

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Subject Inspection in Social Personal and Health Education
(SPHE)

REPORT

Ainm na scoile / School name	Mountmellick Community School
Seoladh na scoile / School address	Mountmellick Co Laois
Uimhir rolla / Roll number	91426A

Date of Inspection: 23-01-2020



**An Roinn Oideachais
agus Scileanna**
Department of
Education and Skills

SUBJECT INSPECTION

Subject Inspections report on the quality of work in individual curriculum areas within a school. They affirm good practice and make recommendations, where appropriate, to aid the further development of the subject in the school.

HOW TO READ THIS REPORT

During this inspection, the inspector evaluated learning and teaching in Social Personal and Health Education (SPHE) under the following headings:

1. Teaching, learning and assessment
2. Subject provision and whole-school support
3. Planning and preparation

Inspectors describe the quality of each of these areas using the Inspectorate's quality continuum which is shown on the final page of this report. The quality continuum provides examples of the language used by inspectors when evaluating and describing the quality of the school's provision in each area.

The board of management was given an opportunity to comment in writing on the findings and recommendations of the report; a response was not received from the board.

CHILD PROTECTION

During the inspection visit, the following checks in relation to the school's child protection procedures were conducted:

1. The name of the DLP and the Child Safeguarding Statement are prominently displayed near the main entrance to the school.
2. The Child Safeguarding Statement has been ratified by the board and includes an annual review and a risk assessment.
3. All teachers visited reported that they have read the Child Safeguarding Statement and that they are aware of their responsibilities as mandated persons.

The school met the requirements in relation to each of the checks above.

SUBJECT INSPECTION

INSPECTION ACTIVITIES

Dates of inspection	22 -01-2020 - 23-01-2020
Inspection activities undertaken <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Review of relevant documents• Discussion with principal and key staff• Interaction with students	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Observation of teaching and learning during five lessons• Examination of students' work• Feedback to principal and relevant staff

School context

Mountmellick Community School is a co-educational, post-primary school which operates under the aegis of Presentation Sisters and Laois and Offaly Education and Training Board. With a current enrolment of 535 students, the school offers the Junior Cycle, an optional Transition Year (TY), established Leaving Certificate, and Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme. The school participates in the Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) action plan.

SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

Findings

- The quality of teaching and learning was good or very good.
- SPHE is taught in an atmosphere of care and mutual respect, and teachers generally facilitated learning that was active and student-centred.
- Highly effective assessment of student learning was observed in lessons, but practice regarding the assessment of students' written work is not consistent.
- The overall quality of whole-school support for SPHE and Relationship and Sexuality Education (RSE) is very good.
- A very good range of whole-school initiatives is provided to support students' wellbeing and complement the delivery of SPHE and RSE.
- The quality of individual planning and preparation for SPHE and RSE is very good, with scope to develop collaborative planning, linked to the whole-school DEIS plan.

Recommendations

- The SPHE department should agree, and consistently implement, practices regarding the assignment, storage and assessment of students' written work.
- Senior management should formalise planning time for SPHE, in line with that provided for other subjects, to ensure that teachers have greater opportunities to plan collaboratively.
- In line with the school's whole-school review of the DEIS plan, the SPHE department should collaboratively review SPHE planning documentation to implement DEIS themes and targets.

DETAILED FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. TEACHING, LEARNING, AND ASSESSMENT

- The quality of teaching and learning in the lessons observed was good or very good.
- SPHE lessons took place in an atmosphere of care and mutual respect, reflective of the whole-school emphasis on wellbeing.
- In some instances the SPHE learning environment was enhanced with displays of subject-related material. While classrooms are used for other subjects, areas in some rooms are designated for the display of SPHE and wellbeing-related posters, and student work. To enhance learning in the subject, this approach should be considered in all rooms where SPHE is delivered.
- Overall, lessons were very well prepared. Teachers have developed a very good bank of supplementary materials and resources, such as presentations and worksheets. In line with good practice, many resources are shared among the SPHE team, and used effectively in lessons.
- Teachers shared learning intentions and an outline of lesson activities with students at the beginning of all lessons. This good practice was most effective when teachers framed the learning intentions in terms of what students will learn as well as do, and when they provided opportunities for students to review their learning during lessons. As outlined in the SPHE policy, teachers should implement the practice of sharing success criteria with students to enhance their learning.
- In line with good practice, teachers facilitated high quality active-learning opportunities in all lessons. Students engaged with a range of effective activities such as walking debates, whole-group brainstorming sessions, high-quality video clips, and teacher presentations to explore topics. Overall there was a good balance between teacher instruction and student activity.
- Learning in lessons generally focussed on knowledge and understanding pertinent to the topic. Learning was most effective in lessons where teachers also placed an emphasis on students' feelings, and facilitated students to develop the necessary skills, attitudes and values to empower them to take ownership of their own decision making. All teachers should ensure that sufficient time is provided for students to process and share their reactions to their experience of lesson activities, to draw conclusions, and to plan for the application of their learning in new contexts.
- Students were facilitated to learn collaboratively in all lessons, and teachers generally provided clear tasks and instructions for the process. Student engagement was best in lessons where teachers provided structures that helped learners to focus on the task, such as worksheets and time-bound tasks, and where the arrangement of furniture facilitated face-to-face discussion. To maximise students' participation and learning in group work, all teachers should provide such structures.
- Teachers used questioning effectively to check students' understanding and knowledge. In a few lessons this included checking students' understanding of relevant subject terminology, in line with the school's literacy strategy. This good practice should be extended to all lessons. Very good practice was noted where higher-order questioning challenged students to explain their responses. To build on this, teachers should consider ways of distributing questions more evenly among the class group, to ensure that all students have opportunities to contribute.
- The SPHE policy outlines a range of formative assessment strategies which are incorporated very effectively in lessons, such as think-pair-share, high-quality verbal feedback from teachers, and opportunities for students to reflect and share their learning with their peers. However, practice regarding the assessment of students' written work is not consistent and

there is no established practice regarding the assignment or storage of written work, including homework. The SPHE department should establish and agree its practices regarding the assignment, storage, monitoring and assessment of students' written work.

2. SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- The overall quality of subject provision and whole-school support is very good.
- SPHE is appropriately timetabled in junior cycle. In senior cycle, a comprehensive RSE and wellbeing programme, has been developed by the SPHE coordinator. However, the time allocated to Wellbeing and RSE lessons varies among class groups. A distinct year-long programme is provided for the majority of fifth and sixth-year groups, while short RSE and wellbeing modules are delivered as part of the Religious Education (RE) programme for other groups. The SPHE department, in collaboration with the RE department should work collaboratively to ensure a consistent experience for all senior cycle students.
- Senior management generally deploys teachers for the delivery of SPHE through consultation, and with continuity and aptitude for the subject in mind. For the most-part, the core team of SPHE teachers consists of Year Heads in junior cycle which ensures consistency.
- School management is highly supportive of continuing professional development (CPD). In line with good practice the majority of teachers have accessed appropriate subject training from the professional development support services.
- The school provides a very good range of supplementary activities to support and enhance the SPHE and wellbeing programmes, many of which promote student leadership, and develop links with the wider community. This includes valuable whole-school initiatives such as the amber flag, the student wellbeing committee, and a wide range of co-curricular activities that promote health and fitness.

3. PLANNING AND PREPARATION

- The overall quality of collaborative planning and preparation for SPHE and RSE is good. The SPHE department has developed a comprehensive SPHE policy which incorporates long-term subject planning. The SPHE coordinator has developed very good schemes of work for the delivery of SPHE and RSE programmes. Commendably, long-term plans for junior and senior cycle are spiral and developmental and are linked to wellbeing indicators. However, there is scope for greater collaborative planning.
- Senior management provides time for SPHE teachers to meet for the purpose of subject planning, however this time is not formally designated. Senior management should formalise planning time for SPHE, in line with that provided for other subjects, to ensure that the SPHE team has greater opportunities to plan collaboratively.
- The subject policy and related schemes of work outline links to some DEIS themes such as literacy and numeracy. The whole school DEIS plan is currently under review and the principal reported that all subject departments will be required to update plans to include links with all DEIS themes and targets. The SPHE department should work together to implement this.
- The current focus of the school's digital learning plan is to improve digital learning practice by ensuring that all staff members can confidently use an online platform to support student learning. The SPHE department should further explore the potential of digital technology to enhance teaching, learning and assessment, and subject planning in SPHE.

The draft findings and recommendations arising out of this evaluation were discussed with the principal, deputy principal and subject teachers at the conclusion of the evaluation.

THE INSPECTORATE'S QUALITY CONTINUUM

Inspectors describe the quality of provision in the school using the Inspectorate's quality continuum which is shown below. The quality continuum provides examples of the language used by inspectors when evaluating and describing the quality of the school's provision of each area.

Level	Description	Example of descriptive terms
Very Good	Very good applies where the quality of the areas evaluated is of a very high standard. The very few areas for improvement that exist do not significantly impact on the overall quality of provision. For some schools in this category the quality of what is evaluated is outstanding and provides an example for other schools of exceptionally high standards of provision.	Very good; of a very high quality; very effective practice; highly commendable; very successful; few areas for improvement; notable; of a very high standard. Excellent; outstanding; exceptionally high standard, with very significant strengths; exemplary
Good	Good applies where the strengths in the areas evaluated clearly outweigh the areas in need of improvement. The areas requiring improvement impact on the quality of pupils' learning. The school needs to build on its strengths and take action to address the areas identified as requiring improvement in order to achieve a <i>very good</i> standard.	Good; good quality; valuable; effective practice; competent; useful; commendable; good standard; some areas for improvement
Satisfactory	Satisfactory applies where the quality of provision is adequate. The strengths in what is being evaluated just outweigh the shortcomings. While the shortcomings do not have a significant negative impact they constrain the quality of the learning experiences and should be addressed in order to achieve a better standard.	Satisfactory; adequate; appropriate provision although some possibilities for improvement exist; acceptable level of quality; improvement needed in some areas
Fair	Fair applies where, although there are some strengths in the areas evaluated, deficiencies or shortcomings that outweigh those strengths also exist. The school will have to address certain deficiencies without delay in order to ensure that provision is satisfactory or better.	Fair; evident weaknesses that are impacting on pupils' learning; less than satisfactory; experiencing difficulty; must improve in specified areas; action required to improve
Weak	Weak applies where there are serious deficiencies in the areas evaluated. Immediate and coordinated whole-school action is required to address the areas of concern. In some cases, the intervention of other agencies may be required to support improvements.	Weak; unsatisfactory; insufficient; ineffective; poor; requiring significant change, development or improvement; experiencing significant difficulties;