

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

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

**Christian Brothers Secondary School
Mitchelstown, County Cork
Roll number: 62420V**

Date of inspection: 4 March 2011



**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 SPHE

SUBJECT INSPECTION REPORT

This report has been written following a subject inspection in Christian Brothers Secondary School, Mitchelstown. 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 three days, during which the inspector visited classrooms and observed teaching and learning. The inspector interacted with students and teachers and examined students' work. The inspector reviewed 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 SPHE teachers.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

Social Personal and Health Education (SPHE) is provided in first, second, and third year. Currently, SPHE is taught during one of the students' timetabled Religious Education (RE) lessons. In order to comply with Circular M11/03, SPHE should be timetabled as a discrete standalone subject, clearly identifiable on the master timetable and on all relevant teachers' timetables. It should also be printed on all students' timetables. It is the school's intention to introduce SPHE to senior cycle from September 2011. This intention is praiseworthy. Management and staff are directed to the draft senior cycle SPHE syllabus, which is available on the website of the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA).

RSE is delivered as a module within junior cycle SPHE. This is consistent with best practice. In senior cycle, RSE is anchored in RE. Relevant training for the teacher charged with the task of delivering RSE in senior cycle is planned. The school's RSE policy should be reviewed in light of the guidelines, template and sample policy which are available on the website of the Department of Education and Skills. School management is advised to append a copy of the school's RSE programme, together with copies of relevant communications between school and home, to the RSE policy.

Most SPHE teachers have participated in SPHE training. It is suggested that an annual audit of teachers' professional development needs relative to the subject be completed. Ideally, this should be informed by the SPHE Support Service's workshop schedules, as emerging needs can then be addressed. This, in turn, will support the adoption of a more systematic and incremental approach to teacher training, which is also recommended.

In relation to staff deployment, it is positive that teachers involved are happy to be teaching SPHE. Considering the single-sex, all-male nature of the student cohort, it would be valuable to have male teachers on the team. School management's efforts in relation to this are encouraged. Management is equally encouraged to timetable SPHE teachers with the same class group in each

of first, second and third years, thereby providing for continuity of teacher throughout the junior cycle SPHE programme.

Serious consideration ought to be given to the organisation of whole-staff in-service in SPHE, which in addition to timetabling the subject as a discrete stand-alone subject, would help to raise the profile of SPHE in the school. The SPHE Support Service should be able to assist in this regard.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

A subject co-ordinator oversees the planning work of the SPHE department. Formal meetings are held once a term. In recent times, minutes of these meetings are being maintained. The continuation of this practice is strongly encouraged. A subject plan is being prepared.

Currently, the teachers' are following the suggested programme outlines for a mid-sized, single sex school in a small town, as provided in the *Guidelines for Teachers*. Copies of these outline plans, for each of first, second and third year class groups, should be filed in the relevant section of the subject plan. Teachers are also encouraged to build the following detail into these outline programmes of work: the learning outcomes for each module, as provided in the syllabus; the relevant whole-school events, seen to support the school's general provision for students' social, personal and health education; and the guest speakers who support teachers' delivery of certain aspects of the syllabus.

It is advised that teachers document the resources, methodologies and assessment strategies that are most suited to the delivery of each of the ten modules in each year. This task would support the eventual sharing of teachers' individual experiences in relation to the delivery of the various modules, as well as discussion around best practice in relation to SPHE in the areas of planning, teaching, learning and assessment. To support this task, it is suggested that teachers begin to maintain more detailed records of work covered. Consideration should be given to the design of a template that would support this record-keeping task, one that would accommodate the documentation of information on a module-by-module basis. In time, this should lead to teachers' agreeing the resources, methodologies, and assessment strategies to be used for each module in each year group.

As a priority, teachers should prepare an outline programme of work for senior cycle RSE. Teachers are referred to the *RSE - Interim curriculum and guidelines for post-primary schools*, available to download from www.ecdrumcondra.ie, which identify three themes and recommend the provision of a minimum of six RSE lessons in each year of senior cycle.

A bank of resources suited to the delivery of the SPHE syllabus exists in the school. Teachers are encouraged to continue to build and expand on this collection, with the budget they are allocated annually by management.

Individual teacher planning for lessons observed was of a good quality.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

The overall quality of teaching and learning in lessons observed was very good.

Lessons were purposeful, with an exploration of relevant subject matter. The very good practice of sharing the lesson purpose with students was incorporated into all lessons. This included specific reference to both module and topic, and a clear delineation of the intended learning outcomes. Lesson pacing was an issue at times, a side effect of over-ambitious planning. However, it was well managed, with the teacher facilitating a mid-point summary of learning, followed by a sharing of the plan for the following lesson. In some instances, learning links were established with prior lessons, thereby providing continuity in learning for students. This approach is further encouraged.

Carefully chosen resources, including resources that were generated using information communication technology (ICT), were well utilised to foster students' interest and participation, and to support their learning. The experiential method, which is considered most appropriate to student learning in SPHE, was in evidence in all lessons. It follows on, therefore, that teachers structured lessons in a way that provided for a very good level of student participation. The incorporation of strategies such as, for example, brainstorming, individual reflection tasks, and a group art task, succeeded in keeping students interested and involved. As appropriate, the inclusion of an even wider range of student-centred methodologies is suggested for consideration. This might include, for example, case study exercises, debate, icebreaker games, narrative expression tasks and role-play. Question and answer sessions were well utilised to develop lesson content.

Activities were well organised and managed. On occasion, students were required to assume different roles, which made them responsible for their own learning. Students' participation was closely monitored, and support and guidance were offered as appropriate. In some lessons, there was room for improvement in the management of student feedback following activities. It is suggested that, as relevant, teachers implement systems that would reduce the likelihood of students speaking out of turn or all together.

Teachers should consider revisiting learning outcomes as a means of supporting lesson summary and conclusion, and as a focus for determining students' understanding and learning. The incorporation of strategies that would facilitate a greater inclusion of student input at lesson conclusion stage is also suggested, as in some lessons there was a tendency to tell students what they had learnt rather than to ask them.

Students responded to good classroom management strategies. A positive atmosphere was created and the majority of students participating in an open, honest and co-operative manner. Students' contributions were encouraged, acknowledged and affirmed. The SPHE classroom layout was conducive to the provision of a participative and co-operative learning environment.

ASSESSMENT

There is an evident consciousness in relation to the assessment of students' progress and achievement in SPHE, but it is suggested that it is an area that requires a fresh focus and approach.

With an emphasis on the learning outcomes identified in the syllabus, consideration ought to be given to the introduction of strategies intended to evaluate students' learning on a module-by-module basis. To this end, it is recommended that the teachers consider developing an assessment toolkit. A number of options exist, for example: classroom activities; home tasks; self-assessment; peer-assessment; and portfolio assessment. Teachers are strongly encouraged to consider the merits and value of portfolio assessment. As a first step in this process, students should be encouraged to maintain subject files. The *SPHE Guidelines for Teachers*, as well as the *SPHE Handbook*, deal with assessment quite extensively, and sample templates are provided for teachers.

The use of lesson reviews is further encouraged, as is the inclusion of reflection exercises. Such exercises should seek to provide opportunities for students to reflect, not just on the knowledge garnered but also on the skills or attitudes that may have been fostered and developed. End-of-module or end-of-topic, as opposed to end-of-lesson exercises, might be best placed to provide for all three. These could also be used to get feedback from students in relation to what went well, and what did not go so well, in each lesson. The outcomes of this can be used to inform teacher self-evaluation and, therefore, future lesson planning and delivery, discussed previously in the planning and preparation section.

The inclusion of SPHE on the school report is recommended.

SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The following are the main strengths identified in the evaluation:

- SPHE is provided in first, second, and third year.
- It is the school's intention to introduce SPHE to senior cycle from September 2011.
- Teachers involved are happy to be teaching SPHE.
- Management's provision of formal meeting time supports subject department planning.
- A subject co-ordinator oversees the planning work of the SPHE department.
- An annual budget is supporting the development of a bank of SPHE resources.
- Individual teacher planning for lessons observed was of a good quality.
- The overall quality of teaching and learning in lessons observed was very good.

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

- SPHE should be timetabled as a discrete standalone subject.
- The adoption of a more systematic and incremental approach to teachers' professional development in SPHE is recommended.
- The team of SPHE teachers should document the resources, methodologies and assessment modes most suited to the delivery of each module.
- Consideration ought to be given to the introduction of strategies intended to evaluate students' learning in SPHE on a module-by-module basis.

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

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.

Published, December 2011