

**An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna**

**Department of Education and Skills**

**Subject Inspection of  
Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE)**

**REPORT**

**Coachford College  
Coachford, County Cork  
Roll number: 70960D**

**Date of inspection: 15 May 2013**



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

**REPORT  
ON  
THE QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN SPHE**

---

**INFORMATION ON THE INSPECTION**

|   |   |
|---|---|
| <b>Dates of inspection</b>  | 14 and 15 May 2013  |
| <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 four class periods</li><li>• Examination of students' work</li><li>• Feedback to principal, deputy principal and teachers</li></ul> |

**MAIN FINDINGS**

- Some teaching and learning of the highest order was observed among general examples of highly competent practice.
- The variety of teaching methods used was effective and was appropriate to the topics presented, and to the delivery of SPHE.
- Positive classroom relationships had been established, which provided an effective context for student engagement.
- Student learning was monitored effectively and formatively by the use of questions, prompts and by the imaginative promotion of students' critical responses to the topics presented.
- Teachers have engaged with continuing professional development (CPD) relevant to SPHE at an individual level and on a whole-school level.
- SPHE department plans are clear and have been developed collaboratively.

**MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS**

- The intended learning outcomes of lessons should be stated clearly at the outset.
  - The references to teaching methods in the SPHE department plan should be expanded and circulated for the use of all subject departments.
-

## **INTRODUCTION**

Coachford College is a designated community college under the patronage of the Bishop of Cloyne and Cork Education and Training Board. The current enrolment stands at 559 students. In addition to the Junior Certificate and Leaving Certificate programmes, students may opt for Transition Year (TY) and the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP).

## **TEACHING AND LEARNING**

- The topics chosen for the lessons were consistent with the SPHE syllabus and suitable to students' maturity levels. Teachers displayed knowledge and understanding of the topics, both in their presentations and in responses to requests for clarification by students. Some examples of teaching of the highest order were observed in the course of the evaluation. In general terms, teaching was highly competent, well based on established relationships, and focused on students' learning needs. While the topic became clear in the course of each lesson, it is recommended that the intended outcomes of lessons be stated clearly at the outset.
- A variety of teaching methods was used in each lesson. As appropriate to SPHE, methods that elicited the personal responses of students were interspersed with exercises that demanded responses of a more objective nature. It was clear from the practice observed, and from the samples of students' work observed, that this was normal practice in SPHE lessons and that it helped to obviate any over reliance on teacher inputs.
- Appropriate use was made of resources, such as the whiteboard and information and communication technology (ICT), in all lessons. ICT, where used, was used effectively to enhance the presentation of the lessons by means of colourful and well-presented slides, and to prompt student thought through the creative use of digital video clips.
- Students were well managed. This was facilitated by lessons which were well structured, developmental and in tune with students' interests. The pace of one lesson was exhilarating; students were guided through a process of critical thinking that was both creative and productive. It was indicative of the positive relationships among teachers and students that the lessons were conducted with good humour and that, in consequence, students' responded with openness and enthusiasm.
- Teachers' knowledge of students facilitated the on-going use of formative assessment throughout the lessons. Teachers observed and commented on the work being produced in students' worksheets and on that produced in the course of small-group discussions. Questions were used effectively to elicit higher-order responses from students. This good practice in assessment was confirmed on perusal of students' homework copies and journals.

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

- The provision for SPHE is appropriate and is in keeping with the school's core values of care and support. All junior cycle students are in receipt of one lesson of SPHE per week. Four members of staff are assigned currently to teach SPHE.
- The interest of the members of the senior management team in SPHE provision is displayed through their familiarity with the subject and through the encouragement and facilitation of CPD. Similarly, the collaborative links that have been developed between the SPHE department and the departments with formal responsibility for student support,

namely, the guidance department, the learning support department and the chaplaincy, have been encouraged by senior management for their part in the creation of a positive learning environment. Communication is ongoing on an informal basis, with regular formal communication through staff meetings and other collaborative engagements. This is good practice.

## **PLANNING AND PREPARATION**

- The SPHE department is well structured. A co-ordinator has been chosen by staff. The co-ordinator arranges regular, minuted meetings and facilitates the dissemination of relevant information as it emerges. It is evident that the department functions with an awareness of Department of Education and Skills circulars and guidelines. The SPHE plan includes, for example, references to the procedures to be used when inviting visitors to the school and includes a statement on confidentiality, both advocated in recent Department publications.
- The SPHE department has devised a plan that is concise and clear. The plan is values-based, with reference to the school's mission, and shows understanding of relevant documents and Department of Education and Skills circular letters. The plan contains references to the arrangement of curricular provision in the junior cycle and to the resources required for such provision. It is clear that SPHE staff engagement with CPD is ongoing and that it has had a positive influence on teaching practice.
- The context of school self-evaluation (SSE) provides opportunities for the consideration of teachers' professional practice. The active methods observed in the course of lessons show staff familiarity with these. It is recommended that references to teaching methods in the SPHE department plan be expanded and circulated for the use of all staff. It is also recommended that, in line with SSE guidelines, reflection on practice be a regular issue for consideration at SPHE department meetings.
- A comprehensive policy on relationships and sexuality education has been prepared in consultation with staff. The consultative process, although protracted, displays good practice in planning and has resulted in a document based on staff consensus, and the inputs of parents and students.
- Individual teacher planning was effective. Consideration was given to the use of a variety of activities in the course of lessons that stimulated students' interest and that included the appropriate use of information and communication technology (ICT). In this context, it is worthy of note that extensive use is made of the school's website to communicate with parents, students and staff, particularly through its Facebook page and its moodle, on both of which items of relevance to SPHE are reported regularly.

---

The draft findings and recommendations arising out of this evaluation were discussed with the principal, the deputy principal and subject teachers at the conclusion of the evaluation. The board of management of the school was given an opportunity to comment on the findings and recommendations of the report; the board chose to accept the report without response.

*Published October 2013*