

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

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

**Lanesboro Community College
Lanesboro, Co. Longford
Roll number: 71720L**

Date of inspection: 22 October 2010



**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

SUBJECT INSPECTION REPORT

This report has been written following a subject inspection in Lanesboro Community College. It presents the findings of an evaluation of the quality of teaching and learning in Social, Personal and Health Education (including Relationships and Sexuality Education in senior cycle), and makes recommendations for the further development of the teaching of this subject in the school. The evaluation was conducted over four 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. Following the evaluation visit, the inspector provided oral feedback on the outcomes of the evaluation to the principal and subject teachers.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

Lanesboro Community College has a policy for Social Personal and Health Education (SPHE) and Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) which sets these subjects firmly in the context of the school ethos. That ethos encourages "the full and harmonious development of each pupil (social, spiritual, emotional, physical) in an atmosphere of care, respect, trust, love and concern." During the course of the inspection, it was clear that the school management and teaching staff set a high value on SPHE and on its contribution to the holistic development of the students and to the life of the school.

SPHE is timetabled for one period per week in junior cycle classes, in accordance with Department of Education and Skills circulars. Classes are of thirty-five minutes duration in the morning and forty minutes in the afternoon. In the current school year, SPHE is set against games in first and second year, which means that boys and girls are taught separately in these years, while the third-year classes are mixed. While there may sometimes be advantages in teaching aspects of SPHE to boys and girls separately, best practice in a co-educational school is that they be taught together and it is recommended that this be done in future.

Senior cycle RSE is currently delivered within the Religious Education (RE) programme. The religion textbook, which contains chapters dealing with these topics, is used as a teaching resource for RSE. Given the multi-denominational character of the school and the obligation on all schools to develop a policy in regard to RSE and to implement an RSE programme in senior cycle, it is recommended that senior cycle RSE be given a more distinct identity within the school's curriculum. This would entail developing a discrete stand-alone RSE programme with its own subject plan. The contents of the programme should be communicated in writing to parents in advance of its delivery.

At present, the school's RSE policy is outlined in two paragraphs of the SPHE/RSE policy document. In accordance with the requirements and recommendations contained in Department circulars M4/95, 0027/2008, 0023/2010 and 0037/2010, it is recommended that the current

SPHE/RSE policy be reviewed with a view to articulating the school's RSE policy in greater detail. The revised policy document should, for example, guide teachers in the treatment of spiritual, moral and ethical issues which may arise when teaching RSE. In accordance with best practice, the revised RSE policy should be developed in collaboration with parents, teachers and students. Detailed guidelines to assist schools in developing a policy for RSE are to be found on the Department's website, www.education.ie.

There are two teachers currently involved in teaching SPHE and RSE in the school. One of them is subject coordinator and teaches all the junior cycle classes, while the other teaches RSE in senior cycle. There is a clear commitment on the part of school management to professional development for the teaching of SPHE. The subject coordinator has attended numerous courses over the ten years that the subject has been offered in the school and has built up considerable expertise in the subject area. The school management readily facilitates teachers' attendance at SPHE courses.

Other teachers besides the two directly involved with SPHE have expertise in related curricular areas and make a contribution to the development and planning of the subject. This collaboration is highly commended. In the interest of sharing good practice and expertise, and with a view to the future development of the subject in the school, it is recommended that school management expand the SPHE core teaching team by inviting at least one new member to join. Gender balance should be considered when expanding the team. Any new team member should be given access to appropriate professional development courses.

Occasionally, outside speakers are invited to contribute to the delivery of the school's SPHE programme. In this regard, the revised school RSE policy should take into account the guidelines in circular 0023/2010 regarding visiting speakers to post-primary schools.

Over the years, a very good bank of teaching resources for SPHE has been built up in the school. These include textbooks, DVDs, magazines, PowerPoint presentations and many handouts prepared by the teachers. Information and communication technology (ICT) is used by the students to research topics and when working on projects.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

The standard of planning and preparation for SPHE in Lanesboro Community College is very good. There is clear evidence of collaborative planning for SPHE/RSE: the two teachers involved meet together and also confer with the other members of staff, such as the Guidance Counsellor, the Home School Community Liaison (HSCL) coordinator and the teachers of Civic, Social and Political Education (CSPE).

The subject plan for SPHE in junior cycle is detailed and comprehensive. It follows the junior cycle SPHE curriculum framework, indicates the order in which the modules will be taught and makes connections with other syllabus areas, such as Science, Home Economics and CSPE. An example of this integrated approach to planning is the link made between the Communication Skills module and CSPE in addressing the topic "citizens and consumers taking positive action." Planning takes full cognisance of the whole-school context and of the phases of school life. For example, the personal safety module is related to the school's fire safety week and the self-management module is taught in the lead-up to the summer examinations.

The subject planning folder contains a good collection of resources from which handouts and presentations could be chosen for the various modules and topics. Commendably, the subject plan also indicates the range of methodologies to be used in facilitating students' learning, including the use of ICT.

The short-term planning for the lessons observed was also of a high standard, with carefully thought-out aims and clear statements of learning outcomes.

At present, the topics to be covered in senior cycle RSE are listed as part of the RE subject plan. In keeping with the recommendation to develop a discrete stand-alone RSE programme, it is recommended that the very good practice evidenced in the junior cycle planning documentation be extended, in order to provide a more detailed plan for RSE in senior cycle. The plan should include reference to appropriate RSE-specific teaching and learning resources, for example the TRUST (*Talking Relationships, Understanding Sexuality Teaching Resource*) materials.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

The standard of teaching and learning in both of the lessons observed was excellent. The first-year lesson was part of the module Belonging and Integrating and dealt with transition from primary to post-primary school. The students worked in groups to evaluate various aspects of their transfer from primary school, rating aspects as "easy/helpful" or "difficult", and they discussed ideas as to how the school could help next year's new students. One of the intended outcomes of this lesson was, commendably, that the students' responses to questions about the school's transition programme would feed into a review of the programme. The second-year lesson was part of the Communication Skills module and aimed to make students aware of the importance of listening and to help them develop the skill of attentive listening. One of the activities in this class was pair work where the students role-played listening situations which modelled features of good and not-so-good listening. The group discussion afterwards drew out the characteristics of good listening.

The aims and outcomes of the lessons were clearly communicated to the students and explicit links were made with prior learning. For example, before embarking on a group discussion activity in the first-year lesson, the teacher and students reviewed the rules for group discussion covered in a previous lesson. Whole-class discussion and questioning were used effectively in both lessons to summarise and consolidate learning outcomes and to revise prior learning.

The various phases of the lessons led naturally into one another and the limited time available was managed very effectively. The variety of well-planned activities ensured that the students' interest and motivation were maintained throughout. There was a real sense of student engagement with the subject of the lessons, both during whole-class activities and when the students worked in pairs, groups or individually. The style of teaching fostered experiential learning and maximum engagement by all the students in their own learning. Both lessons evidenced the stages of the structured experiential learning cycle: experiencing, processing, generalising and applying.

Very good use was made of group and whole-class discussion, which was effectively managed and in which the students participated enthusiastically. The layout of the classroom (U-shaped seating arrangement) facilitated open discussion, as did the fact that the topics were of obvious and immediate relevance to the students' lives. The atmosphere in the classroom was very pleasant and the students were polite and well behaved at all times, showing respect to one

another and to the adults present. Student-teacher rapport was remarkably good and seemed to be a major factor in the students' obvious enjoyment of the subject and their engagement with it.

As this inspection was part of a national evaluation of SPHE, a student questionnaire and a focused interview with a group of students were included among the inspection activities. An analysis of students' responses indicated a very high level of appreciation of the importance of SPHE to their personal and social development. The great majority of the students agreed that their experience of SPHE had contributed to their development of social and personal skills, to their emotional development and to their understanding of issues such as substance misuse and personal safety. In the focused discussion and in their classroom interaction with the inspector, the students were very clear about the purpose of SPHE. Their understanding of the underlying concepts was impressive and they expressed satisfaction with the way, for example, SPHE had helped them in developing good work habits and in managing relationships.

ASSESSMENT

The school's SPHE subject plan includes a list of the modes used to assess students' learning in SPHE. During the lessons observed, it was clear that the teacher was actively assessing individual and group participation and learning. Homework is not usually assigned in SPHE, but the students' folders are carefully kept and carried on from year to year. The folders contain examples of the students' written work, completed worksheets, project work and art work. Written work is corrected with helpful comments and students are given verbal feedback in class. In parent-teacher meetings and in school reports parents are kept informed about their children's progress in SPHE. In further developing the school's already good practice in assessment of learning, the relevant section of the *SPHE Guidelines for Teachers* should prove useful.

A feature of the SPHE programme in Lanesboro Community College is the fact that it is constantly under review. Students are given the opportunity at the end of the year to evaluate their experience of SPHE. They are asked to complete a written evaluation which asks them to identify, for example, the module they most enjoyed, a visitor they found interesting, a moment of self-awareness and a time they felt challenged. This reflective practice is highly commended. In addition to the student evaluation of the programme, the SPHE teachers meet with the Guidance Counsellor and the HSCL coordinator to review the programme and plan for possible changes to it.

SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The following are the main strengths identified in the evaluation:

- The school management sets a high value on SPHE and on its contribution to the holistic development of the students and to the life of the school.
- Curricular provision and timetabling for SPHE are very good.
- Planning for SPHE is very good.
- The standard of teaching and learning in the classes observed was excellent.
- Student motivation, engagement and learning in SPHE are all very good.
- Planning and delivery of SPHE is very well integrated with other subjects and makes a significant contribution to the overall welfare of the students.
- The SPHE programme is reviewed regularly and the views of students are sought and taken into account in planning for future development.

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

- To comply with Department circulars, it is recommended that the school's RSE policy be reviewed and articulated in greater detail.
- The practice of teaching boys and girls separately should be avoided in future.
- A discrete stand-alone programme for senior cycle RSE should be developed.
- School management should expand the SPHE core teaching team.

A post-evaluation meeting was held with the teachers of Social, Personal and Health Education and 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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