

School planning for SPHE

In planning SPHE it will be essential to identify approaches to

- creating a positive school climate and atmosphere
- the organisational planning of SPHE
- planning SPHE in the curriculum through discrete time and integration.

Creating a positive school climate and atmosphere

A positive school climate and atmosphere is one where individuals are valued, cared for and respected. Such an atmosphere contributes to effective teaching and learning and to genuine communication, both within and outside the school.

Every school has its own culture and distinct ways of operating, which inform the organisation of the school, the relationships in the school, and the priority given to the welfare of the individual. Any planning for SPHE that takes place must take cognisance of this context for learning and teaching. It will require building on the good practice that already exists and reflecting on the ways in which the school can promote the all-round development of its young people.

Appropriate strategies for creating a positive climate and atmosphere include

- building effective communication within the school
- catering for individual needs
- creating a health-promoting physical environment
- developing democratic processes
- enhancing self-esteem
- fostering respect for diversity
- fostering inclusive and respectful language
- developing appropriate communication between home and school
- developing a school approach to assessment.

To create a positive school climate it will be necessary for each school to begin by asking fundamental questions regarding the 'way things are done around here'. These questions will help to focus on the values and principles upheld in the school and the ways in which they are put into practice.

Fostering communication within and outside the school

Children and teachers feel valued and respected when they are listened to and when their individual concerns and opinions count. Each school will have to reflect on its own communication strategies to ensure that genuine communication is fostered at all levels.

Some questions that could be addressed are:

- 1 How do children voice their concerns?
- 2 Are they listened to?
- 3 What forms of staff communication are in place?
- 4 How are parents made welcome and listened to in the school?
- 5 How are visitors invited and welcomed?

Catering for the individual needs of the children

Children come from a variety of backgrounds, beliefs and understanding and can be at many different stages of their personal, social and health development. These factors influence the approaches taken to SPHE in the school. The curriculum will need to be adapted to suit various needs, interests and concerns and to deal with the specific environment in which the school is placed.

Creating a health-promoting physical environment

It is essential that the physical environment of the school promotes the general health and well-being of both the children and the teachers. It should be one where

- the basic physical needs, such as heat, light and adequate ventilation, are met
- appropriate facilities are provided for eating and playing
- the building and its environs are safe, promote a sense of security, and create an atmosphere that fosters living in a healthy way.

Pleasant surroundings encourage children to take pride in their own school and can provide a welcome for those who are visiting. Children can also learn how to care for and respect the wider environment as they share the responsibility for taking care of their own immediate physical surroundings.

Self-esteem can be defined as the degree to which people feel worthy, capable, significant and effective.

Developing democratic processes

A school should reflect a caring community where the welfare of each individual is fostered and the concerns of all are taken into account. Children experience and practise the democratic process where

- rules are negotiated
- responsibility is shared
- the opinions of parents, children and teachers are valued
- they feel a sense of belonging
- a sense of commitment to a common purpose is developed and understood.

The holding of a regular school assembly gives children an experience of community and can increase their sense of belonging. Other strategies to foster democracy include taking part in events on behalf of the school and celebrating individual, class or school achievements. In many situations a structure can be created where children are involved in the decision-making in the school and are given responsibilities both as individuals and as groups.

Enhancing the self-esteem and well-being of members of the school community

Without a positive sense of self-worth, the well-being of either the individual or the community is unlikely to flourish. Self-esteem can be defined as the degree to which people feel worthy, capable, significant and effective. It is essential that the school plans for a consistent approach to enhancing the self-concept and self-esteem of all its community by including opportunities to foster

- a sense of identity
- a sense of purpose
- a sense of belonging
- a sense of security
- a sense of competence.

Strategies for fostering positive self-esteem include:

- creating structures and approaches within the school that reflect interest in all the children
- providing opportunities for each child to succeed, to develop individual talents and to acquire a realistic picture of his/her own strengths and limitations
- encouraging and affirming each individual
- ensuring that the school expectations of children are positive and realistic

- providing time for individual discussions on progress and exploring ways in which the child can enhance his/her own learning
- providing a welcome for new entrants and their parents to the school
- creating a structure within which children feel secure and have support when upset
- affirming the work of members of the staff and providing whole-school in-career development
- celebrating achievements.



The school is an intercultural community.

Fostering respect for human and cultural diversity

The relationships that children witness in school can have a profound effect on their social development. Where children are treated in a fair and just way and experience respect for diversity there is a greater chance that they will treat others in the same way. The school has a responsibility to ensure that its curriculum is free of bias and that issues of inequality in any form are addressed and dealt with.

Schools have a particular opportunity to promote genuine respect for diversity by ensuring that

- groups are regularly changed and do not always consist of the same children
- teams are not always chosen by individual children
- books used are bias-free and gender equity is promoted at all levels
- the strengths of individual children are fostered
- children are encouraged to listen to different points of view.

In learning about the cultures of others and exploring various traditions and practices the children can develop a sense of respect for difference and appreciate the contribution that such difference has to offer. This exploration will be particularly relevant where there is a diversity of cultures within a class. It will help to encourage children to be inclusive in their dealings with others, to challenge prejudice, and to learn how to live in an intercultural society.

Fostering inclusive and respectful language

Language reflects values, attitudes, beliefs, prejudices and principles. It not only helps to express a culture but influences and shapes that culture as well. It is essential that children are enabled to use language in a precise and appropriate manner.

The language that is promoted in the school must be one that nurtures both children and adults as unique and valuable human beings. It should respect cultural and other differences between people and be used in a way that encourages inclusiveness. Language can significantly contribute to building positive self-esteem, whereas if used in a negative manner it can cause frustration and hurt.

These messages about language will be communicated to children in the school primarily by the manner in which language is used. The way in which children are addressed in class, the manner in which they are reproached or affirmed and the tone of voice used in exploring issues of a personal nature will all reflect the values that are upheld in the school.

Being aware of how children treat each other when playing together will be helpful in choosing issues for exploration in the class. Contesting some of the crude and incorrect associations with particular words and phrases will enable children to counteract them in their own talk,

actions and behaviour. School policies should ensure that language is used in a positive and affirming way and not to belittle, intimidate or insult others.

Developing appropriate communication between home and school

The school needs to develop effective strategies for dialogue between teachers and parents. It will be essential to SPHE that parents and teachers find ways of listening to each other and of taking the opinions and concerns of both home and school into account. Examples of strategies that could be considered are:

- creating structures for individual consultation with parents and with members of the community
- arranging meetings at appropriate times
- creating a balance between class meetings (for example to introduce the curriculum and/or classroom strategies) and larger group meetings
- ensuring clarity of language in any form of written communication from the school.

Developing a school approach to assessment

Assessment is as essential to SPHE as it is to any other subject. In the development of a school plan there should be agreement on the role of assessment in SPHE, the tools to be used in assessing children, and the ways in which the child's progress can be communicated to the child, to parents and to other teachers.

The assessment process should be a positive experience for children and enable the teacher to

- modify curriculum content according to the needs of the child and so maximise the learning potential of each individual
- adapt learning and teaching strategies used in the classroom to ensure that they are appropriate to the objectives of the curriculum and the ways in which children learn
- assess the effectiveness of learning through the school climate and atmosphere, in the discrete time and throughout other subjects
- discover what the child knows, understands and can do
- promote self-assessment in the child, where he/she learns the value of monitoring his/her own progress and develops some responsibility for his/her own learning. The child is helped to set realistic goals and targets and to become aware of his/her own strengths and difficulties.

- explore how the child transfers learning from one situation to another
- communicate with the child, parents and others regarding the child's abilities, strengths and overall progress in SPHE.

Many of the benefits of SPHE do not emerge or are not evident until long after the child has left primary school. Assessment in SPHE refers to the aspects of the programme that can be realistically assessed during the child's time in school.

Assessment includes teacher-child discussion about progress, difficulties and strengths. Expressing and showing a genuine interest in the child's work in this way contributes significantly to the pupil-teacher relationship. It also adds to the child's sense of security, because he/she knows how he/she is progressing and that efforts are being acknowledged. It is essential to encourage children to develop the skills of effective self-assessment in order to help them to see what they value and how they value it and to set these judgements against external criteria.

It is essential to use a variety of techniques in assessing SPHE. They should take cognisance of the styles of learning and the range of intelligences that are evident in the classroom and genuinely reflect the children's progress. If children are assessed in this way, the teacher will be able to plan and adapt learning experiences according to

individual needs and ensure that the programme in SPHE is meaningful for all.

Among the tools that are recommended for SPHE are

- teacher observation
- teacher-designed tasks and tests
- portfolios.

Much of the assessment in SPHE will occur in everyday teaching and learning in the classroom and while children are at play. This will be an informal type of assessment that is non-intrusive and non-threatening to the child. On some occasions formal tests or tasks designed by the teacher will also be helpful in determining the child's progress in some of the content.

Information from formal behavioural tests, carried out in conjunction with psychologists and other professionals, may further contribute to the overall assessment of the child.

Where the assessment process is explored among the staff as a whole there will be a consistency and a continuity of approach for the children, the teachers and the parents. The communication of information regarding a child's progress can ensure that both home and school play a significant role in helping the child to learn.



Pair-work allows children to clarify their own ideas and opinions.