



Errigal College Letterkenny

Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) Policy

February 2026

Proposer:	Mr Eron Gurnell .
Seconder:	Mr Paul M'Laughlin
Chairperson of the Board of Management:	Donal Coyle
Principal:	Danny McFadden
Date of Approval:	25th March 2026

1. Mission Statement

Our Mission Statement:

To enable each student to achieve their educational potential, in partnership with parents, based on the principles of caring, dignity, mutual respect and equality.

We are an ETB school, state, co-educational and multi-denominational, underpinned by the core values of:

- Excellence in Education
- Care
- Equality
- Community
- Respect



2. Consultation

This policy was devised through a collaborative process that involved input from the SPHE coordinator, SPHE teachers and key stakeholders within the school community. The SPHE team held meetings to review current practices and align them with the Department of Education and Youth's SPHE specifications. Feedback was gathered to ensure the policy reflects best practice in teaching SPHE and addresses the specific needs of our students. This policy aims to provide a comprehensive, supportive and inclusive SPHE programme that promotes the wellbeing of all students in Errigal College.

3. Scope of the Policy

This policy has been drawn up in consultation with the Board of Management, staff, parents and students of Errigal College. The policy applies to all students and their parents/guardians who wish to or have enrolled or transferred to Errigal College as a student.

This policy should be read in conjunction with all other Errigal College policies, which are available on request from the school principal, administration office or on the school's official website.

4. Operating Context

4.1 Relevant Legislation:

The Education Act (1998) emphasises that schools should promote the social and personal development of students and provide health education for them.

Errigal College's SPHE Policy reflects the ethos of the school. The attitudes, skills and values fostered in the SPHE classroom are evident throughout Errigal College where all members of the school community are treated with respect and dignity.

A school climate which encourages open communication, where conflict is handled restoratively and which promotes high standards in all its endeavours is an environment in which the core principles of SPHE can thrive. School policies and procedures which are regularly reviewed and evaluated are the foundations on which a healthy school can be built.

SPHE (at Junior Cycle) forms a core pillar of wellbeing in Errigal College and the Department of Education and Youth ensures that,

- the promotion of wellbeing will be at the core of the ethos of every school and centre for education;
- all schools and centres for education will provide evidence-informed approaches and support, appropriate to need, to promote the wellbeing of all their children and young people.

Schools and centres for education will be supported by the OIDE support team.

The development of the SPHE programme will focus on and be subject to:

- The context and parameters of the Department of Education and Youth regulations and programmes;
- The rights of the patron, i.e. ETB as set out in the Education Act;
- The Mission Statement as set out above;
- The funding and resources available.

Throughout the implementation of the wellbeing policy Errigal College will continue to support the principles of:

- Inclusiveness in enrolment policies;
- Equality of access and participation in the school;
- Parental choice in relation to enrolment;
- Respect for diversity of traditions, values, beliefs, languages and ways of life in society;
- The enrollment of students who have a disability or other special educational needs.

4.2 Funding Bodies:

The financial, physical and teaching resources of the school are provided by

- Grants received from the Department of Education and Youth via Donegal ETB.
- The teacher allocations from the Department of Education and Youth.
- Additional facilities for school and community use.
- The implementation of the school plan and school policies, having due regard to resources and funding available.

The school operates within the guidelines and regulations agreed by the Department of Education and Youth and Donegal Education and Training Board. The school follows the curricular programmes detailed in the prospectus for the school year as prescribed by the Department of Education and Youth, which may be amended from time to time in accordance with Sections 9 and 30 of the Education Act 1998.

5. School Details

5.1 Type of School

Errigal College operates under the trusteeship of Donegal ETB and is grant aided and publicly funded. ETB schools are state, co-educational, multi denominational schools underpinned by the ETB ethos with its core values of:

- Excellence in Education.
- Care.
- Equality.
- Community.
- Respect.

In ETB schools, all students are given equal opportunities for enrolment in line with the Education (Admissions to School) Act 2018. Once enrolled, our schools strive to provide all students with equal opportunities to engage with the curriculum and school life. In all aspects of school life all members of our school communities are treated equitably regardless of their race, gender, religion/belief, age, family status, civil status, membership of the Traveller community, sexual orientation, ability or socio-economic status.

Our schools provide a safe physical and social environment that reinforces a sense of belonging to the school community and wider society. They strive to enable every student to realise their full potential regardless of any aspect of their identity or background. Our schools promote a fully inclusive education that recognises the plurality of identities, beliefs and values held by students, parents and staff. We prepare open-minded, culturally sensitive and responsible citizens with a strong sense of shared values.

5.2 Management

- Errigal College is under the patronage of Donegal ETB
- Errigal College's Board of Management manages the school on behalf of the patron.

Members of Board of Management:

- Cllr Donal Coyle, Chairperson- Donegal ETB Nominee
- Cllr Tomas Sean Devine- Donegal ETB Nominee
- Ms Joanne Donaghy- Donegal ETB Nominee
- Cllr Jimmy Kavanagh- Donegal ETB Nominee
- Ms Regina Grant- Community Nominee
- Cllr Gerry McMonagle- Community Nominee
- Ms Philomena McDonough- Parent Nominee
- Mr Paul McLaughlin- Parent Nominee
- Mr Evan Gorrell- Teacher Nominee
- Ms Cora Higgins- Teacher Nominee
- Mr Danny McFadden- Secretary to the Board/ Principal

5.3 Organisations

- A Parents' Association and Student Council have been established.

5.4 Curriculum Provision

The following programmes are offered at Junior Cycle:

- Junior Cycle
- The Junior Certificate School Programme (JCSP)
- Level Two Learning Programme (L2LP's)
- Level One Learning Programme (L1LP's)

The following programmes are offered at Senior Cycle:

- Transition Year
- Leaving Certificate Programme
- Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP)
- Leaving Certificate Applied Programme (LCA)

5.5 Extra-Curricular Activities / Parallel Curriculum

These activities complement the formal curriculum in contributing to the all-round holistic development of students. Such activities offered in the school include: Drama/Music, Gaisce, Lunch-time clubs, GAA, Soccer, Basketball, Athletics, Swimming, Coding and Educational Tours. All students are encouraged to participate in extracurricular activities.

5.6 Other Relevant Information:

Full details of the school calendar for the school academic year will be published at the commencement of each year.

6. SPHE in Errigal College

6.1 Introduction

Errigal College recognises that the world in which we live presents young people with many opportunities and challenges that affect their health and wellbeing. A student who has developed good self-esteem and a sense of security will be better able to meet these challenges and opportunities.

SPHE supports this personal development, health and wellbeing of young people. It provides them with opportunities to develop skills and competence to learn about themselves and to care for themselves and others and to make informed decisions about their health, personal lives and development.

At Errigal College we are committed to the holistic development of students as individuals, and this is reflected in our SPHE programme, which is an integral part of our overall Wellbeing plan.

SPHE complements the school's mission statement of creating a caring learning environment for all our school community. Our vision within SPHE is to equip students with the skills necessary to cope with and adapt to changes that they are confronted with during adolescence and into young adulthood.

Errigal College recognises that the home is the natural environment in which children grow, develop and mature into adults. In line with the Education Act (1998) Errigal College supports parents and guardians in this work by promoting the social and personal development of students and by providing health education for them.

6.2 Definitions of SPHE

“Social, personal and health education (SPHE) provides students with a unique space where students can develop the knowledge, understanding, skills, dispositions and values needed to support their physical, emotional, social and spiritual wellbeing now and in the future. The SPHE specification is grounded in values of respect, equality, inclusivity, responsibility, dignity, compassion and empathy”. (Department of Education, 2023, p.4)

“This course aims to develop the knowledge, understanding, skills, dispositions and values that will empower students to be healthy, resilient, confident, responsible and empathetic young adults; nurture respectful, loving and caring relationships; and prepare for the opportunities, responsibilities and experiences of life now and beyond school”. (Department of Education, 2024, p.5)

6.3 Aims of SPHE

- To enable students to develop skills for self-fulfilment and living in communities.
- To promote self-esteem and confidence.
- To enable students to develop a framework for responsible decision making.
- To provide opportunities for reflection and discussion.
- To promote physical, mental and emotional health and well-being.

7. Outline of the SPHE Programme

7.1 Context

The Department of Education and Youth recognises that each school has flexibility within the SPHE frameworks to plan the SPHE programme most suitable for the students and the school.

7.2 Junior Cycle SPHE Provision

Each Junior Cycle class is timetabled for one 60 minute period of SPHE a week. The curriculum for SPHE in Junior Cycle is timetabled in four ‘Strands’, each of which appears in each year of the three year Junior Cycle programme.

The ‘Strands’ are listed below:

- 1. Understanding Myself and Others-** This strand focuses on developing self-awareness and self-esteem and building some of the foundational skills and dispositions needed for healthy relationships and to thrive in life, including communicating and negotiating, listening, showing empathy, respecting difference, and self management/self-regulation.
- 2. Making Healthy Choices-** This strand offers opportunities for students to consider how they can make healthy choices to support their wellbeing. It explores what being healthy might look like for a teenager, what helps or gets in the way of making healthy choices and how to access reliable information to support good choices
- 3. Relationships and Sexuality-** This strand explores the cognitive, physical, emotional and social aspects of relationships and sexuality through a positive, inclusive, rights and responsibilities-based approach. The focus is on family relationships, friendships, romantic and potential sexual relationships in the future.
- 4. Emotional Wellbeing-** This strand primarily focuses on nurturing emotional wellbeing and promoting positive mental health.

Topics covered in Junior Cycle

1st Year Topics	2nd Year Topics	3rd Year Topics
Understanding Myself and Building Connections	Understanding Myself and Others	Understanding my Thoughts and Actions
Building a Healthy Mind and Body	Mind and Body Wellbeing	Caring for my Mind and Body
Substance Abuse	Substance Use: Effects and Influences	Understanding and Dealing with substance abuse
Relationships and Sexuality	Reproductive Health and Relationships	Intimate Relationships
Being Safe and Respectful Online and in Person	Protecting Myself Online and in Person	Sexual and Emotional Wellbeing

7.3 Transition Year

Transition year students receive one 60 minute period of SPHE weekly. The aim of SPHE in Transition year is to encourage students to develop the skills required to build coping mechanisms and resilience needed to deal with difficult situations.

This programme is subject to change depending on the needs of individual classes and circumstances and issues which may be relevant at the time. This must include teaching and learning in Relationships and Sexuality. The suggested broad strands/ themes are listed below:

1. Personal Awareness and Wellbeing
2. Healthy Relationships and RSE
3. Decision-making & Resilience
4. Substance Awareness and Risk Reduction
5. Digital Wellbeing & Safety
6. Community, Identity & Respect

7.4 Senior Cycle (Leaving Certificate and LCVP) Provision

Students are timetabled for one 60 minute period of SPHE per week. The Senior Cycle SPHE curriculum specification contains three 'Strands'.

The three 'Strands' are listed below:

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.

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.
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.

Topics Covered at Senior Cycle

Health and Wellbeing	Relationships and Sexuality	Into Adulthood
Factors that influence health and wellbeing generally.	Healthy relationships	Self-management and self-care skills
Fostering positive mental health	Gender, Culture and Social-Norms	Rights and responsibilities before the law
Coping with emotional or mental health challenges	Abusive and violent relationships	Ways to advocate for and create greater equality
Safely managing social situations	Sexual health	

7.5 Senior Cycle (Leaving Certificate Applied) Provision

Students in Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) study the Senior Cycle SPHE curriculum in their Social Education Module.

7.6 Assessment and Reporting- Junior Cycle

2023 Short Course Specification

“The SPHE course supports a wide variety of approaches to assessment. It is envisaged that most assessment in SPHE will be formative in nature and students will provide evidence of their learning through multiple means of expression, including oral, written, visual, digital and art-based pieces. In these contexts, students, with their teachers and peers, will reflect upon and make judgements about their own and others’ learning by looking at the quality of particular pieces of work, and they will agree the next steps in their learning based on feedback they give and receive. In this way, ongoing formative assessment can support the student in their learning journey and in preparing for the Classroom-Based Assessment related to this course”. (Department of Education, 2023, p.18)

Considering the diversity of learners in and contexts, and to support maximum flexibility and choice, students will engage in **one** of the following types of CBA.

1. Portfolio of my learning and reflection in SPHE: Individual selection of items of work, such as digital, written texts, posters, audio-visual or multi-modal.

2. Taking action for SPHE: Individual or small group project that can be presented in a wide range of formats.

8. Teaching Methodologies

8.1 Teaching Methods

The subject of SPHE is primarily skills-based. Teaching methods must be of an experiential nature with an emphasis on discussion, reflection and classroom participation. These teaching methods will be child centred and appropriate to the age, stage and development of the student. The class atmosphere must be one of respect for the safety of each individual student and marked by sensitivity and care.

Examples of some of the methods used are as follows:

- Group activities and projects
- Pair work
- Class discussion, brainstorming, role play and debates
- Artwork, storyboards
- Guest speakers
- Quizzes and games
- Watching videos and listening to case studies
- Research, case studies and class projects
- Situation Cards, Dilemma Boards
- Visualisation, guided imagery and relaxation
- Visitors or guest speakers

8.2 Role of Coordinator

Errigal College has a SPHE designated coordinator who is responsible for managing resources, facilitating in-service training and the management and organisation of the curriculum. **Ms. Marisa Roarty** is currently the SPHE coordinator in Errigal College.

8.3 CPD Training

All members of the SPHE team are encouraged to attend in-service training regularly. The core team for the delivery of SPHE consists of approximately ten members, however this is subject to change depending on enrolment. A record of all completed CPD is kept by the coordinator.

8.4 Participation

SPHE is a core curricular subject in both Junior Cycle and Senior Cycle. It forms a key pillar in the delivery of Wellbeing in Errigal College.

RSE is a strand of the subject and is interweaved throughout the SPHE curriculum. Parents or guardians can opt their children out of SPHE classes if they feel the content conflicts with their personal beliefs, but they are encouraged to provide alternative SPHE at home. Any parent opting out of SPHE should make suitable arrangements with the school.

Where children are withdrawn from SPHE the school cannot take responsibility for any versions of school content passed onto them by other students.

8.5 Sensitive Issues

While it is acknowledged that teachers 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, Errigal College will refer students to other supportive links or services, internal or external to the school community e.g. Student Support Team, Year Head, Guidance Counsellor, etc.

Class discussion will be of a general nature in accordance with previously agreed ground rules and will not be personally directed. If any questions asked by students are deemed to be inappropriate, the teacher will state that this information may be available at a later stage of the curriculum or address the issue through other school policies. 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, advice should be sought from the Designated Liaison Person (DLP) in line with Child Protection Guidelines. When deciding whether or not to answer questions the teacher should consider the age and readiness of the students, the SPHE programme content, the ethos of the school and use their professional judgement.

8.6 Confidentiality

The normal limits of confidentiality will apply to any information coming to the attention of the SPHE 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 school's Child Protection Policy and 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 (DLP) and ensure that that all reporting procedures are complied with.

The Board of Management has appointed Mr. Danny McFadden as the Designated Liaison Person (DLP) and Ms. Deirdre Markham as the Deputy Designated Liaison Person (DDL).

8.7 The Role of Visitors

The SPHE teacher will consult with the Principal in relation to the suitability of guest speakers prior to their invitation to the school.

It is of the utmost importance that classroom teachers remain in the classroom with the students and retain a central role in delivery of the core subject matter of the SPHE programme. The presence of the classroom teacher should ensure that the school follows

appropriate procedures for dealing with any issues that may arise as a result of the external inputs.

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 the young people for whom the programmes are designed.

All programmes, talks, interventions and events should be evaluated by students and teachers in terms of the subject matter, messages, structure, methodology and proposed learning outcomes. Preparatory and follow-up work, where possible, should be undertaken by the class.

8.8 Parents and Guardians

Parents/guardians of incoming first years will be informed of the content of the SPHE curriculum at the first year information evening. Current Junior and Senior Cycle students will be informed of the policy through their SPHE class. A full and complete curriculum specification, core resource materials and policy documents will be available from the principal or SPHE coordinator if a parent/guardian wishes to review this material. Parents/guardians will be informed of any substantial changes in the programme made by the Department of Education and Youth.

8.9 Junior Cycle Resources

Junior Cycle HSE resources are available [here](#).

Junior Cycle 2023 Specification and 'SPHE Toolkit' can be found [here](#).

SPHE Assessment Guidelines for CBA's can be found [here](#).

8.10 Senior Cycle Resources

Curriculum online resources are available [here](#).

Senior Cycle 2024 Specification can be found [here](#).

9. Monitoring, Evaluating and Reviewing the SPHE programme

Monitoring and Evaluation

Errigal College is committed to monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of the SPHE programme. Ongoing reviews and evaluations will take place regularly and will be guided by changing information, guidelines, legislation and feedback from the DEIS Plan, the Donegal ETB, the Board of Management, parents/guardians, students and teachers.

The SPHE policy will be reviewed at 3 year intervals or sooner if necessary.

Some practical indicators will be used to gauge the impact and effectiveness of the policy. Such indicators include the following:

1. A student and teacher evaluation form may be given to some classes at the end of an SPHE module or yearly programme.
2. The range of resource material available to teachers.
3. The in-service training availed of by teachers.

4. Students awareness of the policy.
5. Parents and Guardians awareness of the policy.
6. Feedback is received from teachers, students, parents/guardians and members of the Board of Management.

Signed: 
Donal Coyle

(Chairperson of the Board of Management)

Signed: 
Danny McFadden

(Principal)

References:

Department of Education, National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (2023) '*Short Course Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE), Specification for Junior Cycle*'. Dublin: Stationery Office. Available at:

https://curriculumonline.ie/getmedia/ca8f8975-50ca-4dc3-bba5-a04e25b4f978/JC_SPHE_Short_Course_2023.pdf [Accessed 16 March 2026].

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<https://www.curriculumonline.ie/getmedia/759a3a1d-9736-40d4-9f57-234443d2a344/SC-SPHE-Spec-JULY-24-p9.pdf> [Accessed 16 March 2026].

