Ennistymon Community School

Our Mission Statement

Ennistymon Community School recognises and respects the individual needs of our students and staff, strives to foster a caring, mutually respectful, safe, creative, positive, vibrant and inclusive learning environment. We endeavour to support the educational and holistic development of each student to enable them to realise their potential in partnership with the wider community.

Senior Cycle SPHE Policy (Ages 15–18)

Information for Parents & Guardians

Introduction

At Ennistymon Community School, we recognise the importance of nurturing our students' personal, social and emotional development. Senior Cycle Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) is designed to help students aged 15–18 make healthy, informed and responsible choices in a rapidly changing world.

This policy outlines the aims, content and approach of the Senior Cycle SPHE programme, based on national guidance and school-developed resources. It is intended for parents and guardians, to promote transparency and partnership.

Aims of Senior Cycle SPHE

SPHE empowers students to:

- Understand and manage their mental and emotional wellbeing.
- Develop skills for respectful, healthy and consensual relationships.
- Navigate life's challenges with resilience and empathy.
- Explore personal identity, values, and digital citizenship.
- Make informed decisions regarding health, substance use, sexuality, and relationships.
- Build a strong foundation for adult life and civic participation.

Curriculum Structure

Senior Cycle SPHE is delivered over a minimum of 60 hours across two years (5th and 6th Year). It is structured around three main strands:

1. Mental Health & Wellbeing
- Understanding the impact of thoughts and emotions
- Recognising signs of low mood and anxiety
- Developing coping strategies (e.g. mindfulness, deep breathing)
- Promoting resilience, self-care and emotional regulation
- Exploring social factors influencing mental health, including media and peer pressure

2. Relationships & Sexuality Education (RSE)
- Healthy vs unhealthy relationships and personal boundaries
- Communicating consent and recognising coercion
- Navigating romantic and digital relationships
- Dealing with breakups respectfully

- Awareness of online behaviour and Coco's Law

3. Social Responsibility & Life Skills
- Conflict resolution, active listening and assertiveness
- Responding to peer pressure and risky social situations
- Respecting difference and challenging discrimination
- Understanding rights and responsibilities in adult life
- Developing values and learning how to "stand out from the crowd"

4. Consent

-Understand the significance of consent and healthy relationships.

- Evaluate how personal attitudes and values influence interactions.

- Explain communication's role in setting and respecting boundaries (online/offline).
- Recognize signs of coercion, manipulation, and abuse, including coercive control.
- Discuss societal issues such as sexual harassment, image-based abuse, and legal protections.

How SPHE Is Taught

SPHE is delivered by trained and supportive teachers in a safe, inclusive and non-judgmental environment. We use:
- Group discussion, reflection, debate and personal journaling
- Multimedia and real-world scenarios
- Role-play and communication skill-building

- Case studies involving topics like conflict, discrimination or mental health
- Guest speakers from youth, mental health or legal services (where appropriate)

We encourage student voice and choice in activities and assignments to deepen engagement.

Assessment

Although not formally examined, assessment in SPHE helps students reflect on their learning:
- Personal reflections or letters to their younger/older selves
- Group presentations and poster campaigns
- Role-play demonstrations of communication skills
- Podcasts or digital media on healthy relationships
- Checklists and action plans for wellbeing or online safety

Students choose from multiple formats depending on learning style and comfort.

Inclusion, Diversity & Differentiation

At Ennistymon CS, SPHE is inclusive of all students:
- Respect for all gender identities, sexual orientations and cultural backgrounds
- Differentiated approaches to suit all learning needs
- Clear, accessible language and supports for additional educational needs
- Emphasis on empathy, solidarity and support for others

Safeguarding & Confidentiality

Students' confidentiality is respected in SPHE, but child protection procedures apply. Any disclosures indicating abuse, serious risk, or illegal activity are reported to the school's Designated Liaison Person (DLP) in accordance with our Child Protection Policy.

Parent Engagement

We believe parents are key partners in SPHE education. Parents are:
- Informed about SPHE topics (especially RSE and digital safety)
- Invited to contribute feedback or attend information evenings
- Encouraged to discuss SPHE themes at home with their children
- Welcome to view teaching materials upon request

Resources Used

We use a blend of national and local resources, including:
- SPHE Toolkit (NCCA)
- Minding Your Wellbeing Programme (HSE)
- Webwise.ie – Digital Safety
- SpunOut.ie – Mental Health and Relationships
- DRCC – Consent and Healthy Relationships

- Teacher-designed lessons based on units like Social Skills, Relationships, and Being Responsible

Monitoring and Review

- The SPHE Coordinator evaluates the programme annually with staff and student input.
- This policy is reviewed every two years by the SPHE team and Board of Management.
- Updates are made to reflect national guidance and the evolving needs of our students.

Summary for Parents

Our SPHE programme supports students aged 15–18 in managing their wellbeing, building respectful relationships, and developing personal and social responsibility. We deliver a dynamic, inclusive programme that helps prepare young people for adult life, guided by best practice and in partnership with parents.

For more information, please contact the school's SPHE Coordinator.