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Dominican College Muckross Park Relationship and Sexuality Education Policy

September 2026

'Be who God meant you to be and you will set the world on fire'.
Catherine of Siena

Our Vision
As a school in the Catholic, Dominican tradition, our educational vision as expressed in our motto, Veritas, encompasses the lifelong search for truth, respect for tradition, and commitment to human flourishing.

Our Mission

We are proud of our lived Christian heritage, which inspires us to welcome and respect people of all backgrounds and beliefs. We tailor our educational approach to the needs of each individual student. We aim to excel in teaching and learning and provide an extensive programme of additional activities as we believe that every student deserves the opportunity to flourish.

Sustained by our Dominican tradition, we invite our students to engage with the values of Jesus Christ, who is the Way, the Truth and the Life. Our educational community cultivates care in our students and staff for themselves, their neighbours, and their planet. We aim to strengthen empathy, nurture integrity and discernment, and generate a love of lifelong learning throughout our school community.

1. Rationale and Context

Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) is an integral and statutory part of the curriculum at Dominican College Muckross Park. In line with Department of Education guidelines, every student receives RSE as a core component of their education. This is primarily facilitated through the **Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE)** programme at both Junior and Leaving Certificate levels. The school recognises that for young people, this stage of development involves navigating a complex landscape of experiences, messages, and information about relationships and sexuality from various sources, including peers, media, and online platforms.

Our policy is founded on the principle that providing a safe, supportive, and formal setting for discussing these topics is crucial. It helps students to make sense of information, counter misinformation, and develop a healthy understanding of relationships and sexuality.

2. Guiding Principles

All learning within our RSE programme is underpinned by the three cross-cutting elements that are foundational for effective teaching and learning in SPHE:

- **Awareness:** Students are encouraged to develop a greater self-awareness and a deeper understanding of others. This includes recognising their own feelings, values, and rights, as well as being aware of the perspectives and rights of others.
- **Dialogue:** Lessons are designed to encourage open and respectful classroom dialogue. This allows students to ask questions, share perspectives, and engage in constructive conversations in a safe and non-judgemental environment.
- **Reflection and Action:** Students are prompted to reflect on what they are learning and to consider what it means for their lives now and in the future. This encourages them to apply their knowledge and to take responsibility for their choices and actions.

3. Curriculum and Implementation

RSE at Dominican College Muckross Park is delivered as an integral part of the SPHE curriculum. The content and teaching methodologies are aligned with the specifications set out by the Department of Education and the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA).

1. Social, Personal & Health Education (SPHE) Specification for Junior Cycle, 2023.

Junior Cycle: RSE learning activities are aligned with a range of learning outcomes within Strand 3 (Relationships and sexuality) and Strand 1 (Understanding myself and others) of the junior cycle SPHE curriculum. These activities build on learning from previous units and are designed to be taught with reference to the **Junior Cycle SPHE Toolkit** developed by the NCCA. This toolkit provides comprehensive guidance on teaching SPHE in a safe and effective manner.

2. Curriculum Specification for Senior Cycle Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) 2024.

Senior Cycle: RSE continues to be an integral part of the senior cycle SPHE curriculum, ensuring students are provided with the knowledge, skills, and values to make informed decisions about their lives as they transition into adulthood. The Curriculum Specification for Senior Cycle Social, Personal and Health Education 2024 outlines 3 key strands. In Strand 2: Relationships and Sexuality, students 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.

4. Learning Materials

The Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) program at Dominican College Muckross Park utilises materials that are specifically written and provided by the HSE Education section in conjunction with the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA). These comprehensive resources, which form the basis of the RSE curriculum, are outlined in Appendix 1 of this policy document and are subject to an annual review to ensure they remain current, accurate, and aligned with educational standards.

In accordance with the Department of Education's Circular 0043/2018, Dominican College Muckross Park does not use external facilitators to address learning outcomes relating to RSE, recognising that the qualified classroom teacher is best placed to work sensitively and consistently with students.

CPD opportunities are provided to all teachers teaching RSE and a record of CPD is kept by the subject department.

Each of the learning outcomes at both Junior and Senior cycle is taught in a way that LGBTQ+ identities, relationships and families are fully integrated and reflected in teaching and learning.

5. Partnership with Parents/Guardians

Dominican College Muckross Park believes that RSE is most effective when the school and home work in partnership. Parents and guardians are viewed as the primary educators of their children and the school's role is seen as "supportive and complementary" to the home (Circular 04/95).

Under Section 30(2)(e) of the Education Act 1998, parents have a statutory right to withdraw their child from any instruction that is contrary to their conscience. Dominican college Muckross Park respects this right.

If a parent requests that their child be withdrawn from RSE, the School requires parents to provide a formal written request for withdrawal. Parents may then be invited to meet with the Principal and / or SPHE Coordinator in order to:

- Clarify which specific parts of the curriculum they object to.
- Address any misconceptions about the content.
- Ensure the parent understands that the child may still hear RSE-related discussions from peers in the corridor, lunchroom or other classes.

(*The school has a duty of care to the student during the time they are withdrawn. The school will arrange for the pupil to be supervised in an appropriate area. The student cannot be sent home early, as this would interfere with their right to a full school day.*)

6:Transparency

Relationship and Sexuality Education is woven throughout the SPHE curriculum, using an integrated approach. Overt lessons addressing the Relationships and Sexuality Learning outcomes from Strand 3 at Junior Cycle and Strand 2 and Senior Cycle are commenced in January of each academic year, unless otherwise notified. (See Appendix 1) This consistent approach allows parents to review the content of each year's lesson plans in advance so they can be informed of their child's learning.

This RSE policy has been developed in consultation with the parent body.

7. Child Safeguarding

The safety and well-being of our students is paramount. All teachers delivering RSE are trained professionals who adhere to the school's **Child Safeguarding Statement** and related policies. The classroom environment for RSE is managed to ensure that all students feel safe, respected, and comfortable to participate.

This policy was reviewed and ratified by the Board of Management on 6th October 2026

Signed Mary White Date 6/10/26

Chairperson

Signed Siobhán Kelly Date 6/10/'26

Principal

Appendix 1.

These resources, which form the basis of the RSE curriculum, are subject to an annual review to ensure they remain current, accurate, and aligned with educational standards. This Appendix can be amended without the need to ratify a new policy document.

Junior Cycle Specification:
Social, Personal & Health Education (SPHE) Specification for Junior Cycle, 2023.
https://curriculumonline.ie/getmedia/ca8f8975-50ca-4dc3-bba5-a04e25b4f978/JC_SPHE_Short_Course_2023.pdf

1st year Materials: **Relationships and Sexuality Education 1**
https://www.hse.ie/eng/about/who/healthwellbeing/hse-education-programme/junior-cycle-sphe-training-resources/rse/relationships-and-sexuality-education-1-unit-of-learning1.pdf

2nd Year Materials: **Relationships and Sexuality Education 2**
https://www.hse.ie/eng/about/who/healthwellbeing/hse-education-programme/junior-cycle-sphe-training-resources/rse-2/relationships-and-sexuality-education-2-unit-of-learning.pdf

3rd Year Materials: **Relationships and Sexuality Education 3**
https://www.hse.ie/eng/about/who/healthwellbeing/hse-education-programme/junior-cycle-sphe-training-resources/rse-3/rse-3-unit-of-learning.pdf

Transition Year:
Communication skills for healthy relationships SPHE.
https://www.curriculumonline.ie/getmedia/dfda6cb2-e5f0-4374-8d8a-9740f6ee8b9c/Communication-skills-micro-module-Jan-13-2025.pdf
Relationships and sexuality micro-module

Senior Cycle Specification:
Curriculum Specification for Senior Cycle Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) 2024
https://www.curriculumonline.ie/getmedia/759a3a1d-9736-40d4-9f57-234443d2a344/SC-SPHE-Spec-JULY-24-p9.pdf

5th Year Materials: Relationships and Sexuality 5.

6th Year Materials: Relationship and Sexuality 6.