



**Circular 0023/2010**

**To Chairpersons of Boards of Management and Principals  
of all Post-Primary Schools**

**Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) & Relationships and  
Sexuality Education (RSE)  
Best Practice Guidelines for Post-Primary Schools**

**INTRODUCTION**

The Department of Education and Science wishes to advise management authorities of the necessity to adhere to best practice guidelines in the mandatory implementation of SPHE/RSE in the junior cycle and RSE in the senior cycle.

National and international research has consistently shown that the qualified classroom teacher is the best placed professional to work sensitively and consistently with students and that s/he can have a powerful impact on influencing students' attitudes, values and behaviour in all aspects of health education.

The SPHE/RSE programme should have a substantial skills development element and should not merely be information based. Such skills are developed over time and founded on an ongoing relationship based on trust, understanding and mutual respect.

Young people flourish in an environment where there is a whole-school approach to the holistic growth of students and where there is a shared belief in their potential for development, learning and wellbeing.

**RESPONSIBILITY OF SCHOOLS**

***The Education Act (1998) states that:***

*A recognised school shall promote the moral, spiritual, social and personal development of students and provide health education for them, in consultation with their parents, having regard to the characteristic spirit of the school.*

School management, principals and teachers have a duty to provide the best quality and most appropriate social, personal and health education for their students. They also have a duty to protect students in their care at all times from any potentially harmful, inappropriate or misguided resources, interventions or programmes.

**VISITORS TO POST-PRIMARY SCHOOLS: GUIDELINES**

If schools wish to enhance or supplement SPHE/RSE by inviting visitors to the classroom precise criteria must apply. Outside facilitators who contribute to the SPHE/RSE programme can play a valuable role in

supplementing, complementing and supporting a planned, comprehensive and established SPHE/RSE programme. Any such visitor or visiting group should adhere to the guidelines of good practice as set out in the SPHE Handbook Section 7 and which are condensed herewith:

- Visitors to the classroom or school, particularly those engaging directly with students, should be aware of relevant school policies including the school's child protection policy, RSE policy and substance misuse policy. Any such visit must be carefully planned in advance in line with the relevant whole-school SPHE/RSE programme(s) and policies.
- Talks/programmes delivered by outside agencies or speakers must be consistent with and complementary to the school's ethos and SPHE/RSE programme. Visits should be planned, researched and implemented in partnership with school personnel.
- Relevant teachers need to liaise with and be involved with all visitors and external agencies working with the school and the whole staff needs to be made aware of same.
- It is strongly recommended that parents should be consulted and made aware of any such visiting people or agencies to classrooms / schools.
- The school's SPHE/RSE coordinator may also help in the process of whole-school planning and coordination to support the effective implementation of SPHE/RSE.
- 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/RSE programme. The presence of the classroom teacher should ensure that the school follows appropriate procedures for dealing with any issue(s) that may arise as a result of the external input(s).
- 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.

### **PLEASE NOTE**

Research findings indicate that the following teaching approaches have limited effect and are counterproductive to the effective implementation of SPHE. In light of this, schools are advised to avoid the following approaches:

#### ***Scare tactics***

Information that induces fear, and exaggerates negative consequences, is inappropriate and counterproductive.

#### ***Sensationalist interventions***

Interventions that glamorise or portray risky behaviour in an exciting way are inappropriate and can encourage inappropriate risk taking.

#### ***Testimonials***

Stories focused on previous dangerous lifestyles can encourage the behaviour they were designed to prevent by creating heroes/heroines of individuals who give testimony.

#### ***Information only interventions***

Programmes which are based on information alone are very limited in the learning outcomes they can achieve and can in fact be counter productive in influencing values, attitudes and behaviour.

***Information that is not age appropriate***

Giving information to students about behaviours they are unlikely to engage in can be counterproductive in influencing values, attitudes and behaviour.

***Once off/short term interventions***

Short-term interventions, whether planned or in reaction to a crisis, are ineffective.

***Normalising young people's risky behaviour***

Giving the impression to young people, directly or indirectly, that all their peers will engage/are engaging in risky behaviours could put pressure on them to do things they would not otherwise do.

***Didactic approach***

Didactic approaches which are solely directive in nature are ineffective in the successful implementation of SPHE/RSE.

**FURTHER INFORMATION**

Information, advice and support is available from the SPHE Support Service which is a partnership between the Department of Education and Science, the Department of Health and Children, and the Health Service Executive, in association with Marino Institute of Education.

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Please bring this circular to the attention of teachers and members of the school board of management. This circular may also be accessed at [www.education.ie](http://www.education.ie) under Education Personnel/Circulars.

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