

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Subject Inspection of
Social, Personal and Health Education

REPORT

Killarney Community College
Killarney, County Kerry
Roll number: 70450D

Date of inspection: 14 May 2015



AN ROINN | DEPARTMENT OF
OIDEACHAIS | EDUCATION
AGUS SCILEANNA | AND SKILLS

REPORT
ON
THE QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN
SOCIAL, PERSONAL AND HEALTH EDUCATION

INFORMATION ON THE INSPECTION

Dates of inspection	12 and 14 May 2015
Inspection activities undertaken <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Review of relevant documents• Discussion with principal, deputy principal and teachers• Interaction with students	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Observation of teaching and learning during five class periods• Examination of students' work• Feedback to principal, deputy principal and teachers

MAIN FINDINGS

- Teaching and learning ranged from the highest quality to needing improvement.
- A student-centred approach to lesson delivery predominated.
- In most lessons, students benefitted from teachers' personable approach.
- A most considered inclusion of students with special educational needs was observed.
- Provision is made for Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE), including Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE), in both junior and senior cycles.
- Significant time and thought is given to the provision of a range of relevant, high-quality co-curricular and cross-curricular activities.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

- The processing of class activities, to include taking feedback and supporting the students in the drawing of generalisations, together with the use of questioning, were identified as general areas for development.
 - Provision for the further assessment of student learning in SPHE warrants consideration.
 - As practicable, the deployment of SPHE teachers should be further informed by best practice principles.
 - Programmes of work should be further developed in time.
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INTRODUCTION

Killarney Community College is a co-educational post-primary school managed by Kerry Education and Training Board (ETB). At the time of the evaluation, 407 students were enrolled and there were six teachers timetabled for SPHE. Programmes offered include Junior Certificate, the Junior Certificate School Programme (JCSP), Transition Year (TY), Leaving Certificate, the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP) and the Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) programme. A range of Post-Leaving Certificate (PLC) courses is also offered to students.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

- Teaching and learning ranged from the highest quality to needing improvement. In one instance, participation in introductory and further training was advised. Peer observation is also suggested as a possible support to professional development.
- Many commendable practices were noted. This included: the use of thought-provoking introductions; a clear communication of the lesson plan; an emphasis on new words, including the pre-teaching of words; linking new learning with prior learning; and a referencing of topical subject matter to make lessons more interesting.
- In relation to sharing the lesson plan, good practice was where this included an explicit sharing of learning intentions. Excellent practice was where such learning intentions were all encompassing, meaning that the set of intentions communicated to students were inclusive of the knowledge, understanding, skills, attitudes and values that would be gained or developed by lesson end. This approach is further encouraged.
- On a minor point, it was suggested that teachers make reference to the relevant SPHE module and topic as lessons commence.
- In the main, students' input and activity was well accommodated. In addition, teachers generally provided a very good range of exercises, whereby in their selection and use, chosen exercises sought to vary the demands on students. Where provided, students responded well to such variety. Where this level of provision was not observed it was recommended.
- Opportunities for student collaboration were provided in a number of lessons. As relevant, this was further encouraged.
- In almost all lessons, student activities were carefully planned, well organised, thoroughly explained to students, and closely monitored. This ensured that students' participation was maximised. Where this quality of provision was not observed it was recommended.
- In a number, but not all lessons, adequate provision was made for the processing of assigned activities. This processing phase was most effective when students' were helped to draw their own conclusion, as opposed to the teacher presenting them with one. This was identified as a general area for development.
- The use of questioning, a key strategy of the SPHE classroom, would benefit from review and development in some instances.
- Some teachers' capacity to demonstrate a degree of humility in their interactions with students was noted as a tremendous asset to the SPHE classroom. In addition, the sharing of personal anecdotes and thoughts by the same teachers illustrated understanding and humanity. Students responded positively to this personable approach.

- Classrooms were found to be inclusive, with a most considered inclusion of students with special educational needs observed on a number of occasions.
- There was a clear consciousness around the provision of opportunities to assess student learning, albeit mainly in the form of self-assessment through reflection exercises. Planning for assessment during lesson design, and providing for same as part of lesson delivery, were highlighted as possibilities for development. Individual teacher efforts in this regard, relative to the learning outcomes in the syllabus, could be shared and discussed at subject meetings. Teachers were also encouraged to explore the merits of portfolio assessment.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- As required, SPHE is provided as a discrete, standalone subject in junior cycle. In addition, the school also provides senior cycle SPHE. This extra provision, along with the clear focus in the school on the promotion of students' overall health and wellbeing, indicates the value that is placed on students' holistic development.
- In line with best practice, RSE is delivered as an integral component of SPHE. Additional inputs by visiting speakers are provided in response to identified needs. Provision is enshrined in well developed RSE and visiting speaker policies. The RSE policy includes valuable, course-content appendices.
- The deployment of SPHE teachers is identified as demonstrating scope for development. Relevant best practice principles to further consider include: the maintenance of a core team; the timetabling of the co-ordinator; introductory and ongoing training; and provision for continuity of teachers.
- Relevant supporting school policies either have been or are being developed. The work of the school in the area of student support is currently being encapsulated in a draft policy. The timely finalisation and ratification of the school's substance use policy is important at this point.
- Communication with parents in relation to the SPHE programme is well developed.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

- Management facilitates subject-department planning, and the outcomes of related meetings are appropriately documented and filed.
- A co-ordinator oversees all planning work. This individual demonstrates a keen interest in the area and, as a result, the role is well developed. For example, significant thought and time is given to the provision of a range of high-quality co-curricular and cross-curricular activities, all of which are designed to enhance students' understanding and learning relative to health and wellbeing.
- In this context, rather than rotating the position of subject co-ordinator, it is suggested that consideration be given to the appointment of an assistant co-ordinator. This position should be rotated amongst SPHE teachers, as it would promote a greater sharing of the workload attached to the role of co-ordinator, while building capacity for appointing a new co-ordinator when the time is right.

- A well-developed subject plan is in place. This contains good quality outline programmes of work. Commendably, these reflect the creative ‘carousel’ approach that has been adopted to SPHE delivery, an approach that is facilitated by the concurrent timetabling of SPHE within each year group. Corresponding records clearly indicate the teachers responsible for the delivery of each module in each year group.
- Programmes of work should be further developed in time, to provide topic-specific details relating to resources, methodologies, and the all-important area of assessment.
- The quality of lesson planning was generally very good. In one instance, planning was far too ambitious. In this instance also, the value of planned activities did not appear to have been sufficiently evaluated in advance.

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