Ennis Community College & Gaelcholáiste an Chláir

Relationships & Sexuality Education (RSE) Policy

VERSION 2

School	Ennis Community College & Gaelcholáiste an Chláir
Patron / ETB	Limerick and Clare Education and Training Board
Version	V2
Proposed ratification date	24/08/ 2026
Next review	August 2027

1. Purpose and status of this policy

This policy sets out how Ennis Community College and Gaelcholáiste an Chláir plan, teach, support, monitor and review Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) as an integral part of Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) and the wider wellbeing programme. It applies to all teaching and learning about relationships, sexuality, consent, sexual health, identity and related matters, including learning that arises across other curriculum areas.

The Board of Management recognises that RSE is a required element of education at post-primary level and that effective provision depends on a planned whole-school approach, appropriately qualified and supported teachers, age- and stage-appropriate learning, partnership with parents/guardians, inclusive practice, child safeguarding and regular review.

2. Policy and regulatory framework

This policy is informed by, and should be read alongside, the current versions of the following:

- Education Act 1998, including sections 9 and 30.
- Children First Act 2015 and Children First: National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children 2017, including the 2025 Addendum.
- Department of Education and Youth Child Protection Procedures for Schools 2025, once formally adopted by the Board; until then, the current Department child protection procedures formally adopted by the Board remain in force.
- Circular 0041/2025: Publication of Child Protection Procedures for Schools 2025.
- Circular 0023/2010: SPHE and RSE - Best Practice Guidelines for Post-Primary Schools.
- Circular 0043/2018: Best practice guidance for post-primary schools in the use of programmes and/or external facilitators in promoting wellbeing.
- Junior Cycle SPHE Specification 2023 and the associated NCCA SPHE/RSE teacher toolkit.
- Senior Cycle SPHE Specification 2024 and associated NCCA/Oide supports.
- Transition Year Programme Statement 2024, where relevant.
- Bí Cineálta: Procedures to Prevent and Address Bullying Behaviour for Primary and Post-Primary Schools, effective from 1 September 2025.
- Criminal Law (Sexual Offences) Act 2017 and other relevant current legislation concerning consent, sexual offences and harmful communications.
- The school's Child Safeguarding Statement and Risk Assessment, Bí Cineálta Policy, Code of Behaviour, Acceptable Use Policy, Special/Additional Educational Needs policy, Wellbeing/SPHE planning, Guidance Plan and relevant LCETB policies.

3. School ethos and values

Ennis Community College and Gaelcholáiste an Chláir are non-denominational schools under the patronage of Limerick and Clare Education and Training Board. The schools seek to provide an inclusive, respectful and safe learning environment in which each student is valued and supported to develop personally, socially, emotionally, intellectually and morally.

RSE will therefore be taught in a manner that respects the dignity, rights, beliefs, identities, family circumstances and lived experiences of students. Teaching will be factual, educational, developmentally appropriate, inclusive and consistent with the curriculum, the school's characteristic spirit and the legal obligations of the school.

4. Definition and scope of RSE

RSE is the structured educational process through which students develop knowledge, understanding, attitudes, values and skills in relation to relationships, sexuality, identity, intimacy, consent, sexual health, personal safety and responsible decision-making. In school, RSE is taught primarily through SPHE, while relevant learning may also arise in subjects such as Science, Biology, Home Economics, Guidance, Physical Education, CSPE and other appropriate curricular contexts.

This policy applies to:

- students in Junior Cycle, Transition Year, Leaving Certificate Established, Leaving Certificate Applied and other senior cycle programmes;
- teachers and other school personnel involved in SPHE/RSE or related learning;
- parents/guardians and students aged 18 or over in relation to participation and withdrawal;
- visiting speakers, external facilitators and organisations supporting the school's planned programme;
- school management and the Board of Management in relation to planning, oversight, resources, child safeguarding and review.

5. Aims of RSE

- support students to build respectful, caring, equitable and healthy relationships;
- develop self-awareness, self-respect, empathy, communication and decision-making skills;
- develop a clear understanding of consent, boundaries, bodily autonomy and personal safety;
- provide accurate, age-appropriate knowledge about human sexuality, sexual health, reproduction and relationships;
- help students recognise healthy, unhealthy, coercive, abusive and exploitative behaviours and know where to seek help;
- promote respect for diversity in sex, sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, culture, religion, disability, family form and relationship experience;
- build students' capacity to critically evaluate media, online influences, pornography, social media and peer expectations;
- support responsible decision-making and awareness of legal rights and responsibilities;
- ensure students know how to access trusted adults and appropriate professional support services.

6. Curriculum provision and timetabling

6.1 Junior Cycle

Junior Cycle SPHE is delivered in accordance with the updated 2023 specification. The specification provides for 100 hours of learning across the three years of Junior Cycle and contains four strands: Understanding Myself and Others; Making Healthy Choices; Relationship and Sexuality; and Emotional Wellbeing.

The school will ensure that timetabling and programme planning provide sufficient time for the required learning outcomes to be taught progressively across first, second and third year. RSE is not treated as a once-off event or isolated module; it is planned as a coherent, developmental element of SPHE.

6.2 Senior Cycle

All students at Senior Cycle must receive RSE. The Senior Cycle SPHE Specification 2024 is a mandatory curriculum component supporting 60 hours of teaching and learning over the final two years of senior cycle. Schools may introduce it earlier, but it must be introduced for students entering fifth year by September 2027. The school will plan and timetable for full implementation within this national timeline.

For students following Leaving Certificate Applied, the current Senior Cycle SPHE arrangements introduced from 2025 will be followed in accordance with national requirements. Where the school has not yet fully introduced the 2024 Senior Cycle SPHE specification for Leaving Certificate Established students, RSE provision will continue through the school's existing planned senior-cycle programme while transition planning is completed.

6.3 Transition Year

Where SPHE/RSE is included in Transition Year, provision will support the Transition Year Programme Statement and will build on Junior Cycle learning without unnecessarily duplicating it. Learning will be responsive to students' developmental stage and will prepare them for senior-cycle SPHE.

7. Curriculum content

Exact learning is planned from the relevant NCCA specification rather than from a fixed list of legacy lessons. Teachers select and sequence learning in a way that is age-appropriate, inclusive and responsive to student need. Across the post-primary continuum, RSE learning may include:

- friendship, belonging, communication, conflict, respect and relationship skills;
- self-concept, body image, puberty, identity and diversity;
- healthy and unhealthy relationships, power, equality and stereotypes;
- personal boundaries, bodily autonomy, consent and the right to change one's mind;
- sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, with an emphasis on dignity, inclusion and challenging prejudice;
- sexual attraction, intimacy, readiness, decision-making and peer/social pressures;
- reproduction, fertility, pregnancy, contraception, sexually transmitted infections and sexual health information appropriate to curriculum level;
- sexual harassment, coercion, exploitation, abuse and routes to help and protection;
- online relationships, sexting/intimate image sharing, image-based abuse, harmful communications and digital consent;

- critical media literacy, pornography and the difference between pornography and healthy, respectful sexual relationships;
- legal rights and responsibilities, including the law on sexual consent and relevant protections for children and young people;
- parenting, family diversity and support services.

8. Teaching and learning approach

RSE will be taught using approaches that protect student dignity and support meaningful learning. Teachers will:

- establish agreed class ground rules and revisit them as required;
- use inclusive and non-stigmatising language;
- avoid requiring or encouraging students to disclose personal sexual experiences or private family information;
- use distancing techniques, scenarios, anonymous question boxes and other appropriate methods where helpful;
- ensure learning is educational and not sensational, graphic or voyeuristic;
- differentiate teaching for age, stage of development, literacy, language and additional educational needs;
- address misinformation and prejudice calmly and factually;
- provide opportunities for reflection and discussion while making clear that students are not required to reveal personal beliefs or experiences;
- use current NCCA, Oide, HSE, Webwise and other professionally appropriate materials that align with the curriculum and school policy.

9. Inclusion and additional educational needs

The school is committed to accessible RSE for all students. Planning will have regard to disability, additional educational needs, neurodiversity, communication needs, literacy, cultural background, family circumstances and other relevant factors. Differentiation will not be used to deny students essential learning about safety, consent, relationships or sexual health.

Where necessary, the SPHE/RSE teacher will work with the SEN/AEN team, Student Support Team and parents/guardians, while respecting student dignity and confidentiality, to identify appropriate supports or adaptations.

10. Partnership with parents/guardians

Parents/guardians are important partners in RSE. The school will provide clear information about the RSE/SPHE programme, the curriculum specifications and how parents/guardians can raise questions or concerns. The school will encourage age-appropriate discussion at home and may use learning activities that support parent/guardian engagement.

The policy will be available to the school community. Parents/guardians will be informed about significant changes to RSE provision and, where appropriate, about external speakers or programmes that form part of the planned curriculum.

11. Withdrawal from RSE/SPHE learning

In accordance with section 30(2)(e) of the Education Act 1998 and current Department guidance, a parent/guardian may request that their child not attend particular classes or learning where the content conflicts with their conscience or personal beliefs. A student aged 18 or over may make such a request on their own behalf.

For good administration and to ensure safe alternative arrangements, the school asks that a withdrawal request be made to the Principal in writing, identifying the particular aspect(s) of the programme concerned. A reason is not required. The school may offer to discuss the curriculum content so that any misunderstanding can be clarified, but participation in such a discussion is optional.

Where a student is withdrawn, the school will make reasonable supervised alternative arrangements. Withdrawal from a particular RSE lesson does not automatically exempt a student from related factual content that properly forms part of another subject curriculum. The school will communicate this distinction clearly.

12. Sensitive issues, questions and classroom boundaries

RSE necessarily includes sensitive issues. Questions will be handled factually, respectfully, within the learning outcomes and with regard to age and developmental stage. Teachers may defer a question when it is outside the curriculum, too personal, requires specialist advice or would be inappropriate to answer in a group setting.

Teachers will not provide individual medical diagnosis, legal advice or personal counselling on sexual behaviour. They may provide general educational information and identify appropriate professional services or trusted sources of support. Where a student seeks individual help, the teacher will follow school support and safeguarding procedures.

13. Confidentiality and child safeguarding

Students will be told clearly that teachers cannot promise confidentiality where a child protection or welfare concern arises. Staff will not investigate disclosures themselves. Any concern that meets the threshold for action under the Child Protection Procedures will be dealt with immediately in accordance with the procedures formally adopted by the Board and the school's Child Safeguarding Statement.

A disclosure or information about sexual activity is not managed by a blanket rule. Staff must consider the circumstances and follow the current Child Protection Procedures, including referral to the Designated Liaison Person where a child protection concern may arise. Particular attention will be paid to indicators of coercion, exploitation, abuse, significant age or power imbalance, harmful sexual behaviour, image-based abuse or risk to the student or others.

The 2022 policy's statement that all underage sexual activity leads to parental notification should not be retained. Current child-protection procedures require case-specific safeguarding assessment and the prescribed DLP/reporting process.

14. Consent, sexual activity and legal information

Students will receive accurate, age-appropriate information on consent and the law. Under current Irish law, the age of consent to sexual activity is 17. Teaching will also make clear that consent must be freely and voluntarily given and can be withdrawn, and that the law contains additional protections in situations involving children, persons in authority, coercion, exploitation and capacity.

Teachers will not attempt to provide a detailed legal interpretation of individual situations. Where a legal or safeguarding concern arises, the school's child protection and support procedures will be followed.

15. Online sexual content, pornography and intimate images

The RSE programme will address the influence of online content on expectations about bodies, sexuality and relationships. Pornography will be addressed through critical media literacy and the values of respect, equality, consent, dignity and safety. Students will be taught that pornography is not an appropriate source of education about healthy sexual relationships.

Students will also learn, at an age-appropriate level, about digital consent, sexting, non-consensual sharing of intimate images, online coercion, grooming, harmful communications and how to seek help. Teaching will be consistent with the school's Acceptable Use Policy, Bí Cineálta Policy, Child Safeguarding Statement and current law.

16. Visiting speakers and external facilitators

The school recognises that suitably chosen external facilitators can supplement and enrich the planned SPHE/RSE programme, but they do not replace the teacher-led curriculum. Any use of external facilitators will comply with Circular 0043/2018 and current Department wellbeing guidance.

Before an external input is approved, the relevant school organiser and Principal/designated senior leader will ensure that:

- the proposed input is clearly linked to identified curriculum learning outcomes and the school's planned programme;
- the provider, content, methodology, resources and key messages have been reviewed in advance;
- the facilitator is made aware of the school's ethos, RSE policy, child safeguarding requirements, Bí Cineálta policy and relevant classroom expectations;
- parents/guardians are informed where appropriate;
- a teacher remains present and retains responsibility for the class throughout the session;
- the presentation is not used for commercial promotion, fundraising or advocacy unrelated to the curriculum;
- the input is evaluated afterwards and any concerns are recorded and addressed.

17. Roles and responsibilities

Role	Key responsibilities
Board of Management	Ratifies and reviews the policy; ensures lawful curriculum provision, appropriate resources, child safeguarding oversight and support for staff professional learning.
Principal / Senior Management	Ensures timetabling, programme planning, staff deployment, parent communication, external-facilitator approval, policy implementation and inspection readiness.
SPHE/RSE Coordinator / Team	Coordinates curriculum planning, resources, staff support, continuity across year groups, review and evaluation, and communication with management.
Teachers	Plan and teach the relevant specification; create safe learning environments; use appropriate resources; respect professional boundaries; follow child protection procedures and engage in CPD.
Student Support / Guidance / SEN-AEN Teams	Provide appropriate supports, advice and differentiation while maintaining clear professional and safeguarding boundaries.
Students	Engage respectfully, observe class agreements, avoid pressuring peers to disclose personal information and seek help where needed.

Parents/Guardians	Engage with information provided by the school, raise concerns constructively and support age-appropriate learning and discussion at home.

18. Staff professional learning

The Board and Senior Management recognise that high-quality SPHE/RSE depends on teachers having confidence, subject knowledge and appropriate pedagogical skill. The school will support access to relevant Oide, NCCA, Department and other approved professional learning.

Particular priorities for 2026/27 are: the 2023 Junior Cycle SPHE specification; preparation for the 2024 Senior Cycle SPHE specification; teaching RSE across the post-primary continuum; planning for sensitive issues; consent and relationships; inclusive RSE; online sexual content; and safeguarding boundaries.

19. Resources

Preferred sources include:

- NCCA Junior Cycle and Senior Cycle SPHE specifications and online SPHE/RSE teacher toolkits;
- Oide SPHE/RSE professional learning and support materials;
- Department of Education and Youth curriculum, wellbeing, child safeguarding and Bí Cineálta guidance;
- HSE sexual health and wellbeing education resources;
- Webwise online-safety resources;
- other resources reviewed by the SPHE/RSE team and approved by school management as suitable, accurate, inclusive and aligned with the curriculum.

Legacy resources may be retained only where they remain educationally appropriate and accurate. Dead links, superseded materials and resources based on outdated curriculum structures should be removed from the school plan.

20. Monitoring, review and evaluation

This policy will be reviewed annually by school management and the Board of Management, and sooner where there is a material change in legislation, Department procedures, curriculum specifications, school structures or identified need. Review will include student, parent/guardian and staff voice.

The review will consider, at a minimum:

- whether required SPHE/RSE curriculum time is actually timetabled and delivered;
- coverage and progression of learning outcomes across Junior and Senior Cycle;
- student experience, inclusion and sense of safety in SPHE/RSE;
- parent/guardian awareness and communication;
- staff confidence, training and access to suitable resources;
- quality assurance for visiting speakers/external facilitators;
- withdrawal requests and whether alternative arrangements are clear and workable;
- any safeguarding, equality, Bí Cineálta or online-safety issues that indicate a need to adjust provision;
- progress towards mandatory implementation of Senior Cycle SPHE by September 2027.

Appendix 1 - 2026 Compliance and Inspection-Readiness Checklist

Area	Evidence required	Complete
Policy currency	Version 2 references current Junior Cycle SPHE 2023, Senior Cycle SPHE 2024, Circular 0043/2018, Bí Cineálta and current child protection arrangements.	☑
Junior Cycle timetable	School can evidence sufficient timetabled provision to deliver the 100-hour Junior Cycle SPHE specification across three years.	☑
Junior Cycle planning	Department/NCCA learning outcomes are mapped across 1st-3rd year; legacy year-topic lists are no longer the primary planning framework.	☑
Senior Cycle provision	All senior-cycle students receive RSE. School has documented its position and plan for full Senior Cycle SPHE implementation by Sept 2027.	☑
LCA	Provision reflects the current Senior Cycle SPHE arrangements applicable to LCA students.	☑
Staff awareness	All SPHE/RSE teachers have received the current policy and know safeguarding/confidentiality boundaries.	☑
CPD	A 2026/27 SPHE/RSE professional-learning plan is recorded.	☑
Parents	Parents/guardians receive accessible information on curriculum, policy and withdrawal arrangements.	☑
Student voice	Student experience of SPHE/RSE is gathered and considered in review.	☑
External facilitators	Approval, curriculum link, prior content review, teacher presence and evaluation are documented.	☑

Child safeguarding	RSE policy wording aligns with the Child Protection Procedures currently adopted by the Board; no blanket 'underage sexual activity' rule is used.	☑
Bí Cineálta / inclusion	RSE planning supports prevention of sexist, sexual, homophobic and transphobic bullying and sexual harassment.	☑
Resources	Current NCCA/Oide/HSE/Webwise resources are used; superseded PDST/dead links have been removed.	☑
BOM ratification	Ratification and review dates are recorded in minutes and on the policy.	☑

Appendix 2 - Principal's Recommended BOM Minute

The Board of Management reviewed the school's Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) Policy and noted the changes required to reflect the Junior Cycle SPHE Specification 2023, the Senior Cycle SPHE Specification 2024 and implementation timeline, current Department guidance on external facilitators, current child protection procedures, Bí Cineálta requirements and updated curriculum resources. The Board approved Version 2 of the RSE Policy, subject to completion of the school-specific implementation fields and confirmation of the current Senior Cycle SPHE implementation plan. The Board directed that the ratified policy be communicated to staff, students and parents/guardians and be made available through the school's normal policy publication arrangements.

Appendix 3 - Ratification and review record

Version	V2
Consultation with staff	Date/method: Staff Meeting – 27/08/26
Consultation with students	Date/method: Assembly – 03 Sept 2026
Consultation with parents/guardians	Date/method: Sent via Email – Sept 2026
Ratified by Board of Management	Date: 24/08 2026
Next scheduled review	August 2027, or earlier if required

Chairperson, Board of Management Signature: X Date: 24/8/26	Principal Signature: Jane O'Shaughnessy Date: 24/08/26
Policy published/communicated on: Sept 11th 2026	

Appendix 4 - Official reference documents checked for Version 2

- Department of Education and Youth - Circular 0023/2010, SPHE and RSE: Best Practice Guidelines for Post-Primary Schools.
- Department of Education and Youth - Circular 0043/2018, Best practice guidance for post-primary schools in the use of programmes and/or external facilitators in promoting wellbeing.

- NCCA - Junior Cycle Social, Personal and Health Education Specification (2023), 100 hours across Junior Cycle.
- NCCA - Senior Cycle Social, Personal and Health Education Specification (2024), 60 hours over the final two years of Senior Cycle.
- Department of Education and Youth - Senior Cycle redevelopment implementation information: Senior Cycle SPHE to be introduced for fifth-year students no later than September 2027; current LCA arrangements apply from 2025.
- Department of Education and Youth - Child Protection Procedures for Schools 2025 and Circular 0041/2025. Schools must adopt the 2025 procedures no later than the final Board meeting before 31 December 2026.
- Department of Education and Youth - Junior Cycle SPHE information for parents/guardians, including the option to opt out where content conflicts with personal beliefs.
- Department of Education and Youth - Bí Cineálta Procedures to Prevent and Address Bullying Behaviour, effective 1 September 2025.
- Criminal Law (Sexual Offences) Act 2017 - current statutory provisions on age of consent and consent.
- NCCA SPHE/RSE Online Toolkits and Oide SPHE/RSE professional learning supports, including 2026 RSE and sensitive-issues professional learning.