



WISER Schools Policy 2020/21 (with updated requirements regarding Covid-19 to ensure safety of all students, school staff and WISER facilitators)

As an organisation which specialises in unbiased, relevant, evidenced based, positive sexual health education it is incumbent upon us that we provide all schools, organisations, parents, and students with our explicit assurance that our work is in line with the Department of Education's Circular 0037/2010¹ and the *SPHE & RSE Best Practice Guidelines for Primary Post-Primary Schools*² and. Furthermore, the following document draws on the 'template' provided by the Department regarding the use of outside organisations with specific expertise delivery of RSE³. The WISER programme aims to *support, facilitate, and collaborate with* schools to aid them in the delivery of RSE with the view to being *complementary* to the RSE curriculum.

In line with the Departments RSE policy⁴ the West of Ireland Sexuality Education Resource (WISER) recognises the benefits offered by outside experts which address sensitive issues regarding relationships and sexuality to students and teachers alike⁵. As such, the WISER programme, and accompanying web resource, has been developed by experts in sexual health education to meet the needs of young people, schools and their parents/guardians⁶.

¹Available at https://www.education.ie/en/Circulars-and-Forms/Active-Circulars/cl0037_2010.pdf

²Available at <http://www.sphe.ie/downloads/Circulars/DES%20CIRCULAR-0023%20APRIL%202010.pdf>

³*Ibid.*

⁴Full outline available in Appendix I

⁵Paula Mayock, Karl Kitching, Mark Morgan, *RSE in the Context of SPHE: An Assessment of the Challenges to Full Implementation of the Programme in Post-primary Schools, Summary Report* (February 2007). Available at <https://www.education.ie/en/Schools-Colleges/Information/Post-Primary-School-Policies/2007-RSE-in-the-context-of-SPHE-An-Assessment-of-the-Challenges-to-Full-Implementation-of-the-Programme-in-Post-Primary-Schools-Summary-Report-.pdf>

⁶ Profiles of our WISER education team are available <http://www.bewiser.ie/staff/>
<https://pdst.ie/sites/default/files/RSE%20Policy%20Guide.pdf> (Primary school guidelines)

It is the policy of the organisation⁷ that all WISER facilitators will directly communicate with the SPHE coordinator before delivering the programme. This will include, *inter alia*, the WISER facilitator being provided with the RSE policy of the school/organisation in order to ensure that the programme respects the ethos of the school and teaching. Furthermore, the WISER facilitator will discuss with the SPHE coordinator:

- (i) Topics already covered with the students within the school
- (ii) What topics need to be addressed by the WISER programme
- (iii) What topics will be addressed in the future delivery of RSE within the school
- (iv) Avenues for follow-up, feedback, and support needed from WISER facilitators.

In advance of any programme delivery all schools/organisations are provided with a detailed outline of the WISER programme. This can also be accessed at any time via www.bewiser.ie, both the digital and hardcopy programme outlines offer parents, teachers, and students a complete breakdown of each of the WISER workshops so they have complete knowledge of:

- (i) The learning outcomes
- (ii) Specific topics covered
- (iii) Teaching methodologies used.

In line with best practice, all WISER facilitators will seek specific information regarding the composition of each group to ensure that the learning needs and outcomes are achieved for each student, as far as is practicable. WISER facilitators are required to ask the SPHE coordinator in each school whether there are specific learning and/or behavioural challenges of participants which the facilitator needs to be aware of. All WISER facilitators guarantee that any information about young people's specific needs, circumstances, or challenges is treated with the utmost respect by ensuring such information remains confidential.

WISER facilitators will, at all times, remain professional and observe the rules governing the school/organisation in which they are working⁸. All WISER facilitators must report

⁷ AIDS West Ltd.

⁸ This may include such things as; specific parking locations; appropriate dress code; using designated eating places; refrain from mobile phone use... etc.

immediately to the school reception upon arrival (unless directed otherwise) and ensure that their digital diary is up-to-date.

In accordance with the policy of the organisation WISER facilitators will be accompanied at all times by an appropriate adult⁹ when delivering the WISER education programme. It is of the utmost importance to the organisation that the WISER programme adheres to schools' policies, as such where the SPHE/RSE policy requires a member of teaching staff to be present the school/organisation will make this known to the WISER facilitator prior to the delivery of the WISER programme. In order to ensure that maximum benefit is derived from the WISER programme WISER facilitators will ensure that the classroom teacher/support staff are made aware of their role within the workshops. It is the role of the WISER facilitator to lead the participants through the learning objectives of the programme and provide expertise on specific elements of the RSE curriculum. It is therefore advised that when teacher/support staff is attending the workshops they must agree to the terms of the workshop contract and are only required to participate to their own level of comfort. The role of the teacher/support staff in the workshop may differ from group to group, but typically their role is to *assist* in the workshop if called upon to do so by the WISER facilitator. The nature of the role played by teachers/support staff will be discussed and agreed, in line with the policy of the school, prior to attending the school/organisation.

Confidentiality and Child Protection

All staff are Garda vetted and have received Children First Training. If an incident occurs organisational Child Protection Policies are followed and Children First Guidelines adhered to. In accordance with statutory obligations,¹⁰ where staff have "belief, knowledge or suspicion of harm to a child, or Protected Person, [all instances] must be reported to the organisations Designated Liaison Person Mr. Joe McDonagh (D.L.P), and/or to the relevant authority, be it Tusla or An Garda Síochána. It is also the policy of the organisation that **all** instances which concern the welfare of a child will be *immediately* communicated to the school/organisation involved (where this is in the best interest of the child).

⁹ Appropriate adult meaning a person who(i) has been Garda vetted (ii) has been approved by the Manager of AIDS West and/or the school/organisation (iii) is bound by the child protection policy of the school and/or AIDS West. This may be a member of the teaching staff, another WISER facilitator, support staff, or volunteer.

¹⁰Children First Act, 2015; Children First Act, 2015; Criminal Law (Sexual Offences) Act 2017

(See *Child Protection Policy* and *Child Protection Guidelines and Procedures* for further information).

WISER Education Guidelines

Where the WISER programme is invited to a school to contribute to the Relationships and Sexuality Education workshops, the organisation compliments and supports an established RSE programme. The organisation adheres to the guidelines of good practice as set out in the SPHE Handbook Section 7 by ensuring:

- That the organisation is aware of the relevant school policies, and also making schools aware of Sexual Health West's organisational policy regarding delivery of the WISER programme and Child Protection procedures. The organisation also ensures that students are aware of the limits to confidentiality.
- The school's RSE/SPHE coordinator may also help in the process of whole-school planning and coordination to support effective implementation of SPHE/RSE. WISER educational staff meet with school personnel prior to and throughout the delivery of the WISER programme. This ensures sustainability, keeps school staff informed and offers opportunities to collaborate.
- The Dept of Education strongly recommends that parents should be consulted and made aware of any outside agencies visiting the school. The WISER education programme provides a parenting seminar to provide details of the WISER workshops and address any questions or anxieties they may have. Parents are the primary educators of their young people in the area of relationships and sexuality and therefore consultation with parents is key to the ongoing personal and social development of students.
- The organisations teaching methods are concerned with the acquisition of knowledge, attitudes and skills. The approach is an open and facilitative teaching style, using

participative and experiential methodologies. WISER workshops have clear educational outcomes outlined in the programme content; please refer to www.bewiser.ie for more details. The workshops are age appropriate with materials and exercises being adjusted in order to meet the developmental stage, educational ability and needs of the participants.

- It is imperative that a classroom teacher is present throughout each WISER programme regardless of one/two WISER staff facilitating the sessions.

It is very important that the classroom teacher agrees to the contract/ground rules established by the external facilitator(s) at the beginning of the programme. This is to ensure a supportive environment which is essential for RSE to be effective. If any issue arises that the external facilitator needs support with they will request that the teacher present intervene/support.

- The WISER workshops are evaluated by students during the last session of the programme. This provides the education team with ongoing information on how to improve the content if required. The WISER programme is constantly evolving as we keep up-to-date with relevant sexual health research to enhance the quality of methodology, materials and delivery.

Obligations under the National Sexual Health Strategy

In October 2015 Ireland launched its first ever sexual health strategy¹¹. Within this strategy there is the direct reference to sex education for children and young people (section 3.2). The strategy clearly outlines that 'sexual health education of children is the responsibility of parents in the first instance and is supported through RSE in primary and post-primary schools and by youth organisations and NGOs' (Non-Governmental Organisations) i.e. Sexual Health West's WISER Programmes, and that '*a partnership approach between parents,*

¹¹Available at the Department of Health webpage: <http://health.gov.ie/healthy-ireland/national-sexual-health-strategy-2015-2020/>

statutory and non-statutory organisations is also required to address the sexual health information needs of children and young people to support sexual health and wellbeing'.

A key recommendation (3.4) is to 'ensure that all young people will have continued access, and knowledge of how to access, age-appropriate sources of trustworthy and accurate information and support on relationships and sexual health (through a partnership with DCYA, DES, HSE, NGOs'.

Additional priority action 8 in the Sexual Health Action Plan for 2015–2016 is to 'establish a HSE foundation programme in sexual health promotion as a national sexual health training programme'. Our Education Coordinator was one of the facilitators for three consecutive years in the west of Ireland for the HSE foundation programme in sexual health promotion, and other team members have also been trained in this programme.

In summary, the WISER (West of Ireland Sex Education Resource) programmes have been designed to promote a positive, respectful approach towards relationships and sexuality that enables and empowers young people to make knowledgeable choices with regard to their sexual health and personal relationships. The programme looks to build responsible and respectful attitudes towards gender and sexuality.

In line with the vision of Ireland's Sexual Health Strategy 2015-2020, the WISER programmes support the aims of sexual health promotion, education and prevention initiatives.

Additionally, the programme is based on the evidence of best practice as developed by UNESCO, 2018 and data gathered from Irish young people as to their own sexual health education needs.

Covid-19 requirements

The following requirements are to help in keeping students, school staff and the WISER team as safe as possible while providing our Relationships and Sexuality Education Programmes.

Wash hands for at least 20 seconds when WISER staff arrive in a school or other setting, and regularly throughout the day. Use hand sanitiser when needed.

Wearing of face masks/PPE

Open windows and doors for ventilation (always windows)

Numbers of students to be reduced and a spacious environment where social distancing can be adhered to

The class room must be set up prior to facilitators and students' arrival to avoid unnecessary gathering outside the door. The desks need to be stacked against the wall, chairs in a circle with adequate space between each student, and from facilitator(s)

Keep a log of who we meet each day within the school setting: list of students for each session to be provided by school via email if possible

Practice good cough/sneeze hygiene; use your elbow or a tissue for both WISER staff and students

Don't touch your face

Know the symptoms, if any staff member has them, self-isolate and contact their GP immediately

If a student presents with symptoms, WISER staff need to have received guidance from the school of what procedures are in place

If WISER staff feel they are in an unsafe environment or any of the above requirements are not being met, unfortunately they will be unable to deliver the WISER programme