

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

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

Ó Fiaich College
Dundalk, County Louth
Roll number: 71770D

Date of inspection: 26 January 2012



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)**

INFORMATION ON THE INSPECTION

Dates of inspection	25 and 26 January 2012
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 four class periods• Examination of students' work• Feedback to principal and teachers

MAIN FINDINGS

- Overall, the quality of teaching and learning in the lessons observed ranged from good to very good with some exemplary practice noted.
- In most lessons, care was taken to involve as many students as possible during question-and-answer sessions.
- Students displayed a thorough understanding of the concepts being taught in all lessons.
- Many supplementary activities are provided to students which also support the work of the SPHE teachers.
- The SPHE department is paying meticulous attention to the assessment of students' work.
- The standard of planning and the co-ordination of the SPHE department are both excellent.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

- To ensure that student learning is appropriately assessed, all learners should be encouraged to respond to questions in lessons.
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INTRODUCTION

Ó Fiaich College operates under the management of County Louth Vocational Education Committee (VEC) and comprises a post-primary college and an Institute of Further Education that provides Post Leaving Certificate (PLC) courses. The second level school has a current enrolment of 355 students. The school participates in the Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) action plan for educational inclusion. The school offers the full range of programmes which includes the option of Transition Year (TY) for some students.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

- Overall, the quality of teaching and learning in the majority of lessons observed ranged from good to very good with some exemplary practice noted. In these lessons, a variety of methodologies and resources was used.
- In all lessons, instructions were very clear and intended learning outcomes were shared at the start of the lesson and revisited at the end.
- Students were informed about the content of forthcoming lessons, which is very good practice.
- All lessons were logical, purposeful and carefully thought out. Good routines were established from the outset, which included the taking of a roll.
- Students were provided with opportunities to participate actively in lessons. This took the form of pair work or group work. Class discussions were well managed. For instance, key points were recorded by students to optimise learning.
- In some lessons, the central focus was to impart information to students and this is appropriate. However, it is important to develop students' attitudes to particular topics as well as their knowledge. This is recommended.
- Students displayed thorough understanding of the concepts being taught in all lessons. Overall, all students were provided with opportunities to participate in the lesson during question-and-answer sessions and this good practice should be used in all lessons.
- Classroom management regarding discipline was very good. The learning atmosphere was very positive and in the main, it was evident that teachers had a high level of awareness regarding the individual learning needs of their students. An example of this was the use of concrete materials, which is particularly appropriate for the kinaesthetic learner.
- On occasion, individual reflective tasks which required students to complete worksheets were included in lessons, but sometimes the level of written work that was required was overly ambitious. Care should be taken not to overburden particular learners with tasks that require much writing.
- Some efforts were made to acquire and display SPHE posters in classrooms but this was not standard practice. However, SPHE teachers plan to acquire and distribute subject-related materials throughout the school. This should serve as a reminder of the importance of SPHE to students.
- The SPHE department has developed evaluation forms for students to use to assess their learning. Examination of students' materials demonstrated that some good use has been made of these materials. In order to comply with the assessment policy of the SPHE department, it is recommended that more widespread use be made of this resource.

- A system has been established by all teachers for students to store their work and, in line with good practice, these materials are kept by the teachers. The SPHE department pays meticulous attention to the assessment of students' work and this is commended.
- In most lessons, students' literacy needs were well catered for. Key words were displayed and referred to at appropriate stages throughout the lesson. This practice should be incorporated into all SPHE lessons as part of the commitment to catering for the literacy needs of the students.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- The timetabling arrangements that are in place for SPHE are appropriate. In addition to their timetabled SPHE lesson, all students are provided with a pastoral care programme which is delivered by tutors at appropriate stages throughout the year.
- There is a clear identifiable care team in this school which meets weekly. This team includes the SPHE co-ordinator, the guidance counsellor and the Religion teacher who also delivers the relationships and sexuality (RSE) programme in senior cycle.
- Many supplementary activities which support the work of the SPHE teachers are provided to students and are organised by the care team. In addition, any decisions regarding the use of external speakers are made by these teachers.
- The SPHE department has developed an assessment policy and this is good practice. Most aspects of it are being executed by all teachers. Attention should be paid to those areas which are not currently being implemented by all teachers.
- The SPHE department comprises three teachers. It is very good to note that there has been significant engagement with in-service courses provided by the SPHE support service. Other members of staff not currently teaching SPHE have also undertaken training. This flexibility for members to join the team is very good as it ensures that there is not an over-reliance on a few members of staff.
- The SPHE department has acquired a good range of resources over time and these can be accessed by all teachers.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

- The school supports subject department planning and provides time for the SPHE department to meet. A key strength of this department is the high quality of co-ordination currently in existence.
- The standard of planning for SPHE is very good. There is a three-year plan for SPHE which is spiral and developmental. Detailed programmes of work for all class groups have been developed and these include a statement of intended learning outcomes for almost all topics. In addition, a separate pastoral care programme is available which is appropriate in content and complements the SPHE planned programmes of work. It is good to note the input of the guidance department in this work.
- Individual planning is equally very good. All teachers presented planning folders which contained a wide range of resources and other useful planning materials which are acquired or designed by the teacher and tailored to suit the learning needs of students. This commitment by the teachers is highly commended.

The draft findings and recommendations arising out of this evaluation were discussed with the 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, 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

The SPHE Department and management of O’Fiaich College thank the inspector for her courtesy and the manner in which the evaluation was conducted. The co-ordinator and teaching team have been highly commended in this report. The high standard of co-ordination, planning, teaching and assessment of learning in this subject area are identified and praised in the report. The subject department has taken on board the recommendations contained in the report as an opportunity to improve and develop the teaching and learning experience for learners.

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

- It was suggested that a simpler personal reflection sheet be used by students in years one to three. This has been implemented and students complete sheets at end of class as per recommendation.
- Homework is assigned on a weekly basis. There is now less emphasis on written homework for the JCSP students as was advised.
- It was suggested that additional resources could be made available to the SPHE team. A wish list will be compiled at the next subject planning meeting for second level teachers.
- It was noted that not all rooms had students’ SPHE work on display. Students may only use a classroom once in a week and are delegated to other subjects e.g. Maths and Irish. Therefore space for display purposes is minimal. The nature of the subject where students complete tasks of a personal nature may be inappropriate to display work. Students share their ideas, feelings and suggestions in the SPHE class. This is a form of display, albeit temporary.