

**An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna**

**Department of Education and Skills**

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

**REPORT**

**Saint Muredach's College  
Ballina, County Mayo  
Roll number: 64510J**

**Date of inspection: 12 November 2014**



**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) AND RELATIONSHIPS AND SEXUALITY  
EDUCATION (RSE)**

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**INFORMATION ON THE INSPECTION**

<b>Dates of inspection</b>	11 and 12 November 2014
<b>Inspection activities undertaken</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Review of relevant documents</li><li>• Discussion with principal and teachers</li><li>• Interaction with students</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Observation of teaching and learning during five class periods</li><li>• Examination of students' work</li><li>• Feedback to principal, deputy principal and teachers</li></ul>

**MAIN FINDINGS**

- The overall quality of teaching and learning in SPHE ranged from fair to good and very good with some highly commendable teaching observed.
- Best practice was observed when a variety of active learning strategies and stimulating resources were used effectively.
- Assessment in SPHE is viewed as part of the activity of teaching and learning, however, there is scope to develop this further.
- Very good rapport between teachers and students was evident in most of the lessons visited.
- Teachers are extremely committed to promoting SPHE and there is very good whole-school support for SPHE, with scope to further develop teachers' continuing professional development (CPD).
- Subject planning in SPHE ranged from good to very good, with some scope to further develop an assessment policy for SPHE.

**MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS**

- Teachers should formalise the sharing of professional expertise so that the very good practices observed during the evaluation can be strengthened across the entire department.
  - Assessment in SPHE should be further explored and policy developed to include details such as assessment criteria for SPHE and the development of students' skills of reflection through portfolio work.
  - Individual lesson plans should be further developed to include more specific information with regard to agreed assessment procedures.
  - In order to ensure the successful implementation of the SPHE programme, all teachers of SPHE and Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) should undertake an appropriate level of subject-specific CPD.
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## **INTRODUCTION**

St Muredach's College is a long-established voluntary secondary school for boys which operates under the patronage of the Catholic Bishop of Killala. The school is one of three providers of post-primary education in Ballina and has an enrolment of 415. The school provides a broad curriculum including an optional Transition Year (TY).

## **TEACHING AND LEARNING**

- The overall quality of teaching and learning in SPHE ranged from fair to good and very good with some exemplary practice noted.
- The majority of lessons were well structured and delivered at a pace that allowed students time to engage with the key concepts of the lesson. The good practice of sharing the learning outcomes with students at the beginning of lessons was observed; however, to consolidate students' learning, these should routinely be returned to towards the end of lessons.
- Individual lesson preparation ranged from good to very good. Good use was made of a variety of teaching resources, including information and communication technology, to support learning effectively.
- Highly commendable practice was noted in most lessons where a variety of methodologies to promote active student engagement and ongoing assessment of learning were evident. In a significant minority of cases there was scope for improvement with regards to the need to enhance teacher input in terms of methodologies, assessment modes and classroom management in order to improve students' engagement. Teachers should formalise the sharing of professional expertise.
- In most lessons teachers ascertained students' prior knowledge very effectively and built on this during the lesson. Where teaching and learning were most effective questioning strategies, both global and directed, provided for a good level of discussion and input from students.
- In almost all lessons good classroom management resulted in good student behaviour, and a positive classroom atmosphere, characterised by positive student-teacher rapport. The vast majority of students participated in a co-operative manner. In a small minority of instances, there was some low level disruption where students were disengaged. Procedures for dealing with indiscipline should be consistently implemented in line with the school's code of behaviour.
- The learning environment of most classrooms was enhanced through displays of SPHE related materials. Attention was paid to promoting the development of students' literacy and numeracy skills.
- The vast majority of students demonstrated a good knowledge and understanding of the topics under study, commensurate with their ability. Students' books and folders indicated good progression in their work.
- In the best lessons ongoing assessment of student progress in SPHE was integrated into lesson delivery, through the use of such methods as short projects, and student reflection.
- Teachers have recently agreed to explore the potential for students to use the materials and reflections in their SPHE folder as the basis for the development of student assessment of SPHE in the form of a reflective portfolio.

- The SPHE team should further develop the process of assessment to ensure that there is an agreed and consistent approach to evaluating students' engagement and learning. Teachers should also agree and implement a set of assessment criteria linked to intended learning outcomes, to be used for assessing students' progress in SPHE. This work should culminate into an agreed assessment policy for SPHE.

#### **SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT**

- The positive whole-school climate is most supportive of the aims of the SPHE syllabus. A good range of student support structures and interventions to support student welfare exist. Initiatives, such as the pastoral care team, a healthy living week, as well as a range of guest speakers supplement the SPHE programme well.
- The SPHE programme, including RSE, is provided for all junior cycle students in accordance with the requirements of Circular M11/03. A very well-developed RSE programme is delivered in the context of Religious Education at senior cycle. Teachers have agreed to develop and deliver an RSE module for the TY programme.
- In the context of future reviews of SPHE related policies, a role for the student council in policy development and review should be considered.
- In keeping with best practice, a core team is involved in SPHE delivery. It is praiseworthy that management endeavours, when possible to have the SPHE teacher teaching their class for another subject and, when possible, to have continuity of teacher for individual class groups.
- The role of SPHE co-ordinator is well established and undertaken on a voluntary basis by a teacher who has considerable experience in teaching SPHE.
- In relation to teachers' CPD, while the co-ordinator and one other teacher have some training in SPHE and RSE, a systematic and incremental training plan should be implemented and a record of SPHE-related training needs and training undertaken should be maintained. Furthermore, consideration should be given to providing whole-staff in-service in a range of SPHE-related topics.

#### **PLANNING AND PREPARATION**

- The SPHE team displays, good team work and a high level of commitment to developing the subject. Good progress has been made to date in developing a subject plan, however, there is scope to further expand the homework and assessment aspects. The provision of discrete time for whole-team SPHE meetings provided during staff planning days is commendable.
- Currently the SPHE teachers follow a time-bound course outline which includes learning outcomes and generic assessment modes. For more detailed planning individual lesson plans have been developed for each lesson. These include the learning outcomes to be attained, the corresponding methodologies and resources and a review section to inform future planning. Individual lesson plans should be further developed to include more specific information with regard to agreed assessment procedures.
- Detailed schemes of work, including a range of suitable resources, have been developed to a very high standard for senior cycle RSE and there is scope to further develop the assessment aspect.

- There was evidence of ongoing self-evaluation, particularly from an end-of-year review, which included the views of students and teachers. Developmental priorities for SPHE arose from this review and currently the team are planning to implement a range of actions to address these various priorities.

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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 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.

# **Appendix**

**SCHOOL RESPONSE TO THE REPORT**

**Submitted by the Board of Management**

**Area 1 Observations on the content of the inspection report**

Very fair.

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

Meeting of SPHE teachers and board of management to consider contents of report - have decided to implement all the recommendations.