

**An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna**

**Department of Education and Skills**

**Subject Inspection of  
Social, Personal and Health Education  
REPORT**

**Coláiste Dhúlaigh Post Primary School  
Coolock, Dublin 17  
Roll number: 70330Q**

**Date of inspection: 27 November 2010**



**A N R O I N N | D E P A R T M E N T O F  
O I D E A C H A I S | E D U C A T I O N  
A G U S S C I L E A N N A | A N D S K I L L S**

**REPORT**  
**ON**  
**THE QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN**  
**SOCIAL, PERSONAL AND HEALTH EDUCATION (SPHE)**

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**SUBJECT INSPECTION REPORT**

This report has been written following a subject inspection in Coláiste Dhúlaigh Post-Primary School conducted as part of a whole-school evaluation. It presents the findings of an evaluation of the quality of teaching and learning in Social, Personal and Health Education (including Relationships and Sexuality Education in senior cycle) and makes recommendations for the further development of the teaching of this subject in the school. The evaluation was conducted over two days during which the inspector visited classrooms and observed teaching and learning. The inspector interacted with students and teachers, examined students' work, and had discussions with the teachers. The inspector reviewed school planning documentation and teachers' written preparation. Following the evaluation visit, the inspector provided oral feedback on the outcomes of the evaluation to the principal and subject teachers.

**SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT**

Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) is very well provided for as a curriculum subject and it benefits from strong whole-school support. Each junior-cycle class is timetabled for SPHE in line with the requirements of circular letter M11/03. This report is confined to the teaching and learning of SPHE in junior cycle and to the provision of RSE in senior cycle.

In senior cycle, the current relationships and sexuality education (RSE) programme is not delivered as a distinct stand-alone module. Elements of the RSE programme are being delivered in Transition Year (TY) and within Religious Education and Guidance classes in fifth year and sixth year while other aspects are delivered by external speakers. Some information regarding RSE planning was available in SPHE planning documentation. However, as it was reported that some class teachers also deliver aspects of the RSE programme, the school should now ensure that all elements of the RSE programme, including all inputs by external speakers, are fully documented as part of the SPHE plan. The school might also find it useful to refer to the TRUST (Talking Relationships Understanding Sexuality Teaching) resource for teaching RSE in senior cycle following the appropriate training. Currently, no information is sent to parents in advance, regarding the delivery of the RSE programme. In line with good practice, this is recommended.

External speakers include presenters from Babies for Life, Aware and the Health Service Executive (HSE). All follow through is undertaken informally. The school should now ensure that all such external presentations are formally evaluated and that all pertinent information arising out of this work should be included in the SPHE plan. The school reports that it follows the requirements of Circular Letter 0023/2010 *Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) & Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE): Best Practice Guidelines for Post-Primary Schools* but does not yet have its own written policy regarding its procedures when engaging visiting speakers. The development of such a policy is now recommended.

The SPHE department in junior cycle comprises four teachers, two of whom deliver SPHE to more than one class group. This system is working very well in this school. All teachers met with during the evaluation were clearly committed and dedicated to this subject. Every effort is made to ensure that teachers remain with their class groups for the three-year cycle. Most members of the current team are experienced and have taught SPHE for one or two years and this is good.

Management is very supportive of teachers' continuing professional development and there has been engagement with the SPHE support service to enhance the professional competencies of SPHE teachers. However, as some teachers are fairly new to the subject, this is now an opportune time to conduct an audit of teachers' training needs, and as resources allow, to further engage with the SPHE support services. This will ensure that there is an incremental approach being taken to teachers' professional development needs. This is recommended.

All teachers are timetabled to teach SPHE in rooms which facilitate the inclusion of active participative strategies such as group work. This is good as it supports the use of the learning methodologies advocated in the syllabus for the successful delivery of the subject. Very good efforts have been made by some SPHE teachers to ensure that there are appropriate displays of SPHE materials in their classrooms. These are very useful for maximising the potential of the students' immediate learning environment to stimulate and retain their interest in issues and topics relevant to the subject. The acquisition of displays for the remaining classrooms that are used for the delivery of SPHE lessons is recommended.

There is a co-ordinated approach to the acquisition of SPHE resources in this school. All resources are stored in a room which is accessible to teachers. Many of the resources have been audited and catalogued and this information has been included in the SPHE plan. It is recommended that this information be updated regularly. Some teachers have spent considerable time and effort adapting existing resources or developing resources tailored specifically for students' needs. These are very good practices which should be adopted by all teachers. A system should also be put in place which allows these resources to be accessed by all teachers.

The school is clearly committed to the promotion of SPHE in a wide whole-school context. Many systems which support the work of the SPHE teachers are in place. These include the year head and tutor system; the annual friendship week and 'Belonging Plus', a mentoring system for first year students. Every year, the school also accesses a 'Reach Out Programme' in the locality which is provided by Youthreach. One class group attends the programme for a full afternoon each week which includes their timetabled SPHE lesson. No other SPHE time is scheduled for this class group. Although some of the required SPHE modules are covered in the 'Reach Out Programme', this class group does not have access to the full ten modules required. The school should review the amount of class time being used to facilitate attendance at this course.

## **PLANNING AND PREPARATION**

It is very clear that SPHE is a core element of the pastoral care structure in this school. Most of the necessary key policies relevant to or supportive of SPHE have been developed. These include the substance use policy and the anti-bullying policy. There is no written RSE policy. As a matter of priority, the school must now develop this policy and progress it to ratification following consultation with all the partners in line with Circular Letter 0027/2008. In so doing, the school should ensure that this policy reflects all current practices relating to RSE in the school.

Co-ordination of the SPHE department is undertaken by a teacher in a voluntary capacity. In line with good practice, the co-ordinator is also currently teaching SPHE. The co-ordinator carries out her role conscientiously and is clearly committed to SPHE. Materials which support the teaching and learning of SPHE have been made available to teachers and this is very good. Meetings of the full SPHE team occur at the start of the year and minutes of these meetings are kept. Thereafter, there is much informal contact between teachers.

Planning documentation, containing extensive information, was presented on the day of the evaluation. However, this should be kept updated and include all relevant planning materials for the RSE programme. The SPHE programme overview comprises an outline of work for each year group and the majority of teachers adapt this for their own particular class group. All ten modules are covered with all year groups, with the exception of one class group, as described in the previous section of this report.

Some programmes of work for individual class groups were presented during the course of the evaluation and evidence was presented which indicated that some teachers are also systematically tracking all work covered in lessons in detail. It was particularly noteworthy when this information included methodologies used and an evaluation of lessons. This very good practice should be adopted by all teachers.

To build on this good work, the remaining SPHE teachers should interpret the department plan for each of their class groups by developing individual programmes of work. These programmes should specify the intended learning outcome for each topic and this should be linked to methodologies and resources. All modes of assessment which are being adopted by teachers should also be recorded.

In the majority of cases, individual preparation for lessons observed was very good. This was evident through, for example, the prior preparation of handouts and worksheets which were seamlessly integrated into lessons at appropriate stages.

## **TEACHING AND LEARNING**

Four lessons were observed during the course of the evaluation. In most lessons observed, there was a very good standard of teaching and learning. Generally, the good practices of sharing the aims and objectives with the students for their consideration, from the outset, and returning to them at the end of the lesson, to determine the extent of the learning, were observed. These practices should be included in all lessons as they provide a focus and structure for the students.

The content and pace of most lessons observed were appropriate. Many lessons were well structured and were characterised by smooth transitions from one stage to the next. Opportunities were provided to students to participate actively in lessons. For instance, in a lesson on 'Healthy Eating' students sampled different fruits. This was achieved in the form of a game to add further stimulation to the activity. Following this, opportunities were provided to students to process their learning through written activities, discussion and analysis. The level of learning was good as evidenced by the constructive comments made by many members of the class.

In a second lesson observed, on 'Listening Skills', students engaged with the topic through a variety of written tasks. This information was then processed through general questioning which led to some discussions by the students. Their responses were good and illustrated that a very good level of learning had occurred. To further reinforce the learning, a song was played for the

students, who, in turn, were required to listen to the words and fill in the gaps on a worksheet. This activity was very effective and students rose to the challenge very competently.

Student learning was not as good when there was an inappropriate level of teacher input, an insufficient number of student activities and when the material being used was too challenging. Consequently, on occasion, students were disengaged from the topic-at-hand. It is important when planning any lesson that there is an appropriate amount of student activities. In another lesson on 'Friendship', ICT was used effectively to generate student discussion and to play a song 'Lean on Me', to further reinforce the learning. Students engaged with both activities very well.

A wide range of teaching methodologies was observed and many of the strategies were in keeping with those recommended for the delivery of SPHE. These included individual reflection, brainstorming, questioning, ICT, inclusion of Music and the completion of worksheets. The use of meaningful resources enhanced student engagement with the topics to very good effect.

Student attendance is consistently monitored. There was a friendly and caring atmosphere in most lessons and a positive rapport had been developed between teachers and their students. Where necessary, references were made to the class contract which had been developed in consultation with students in most of the classes visited. However, in one lesson, the behaviour of some students was inappropriate. These students used a high level of unsuitable language which was directed at each other. This behaviour went largely unchecked by the teacher. It is essential that such poor behaviour is never tolerated and that the school code of behaviour is systematically applied by all teachers.

In all cases, instructions were clear and precise. Students' participation in the classroom activities was closely monitored by the teacher and help and assistance were afforded when necessary. Students' efforts and contributions were well received and appropriately affirmed. It is very apparent, in this school, that the teachers of SPHE use lessons as an opportunity to promote the holistic development of students. This is highly commended.

## **ASSESSMENT**

It is evident that the SPHE department has deliberated on the assessment process for SPHE. In the planning documentation, an 'Assessment Tool Kit' has been developed. In addition, a range of assessment strategies is used by teachers to determine students' progress in lessons. These include teachers' observations of students, class discussions, questioning, completion of worksheets and responses to tasks. However, student reflection and self-assessment have yet to be used. It is recommended that a template should now be devised to support this process and be used consistently by all teachers.

A system is in place for students to store and file personal materials from SPHE lessons. This takes the form of a folder which is stored by the teacher and distributed to students at the beginning of the lesson. This is very good practice. The level of student written work evident in the lessons visited varied. It is important that there is a consistent approach by all teachers in this regard.

Communication with parents is maintained through school reports twice per year and annual parent-teacher meetings as appropriate. School reports include comments to affirm students' engagement in SPHE.

## **SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

The following are the main strengths identified in the evaluation:

- Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) is very well provided for as a curriculum subject and it benefits from strong whole-school support.
- There is a co-ordinated approach to the acquisition of SPHE resources in the school.
- The school is clearly committed to the promotion of SPHE in a wide, whole-school context.
- Individual preparation, for the majority of lessons observed, was very good.
- In most lessons observed, there was a very good standard of teaching and learning.
- A wide range of teaching methodologies was observed and the use of meaningful resources enhanced student engagement with the topics to very good effect.
- It is apparent that the teachers of SPHE use lessons as an opportunity to promote the holistic development of students.

As a means of building on these strengths and to address areas for development, the following key recommendations are made:

- The school should ensure that all elements of the RSE programme including all inputs by external speakers are fully documented as part of the SPHE plan.
- The school should conduct an audit of teachers' professional development needs and further engage with the SPHE support services.
- As a matter of priority, the school must now develop the RSE policy and progress it to ratification, following consultation with all the partners, in line with Circular Letter 0027/2008.
- When planning SPHE lessons, it is important that there is an appropriate amount of student activities.

A post-evaluation meeting was held with the teachers of SPHE and with the principal at the conclusion of the evaluation when the draft findings and recommendations of the evaluation were presented and discussed.

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