationships
- 1.6 discuss experiences/situations of bias, inequality or exclusion<sup>3</sup> and devise ways to actively create more inclusive environments
- 1.7 communicate in a respectful and effective manner and listen openly and sensitively to the views/feelings of others
- 1.8 reflect on the meaning and importance of empathy and discuss ways that it can be expressed
- 1.9 demonstrate self-management skills, including setting personal goals, delaying gratification, and self-regulation of thoughts, emotions and impulses.

#### Strand 2:

- 2.1 consider the multifaceted nature of health and wellbeing, and evaluate what being healthy might look like for different adolescents, including how food, physical activity, sleep/rest and hygiene contribute to health and wellbeing
- 2.2 investigate how unhealthy products such as nicotine, vapes, alcohol, and unhealthy food and drinks are marketed and advertised
- 2.3 discuss societal, cultural and economic influences affecting young people when it comes to making healthy choices about smoking, alcohol and other addictive substances and behaviours, and how harmful influences can be overcome in real-life situations
- 2.4 demonstrate skills and strategies to help make informed choices that support health and wellbeing and apply them in real-life situations that may be stressful and/or involve difficult peer situations
- 2.5 discuss the physical, social, emotional and legal consequences of using addictive substances - immediate and long-term

2.6 consider scenarios where, for example, alcohol, nicotine, drugs, food and electronic devices might be used to cope with unpleasant feelings or stress, and discuss possible healthy ways of coping

2.7 assess the benefits and difficulties associated with their online world and discuss strategies for dealing with a range of scenarios that might arise

2.8 discuss how to share personal information, images, opinions and emotions in a safe, responsible and respectful manner online and in person

2.9 explore why young people share sexual imagery online and examine the risks and consequences of doing this 2.10 demonstrate how to access and appraise appropriate and trustworthy information, supports and services about health and wellbeing.

### Strand 3:

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

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

### Strand 4:

4.1 discuss the fluid nature of emotional wellbeing and ways to nurture and protect it

4.2 recognise and acknowledge their emotions and recognise the links between thoughts, feelings and behaviour

4.3 consider the impact of stress and draw upon a variety of techniques to help self-regulate emotions and cope with the day-to-day stresses of life

4.4 discuss ways to support themselves and others in challenging times and where/how/when to seek support, if needed

4.5 explore how emotional wellbeing can be affected by factors within our control, such as sleep, diet, exercise, substance use and online exposure, and factors beyond our control

4.6 recognise different kinds of abusive and bullying behaviour that can occur in interactions online and in person

4.7 explain why noticing and responding to different kinds of abusive or bullying behaviour that can occur in person and online is important and discuss appropriate responses including, why, how, where and when to report

4.8 identify actions young people can take, without putting themselves at risk, in situations where they are aware of incidents of abusive behaviour or bullying happening and explore the barriers to standing up

4.9 demonstrate how to access and appraise appropriate and trustworthy information and services aimed at supporting young people's emotional wellbeing and mental health.

## **Senior Cycle SPHE Specification 2024**

### **Strand 1: Health and Wellbeing**

Within this strand students will explore the factors that influence their physical, social, spiritual, 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.

#### **Learning Outcomes**

1.1: explore the determinants of good health

1.2: investigate ways a person can influence their holistic health, including physical activity, food, sleep, social connections, positive self-image and connecting with nature, and discuss how these are related

1.3: examine social norms, attitudes and beliefs related to alcohol, tobacco/vaping and substance use

1.4: explore the factors that influence mental health and wellbeing, including the influence of family, community, peers, school, social media, digital technology, alcohol and mood-altering drugs, and one's self-image and identity

1.5: recognise helpful and unhelpful thinking patterns, including negative self-talk, and how these can affect emotions and behaviour

1.6: describe and draw on a variety of strategies that can help regulate and manage thoughts and emotions in order to nurture positive mental health

1.7: recognise the signs and symptoms of low mood, stress and anxiety in themselves and others and recognise when help should be sought, where to go and how to access help if needed

1.8: discuss ways of responding to low mood, stress and anxiety

1.9: explain the pathways towards addiction, the signs and consequences of different kinds of addictions and where to go and how to access help, if needed

1.10: discuss and devise ways to safely manage social situations where their own or others' health or safety may be at risk

## **Strand 2: Relationships and Sexuality**

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.

### **Learning Outcomes:**

2.1: demonstrate the awareness and skills needed for nurturing healthy in-person and online relationships, including respecting boundaries, communicating effectively, navigating difficult conversations, preventing and managing conflict and dealing with break-ups

2.2: reflect on how their attitudes, beliefs, values and identity, and those of others, can influence the dynamics of families, friendships and romantic relationships

2.3: discuss the need for consent and the importance of care, respect, empathy, trust and mutual pleasure within a sexual relationship.

2.4: examine how both positive and harmful attitudes around gender are perpetuated in the media, online, and in society and discuss strategies for challenging and changing harmful attitudes and narratives.

2.5: identify and consider common signs of abusive relationships, including coercive control

2.6: explore the root causes and consequences of domestic, sexual and gender-based violence (DSGBV), and outline the supports and services available, and protections under the law

2.7: investigate the possible influence of pornography on attitudes, behaviours and relationship expectations and what supports are available for those impacted by pornography

2.8: discuss image-based abuse, sexual harassment, sexual assault and rape, and what to do and how to seek support if they or someone they know has experienced any of these.

2.9: understand the components of sexual health including fertility across the life cycle, reproductive choices, sexual functioning, safer sexual practices, possible responses to an unplanned pregnancy, and how to access sexual health information and services.

### **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 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.

#### **Learning Outcomes:**

3.1: consider strategies for self-care that can help maintain health and prevent ill-health

3.2: demonstrate self-management skills necessary for life

3.3: explore a range of life events where they might experience change, loss or heartache and discuss how to care for themselves and/or others during these times and where to find support.

3.4: summarise accurately their rights, responsibilities and protections before the law as a young adult with reference to online communicating, consent, alcohol and drug use, their work-place rights and right to access services.

3.5: demonstrate the confidence and skills needed to be their own person and be able to advocate for themselves and others, even if it means standing out from the crowd

3.6: recognise when people are experiencing discrimination and demonstrate the skills needed to express solidarity in a range of situations.

### **Appendix B – Resources and Supports**

The SPHE Team has gathered a collection of current and relevant resources and supports for use in the SPHE/RSE classroom. This collection is routinely reviewed and updated. Below is a sample of the resources that are used in teaching SPHE/RSE at Coláiste De Lacy.

These resources are accessible to parents for review. Should parents have any questions about the content of these resources, a member of the SPHE team is available to discuss these matters further.

SPHE teachers have the flexibility to utilise resources from the junior cycle in the senior cycle, and vice versa, based on their judgment of what is suitable for the students' age and developmental stage.

### **Junior Cycle:**

- NCCA Toolkit of Resources
- Shared Teams Folder of Resources
- SPHE 'You've Got This!' Series of SPHE Books (Junior Cycle)
- Webwise 'Lockers' Resource
- Webwise ' BinCtrl' Resource
- Webwise ' Connected' Resource
- Webwise 'The Respect Effect' Resource
- B4uDecide Resource
- University of Galway 'Activating Social Empathy'
- Planet Youth – Sleep Lessons
- BodyWhys #morethanaselfie
- HSE SPHE Lessons

### **Senior Cycle**

- NCCA Toolkit of Resources
- Shared Teams Folder of Resources
- You've Got This! Senior Cycle Books
- Mindout – Mental Health Resource
- Active Consent
- ConsentED
- Headstrong Mental Health Resources