Subject Inspection of
Social, Personal & Health Education
REPORT

Scoil Mhuire
Kanturk, County Cork
Roll number: 62290L

Date of inspection: 28 March 2011
REPORT
ON
THE QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN
SOCIAL, PERSONAL & HEALTH EDUCATION (SPHE)
INCLUDING RELATIONSHIPS SEXUALITY EDUCATION (RSE)

INFORMATION ON THE INSPECTION

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MAIN FINDINGS

• Planning for SPHE lessons observed was good, as was the quality of teaching and learning.

• Teachers are student-centred in their approach to teaching SPHE, with the resources and strategies in use promoting high levels of student participation.

• There was some use of information communication technologies (ICT) in lesson delivery, although this could be further exploited.

• There was a focus on assessment in some lessons, facilitated in the main through the use of review exercises.

• Appropriate provision is made for SPHE in first, second and third year, and for RSE in both junior and senior cycles.

• A whole-school focus on students’ social, personal and health education is evident.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

• Teachers should explore the use of additional assessment strategies based on learning outcomes identified in syllabus modules.

• Management is encouraged in its efforts to timetable teachers with the same class group in each of first, second and third year.

• It is recommended that a more systematic and incremental approach be adopted to the continuing professional development (CPD) of SPHE teachers.

• Scope exists for further development of collaborative, programme planning.
INTRODUCTION
Scoil Mhuire is a co-educational Catholic voluntary secondary school, under the trusteeship of CEIST. It has a current enrolment of 300 students.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

- The quality of teaching and learning in SPHE is good.
- Teachers’ approach to teaching SPHE is student-centred. Chosen resources and strategies promoted high levels of student participation. These included strategies such as brainstorming, discussion, and pair and group work and resources such as case studies, quizzes and ranking exercises.
- There was some use of ICT in lesson delivery. It is suggested that teachers examine how ICT might be further exploited, particularly in relation to the introduction of images and visuals that would support student learning.
- The experiencing or ‘activity phase’ of the experiential learning method was well provided for in all lessons, and was also well organised and managed. Tasks often required personal reflection and input, thereby increasing the relevance of lessons.
- Good provision for the ‘processing’ phase of the aforementioned method was apparent. Overall, feedback was well managed, although at times all groups were not given the opportunity to contribute. This should be borne in mind in future lessons, or students may become less enthusiastic about the completion of assigned tasks.
- At times, provision for the ‘generalising’ phase of the experiential learning method, or the lesson conclusion, was weak. This was due, in the main, to lack of time. Where students are not facilitated in making generalisations, learning opportunities may be lost. Furthermore, without this, students can experience SPHE as a series of unrelated events. For similar reasons, the plan for the next lesson should be shared with students. Both points should be taken into account during future lesson planning and delivery.
- An awareness of the potential for cross-curricular learning in SPHE was obvious in one lesson. In this instance, a poem with the theme of school exclusion, and which students had already studied in English, was incorporated into the SPHE lesson. This approach is further encouraged.
- There was a focus on assessment in some lessons, facilitated in the main through the use of review exercises. To build on this good practice, teachers should explore the use of other assessment strategies, which would find their basis in the learning outcomes identified in syllabus modules. The Teacher Guidelines and the SPHE Handbook provide examples of possible approaches.
- An appropriate level of affirmation, positive teacher-student relations and the presence of attentive students, led to the creation of classroom environments that were conducive to learning.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- There is appropriate provision for SPHE, including RSE, in junior cycle. The additional provision of a mental health module in Transition Year (TY) is commended.
• A very positive finding is the high level of satisfaction expressed by senior students in relation to provision for RSE in senior cycle.

• The board has ratified an RSE policy. It is suggested that a copy of the outline RSE programme for all year groups be appended to the RSE policy.

• In line with best-practice guidelines, guest speakers are used to support and augment class-based instruction in areas such as mental health and substance use. The preparation of a visiting-speaker policy is advocated. A template for this task is provided in the SPHE Handbook.

• The school’s ‘Cairde’ programme, a peer-mentoring programme involving TY students and first years, is one example of the many school policies, systems, practices and activities which were seen to support a whole-school focus on students’ social, personal and health education.

• A number of positive deployment practices are evident. For example, a core team of teachers who are happy to teach SPHE has been established and teachers assigned to a class for the teaching of SPHE also teach the class for another subject. With a view to further enhancing deployment, management is encouraged in its efforts to timetable teachers with the same class in each of first, second and third years.

• A large percentage of SPHE teachers have participated in relevant training. That said, it is recommended that a more systematic and incremental approach to the CPD of SPHE teachers be adopted. It is suggested that an annual audit of teachers’ training needs be completed. Ideally, this should be informed by the SPHE Support Service’s workshop schedules, as emerging needs can then be addressed.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

• A subject co-ordinator oversees the planning work of the SPHE department, including the annual updating of the subject plan. Due to the voluntary nature of this position, and given the professional development opportunities that it offers, it is suggested that the role be rotated amongst all team members. The completion of a SWOT analysis is praised. It is suggested that this is an exercise that could be revisited on a regular basis.

• Scope exists to further develop collaborative, programme planning. As a first step in this process, it is recommended that the teaching team agree the SPHE modules to be covered, on a term-by-term basis, with each year group. A similar approach is recommended in relation to the school’s senior cycle RSE programme. Over the course of the next school year, it is suggested that teachers maintain individual records of the resources, methodologies and assessment modes they use in the delivery of the various modules. It is envisaged that, in time, these records might be used by the teaching team to agree on the most desirable way to teach the topics, and evaluate the intended learning, in each module with each year group. Following on from this, school-specific, resource files for each year group should eventually be developed.

• Planning for the lessons observed was of a good quality.

The draft findings and recommendations arising out of this evaluation were discussed with the principal and subject teachers at the conclusion of the evaluation.
The board of management of the school was given an opportunity to comment in writing on the findings and recommendations of the report, and the response of the board will be found in the appendix of this report.

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Appendix

School response to the report

Submitted by the Board of Management
Area 1  Observations on the content of the inspection report

The Board of Management appreciates the recognition by the Inspectorate Team of the dedication to and interest in the subject displayed by the team of teachers. Our observation is that they experience fulfilment in the teaching of the subject and are interested in developing it further.

Area 2  Follow-up actions planned or undertaken since the completion of the inspection activity to implement the findings and recommendations of the inspection.

The Board of Management will encourage the time tabling of the individual teachers to the junior classes for the first 3 years.
The Board will also attach the outline programme of classes to the RSE policy.
We appreciate also the recommendations and suggestions made in relation to assessment and training and will implement same.