Subject Inspection of Social Personal and Health Education REPORT

Cashel Community School
Cashel, County Tipperary
Roll number: 91497A

Date of inspection: 18 February 2011
REPORT ON THE QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN SOCIAL, PERSONAL AND HEALTH EDUCATION (SPHE)

SUBJECT INSPECTION REPORT

This report has been written following a subject inspection in Cashel Community School. It presents the findings of an evaluation of the quality of teaching and learning in SPHE, including Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE), and makes recommendations for the further development of the teaching of this subject in the school. The evaluation was conducted over two days during which the inspector visited classrooms and observed teaching and learning. The inspector interacted with students and teachers, examined students’ work, and had discussions with the teachers. The inspector reviewed school planning documentation and teachers’ written preparation, conducted an interview with senior students and administered a questionnaire to forty-one third-year students. Following the evaluation visit, the inspector provided oral feedback on the outcomes of the evaluation to the principal and subject teachers. 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.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

Cashel Community School is a co-educational school in the community and comprehensive sector with a current enrolment of 777 students. A positive school climate that supports students’ social, personal and health education is evident and SPHE is viewed as an integral component of the school’s approach to the pastoral care of students. SPHE is appropriately timetabled for all students in accordance with the requirements of Circular Letter M11/03. Additionally, appropriate arrangements are made to ensure that a comprehensive RSE programme is provided for all senior cycle students. The provision of a module on personal development for students who opt to study the Transition Year (TY) programme is welcomed, as this ensures a continuation of supports from junior cycle for these students as they grow and mature.

A core team of six female teachers, with relevant knowledge, skills and interests, is currently deployed to teach the subject. All teachers have been facilitated to participate in relevant professional development courses, which ensure that they are very familiar with the content and pedagogical approaches to support students’ learning and personal development through the SPHE and RSE programmes. Management and the SPHE team expressed a desire for male teachers to join the SPHE team, given the co-educational nature of the school. The achievement of this objective should be actively pursued. A strategic approach should be taken to identify additional members of staff with the necessary interest and skills to deliver the programme. Engagement with the in-service programme provided by the SPHE support service will help to support teachers expressing interest and a willingness to teach the subject.

Attempts by management to ensure that teachers remain with their class groups from first-year to third-year, where possible and appropriate, is commended. This practice helps to establish trusting relationships and consistency of approach in the delivery of the programme.
Policies relevant to SPHE have been developed to support students and the work of the school, including policies on substance use, anti-bullying, and dealing with critical incidents. The Child Protection Guidelines have been adopted in line with the requirements of the Department of Education and Skills. The school’s RSE policy has recently been developed and is currently in draft format and at the consultation phase. The progression of this policy to ratification stage and implementation is recommended.

Senior cycle students, interviewed as part of the evaluation, spoke highly of their experiences in SPHE and RSE and value the knowledge and skills that they have developed as a result of their learning. The provision of a comprehensive and coherent RSE programme, in addition to the supportive nature of the learning experiences, is very much appreciated by these students.

A very good infrastructure has been developed to support the effective integration of information and communication technology (ICT) into teaching and learning in all classrooms. Most SPHE teachers have their own classrooms and have developed these rooms as an attractive and vibrant resource to support students’ engagement and learning. An appropriate system is in place for the purchase or replacement of resources to support teaching and learning.

The school is proactive in promoting student well-being and ensuring that a respectful atmosphere pervades throughout. The organisation of whole-school initiatives, such as the anti-bullying and healthy eating campaigns, is commended. Additionally, the active engagement of the student council in organising an anti-smoking campaign is exemplary. This peer-led initiative has the potential to make a very positive contribution to the further promotion of student welfare.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

The quality of planning for SPHE is very good. Management provides time for formal subject department planning, and teachers also meet informally on a regular basis to discuss the organisation and delivery of the various programmes of work. A subject co-ordinator has been appointed and this role is very well executed. A subject plan has been developed and this comprehensive document ensures that all aspects of programme organisation and delivery are appropriately identified and documented.

The programmes of work in SPHE for each year group are well developed and appropriately constructed to ensure that the syllabus is delivered in a coherent and incremental manner. Common schemes of work for each module and topic have been developed and the identification of learning outcomes, aligned with the required resources for each topic, is good practice. The further expansion of these planning frameworks to connect appropriate teaching and learning approaches with assessment strategies should be considered.

A comprehensive RSE programme has been developed. This programme ensures that the key knowledge, understanding and skills are developed in a coherent and age-appropriate manner. The effective delivery of the programme has been carefully considered and appropriate arrangements have been made to ensure that all students have access to the comprehensive programme.

Cross-curricular links with related subject disciplines have also been identified in the SPHE subject plan. These links have been further developed for some subjects to identify the relevant knowledge and specific skills in common with the SPHE programme. The expansion of these links for all related subjects will further enhance the quality of subject planning.
A considerable range of texts and resources have been acquired or developed to support the delivery of each topic. A number of DVDs of relevant topics have been recorded to provide additional stimulus material to support students’ learning. These resources and reference materials, along with copies of the syllabus, programmes of work, *SPHE Handbook* and *Guidelines for Teachers* are stored in a central area, which is easily accessible. Consideration should be given to the creation of a shared SPHE folder on the school’s network, as this will facilitate the sharing of the many high-quality electronic resources developed by teachers to support teaching and learning of the range of topics.

Appropriate links have been established with relevant external agencies to provide additional information and to complement the work of the SPHE department. The procedures for the inclusion of guest speakers follow good practice, in line with Circular Letter 0023/2010.

There is a very high quality of individual planning for SPHE among all teachers. The considered and reflective approach taken by teachers to the programme development and delivery is highly commended. Very good efforts are made by teachers to record their reflections on the delivery of each topic on a weekly basis for each class, which is exemplary. In addition, the inclusion of elements of student review of various elements of the programme is very good practice.

**TEACHING AND LEARNING**

The quality of teaching and learning in the SPHE lessons observed was of a high standard. Teachers have developed a very efficient system to organise the learning environment, settle students, record attendance and introduce the topic of the lesson. This good practice optimised the time available for active engagement in learning. This system involved sharing the learning intentions with students and, through skilful questioning and guided discussion, ensured that students had a clear focus and expectation for their learning. Links with relevant previous learning were also made to contextualise the current topic as part of the continuum of learning in SPHE.

A common feature of all lessons was the appropriate and very effective use of ICT to support teaching and learning. ICT was used to display the intended learning outcomes, to provide stimulus material for reflection or discussion, to display the tasks and key questions related to the topic and to provide a summary of the key points of the lesson. This helped to maintain student interest and to ensure a high level and quality of engagement.

Each lesson was appropriately structured and paced. The experiential learning process was effectively used to develop students’ knowledge and understanding of the relevant topic. The range of tasks set ensured an appropriate balance between teacher input and student activity. Tasks set were developmental and well constructed to scaffold students’ learning as they progressed from one task to the next. Questioning was effectively used in all lessons and teachers used targeted questions to differentiate for student ability. Very good practice was also noted where teachers moved around the classroom to provide individual assistance to students whenever required. This ensured that all students were fully included, actively engaged and making progress.

Key skills relevant to SPHE were effectively identified and promoted through the range of class activities. All lessons provided students with opportunities to work independently or as part of a group. Group work was well structured, with appropriate roles assigned and time allocated for the completion of each task. The development of key social and communication skills through these class activities is highly commended. For example, the development of a positive self image was
the topic of one lesson, where students were asked to construct a visual *curriculum vitae* in response to a job advert. Through this task, including the skilful processing of responses by the teacher, students identified and articulated particular strengths about themselves. The recognition and expression of positive traits, talents and aspirations are skills that help students develop self awareness and personal effectiveness. These key skills contribute to students’ personal growth and assist them to develop and achieve their personal goals.

A range of suitable and age-appropriate resources were used to support students’ learning. A variety of worksheets used during lessons on changes at adolescence provided students with opportunities to review the physical, social and emotional milestones achieved since starting secondary school. In some lessons, students also used their copybooks to record the main points of the lesson, and this good practice should be extended to all lessons as appropriate.

Each classroom was very well decorated with a display of subject and topic-specific materials and student-generated work. Many of the classrooms displayed posters with motivational quotes from well renowned personalities that promoted tolerance, goal setting, self belief and achievement. Lessons were characterised by excellent student behaviour and a positive and supportive atmosphere was observed in all lessons. An affirming approach was evident in all classroom interactions, which ensured that the learning environment in each class was purposefully focused.

Learning outcomes were revisited periodically throughout lessons and again at the end. Through targeted questioning by teachers, and self reporting, students demonstrated a very good understanding of the topics in focus.

**ASSESSMENT**

Very good progress has been made in developing the assessment process in SPHE. A range of appropriate formative and summative methods are used to assess and monitor students’ engagement and learning. All students keep SPHE folders and copybooks to retain records of their work. Teachers have also developed a very good system of storing these folders to ensure that they are easily accessible for every lesson. A review of students’ folders and copybooks indicate that students’ are making good progress in the planned programme of work. The inclusion of a comment about students’ progress in SPHE on the school reports system, and the attendance of SPHE teachers at annual parent-teacher meetings, is in keeping with good practice.

To further advance the assessment process, the SPHE department should discuss a common approach to assessment for each year group, based on the identified learning outcomes. The identification of a number of assessment milestones for each year group should be discussed as part of the subject department planning process.

**SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

The following are the main strengths identified in the evaluation:

- Cashel Community School promotes a positive school climate to support students’ social, personal and health education.
- The time provided for SPHE, including RSE, is in line with Department requirements.
- SPHE is very well co-ordinated, with a systematic and organised approach to subject planning and a detailed, comprehensive subject plan in place.
- The SPHE department has developed a comprehensive range of appropriate resources, which are centrally stored and accessible for all teachers of the subject.
There was a high standard of teaching and learning in the SPHE lessons observed, with a clear emphasis on an interactive and experiential approach to promoting students’ learning.

Lessons were characterised by exemplary student behaviour and a caring and affirming approach by teachers to all aspects of students’ engagement and learning.

A reporting system is in place to inform parents of students’ engagement and progress in SPHE.

A number of co-curricular and whole-school initiatives also support students’ social and personal development.

As a means of building on these strengths and to address areas for development, the following key recommendations are made:

- The progression of the draft RSE policy to ratification stage and implementation is recommended.
- The inclusion of the most appropriate teaching and learning and assessment strategies in the existing planning framework for each year group is recommended.
- To further advance the assessment process, the SPHE department should discuss a common approach to assessment, including the identification of a number of assessment milestones for each year group.

Post-evaluation meetings were held with the teachers of SPHE and with the principal at the conclusion of the evaluation when the draft findings and recommendations of the evaluation were presented and discussed.

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