

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

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

**Mohill Community College
Mohill, County Leitrim
Roll number: 76089V**

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
SOCIAL, PERSONAL AND HEALTH EDUCATION (SPHE)

SUBJECT INSPECTION REPORT

This report has been written following a subject inspection in Mohill 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 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. Following the evaluation visit, the inspector provided oral feedback on the outcomes of the evaluation to the principal, deputy 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

Mohill Community College is the result of an amalgamation which took place in 2008 between Marian College, a voluntary secondary school, and Mohill Vocational School. Currently, this school caters for 331 male and female students. Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) is very well provided for as a curriculum subject and it benefits from strong whole-school support. Each junior-cycle class is timetabled for SPHE in line with the requirements of circular letter M11/03. However, evidence was provided which indicated that in some cases, students with special educational needs (SEN) are being consistently removed from SPHE lessons to receive SEN support. The school should now review these arrangements so that all students can be provided with SPHE.

Currently, the SPHE department comprises one teacher but school management is confident that the SPHE department will expand once again starting from the next academic year. A high level of support is provided to the current SPHE department by three other experienced SPHE teachers. One teacher delivers the 'Social Education' module to Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) students. The remaining teachers have taught the subject in this, and in some cases, another school in previous years. All of the teachers met with during the evaluation were clearly committed and dedicated to this subject.

The RSE programme in senior cycle covers all of the themes as recommended in the *Interim Curriculum and Guidelines for Post-primary Schools*. This is partly delivered by external speakers who include representatives from 'The Samaritans' and 'Love for Life', and partly by the SPHE teacher in her Religious Education lessons. It is good to note that students have been provided with opportunities to evaluate all such external inputs and in addition, the teacher has recorded her own personal reflections. These are very good practices. The school is very clear about its procedures regarding visiting speakers. In line with good practice, parents are informed prior to the delivery of the RSE programme.

All SPHE lessons are timetabled in rooms which facilitate the inclusion in lessons of the learning methodologies advocated in the syllabus for the successful delivery of the subject. Very good efforts have been made by the SPHE teachers to ensure that there are appropriate displays of SPHE materials in their classrooms. These are very useful for maximising the potential of the students' immediate learning environment to stimulate and retain their interest in issues and topics relevant to the subject.

Management is very supportive of teachers' continuing professional development and there has been a high level of engagement with the SPHE support service to enhance the professional competencies of the SPHE teachers. However, as many of these courses were attended prior to the amalgamation of the school, it is important that the SPHE department compile this information so that there is a clear record of all training activities undertaken to date. It is recommended that this information be added to the department plan and kept updated.

The school is clearly committed to the promotion of SPHE in a wide whole-school context. For instance, many visual displays were placed in strategic locations around the school highlighting key areas of SPHE. Many systems which support the work of the SPHE teacher are in place. These include the year head and tutor system; the Big Brother, Big Sister mentoring programme between senior students and first-year students and a friendship week. The school has already firmly established itself as a Health Promoting School. This initiative was introduced in 2009. A Health Promotion committee was established which comprises teachers, parents and students and has already made very good progress in its work and this is commended.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

The systems that are in place in this school are supportive of collaborative planning. Time is made available for the SPHE department to meet. Records have been kept of all such meetings. In addition, there is much informal contact between the teachers.

It is very clear that SPHE is a core element of the pastoral care structure in this school. All of the key policies relevant to, or supportive of SPHE have been developed although some have yet to be ratified. The RSE policy should now be updated so that it more accurately describes current RSE provision in this school. Materials are available at www.education.gov.ie which will support this work.

Planning and co-ordination of SPHE in this school is of an exceptional quality. The SPHE teacher fulfils the role of co-ordinator very conscientiously. Materials have been acquired and developed which support the teaching and learning of SPHE. These are stored centrally and have been carefully filed and catalogued.

Planning documentation was presented on the day of the evaluation and it contained detailed information about the organisation of the department and all relevant planning materials for the SPHE and the RSE programmes. The SPHE programme for each year group consists of all ten modules as recommended in the syllabus designed by the National Council of Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA). Modules are presented in a spiral and developmental way. The RSE programme is clearly documented and it is very apparent that all external inputs are planned as part of the programme.

All the SPHE and RSE programmes of work presented contained a list of topics and included an estimated timeframe for their completion and the resources used. Common learning objectives for each topic have been identified and included in the plan. To enhance this very good work, the SPHE department should now determine how learning objectives will be achieved by considering the modes of assessment and the methodologies that will be used. This information should be included in the plan.

All lessons observed were thoroughly prepared. This was evident through, for example, the provision of handouts and worksheets which were seamlessly integrated into lessons at appropriate stages. Information and communication technology (ICT) was used effectively. All classes have developed individual class contracts which were on display in the classroom.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

Two lessons were observed during the course of the evaluation. The quality of teaching in both of these lessons was very good. Good practice was observed where the aims and objectives were shared with the students for their consideration as part of the learning process and returned to at the end of the lesson. Students were informed regarding the content of a subsequent lesson. These are very good practices as they provide a focus and structure for the students. Good routines were established which included monitoring attendance at the start of each lesson.

Students were provided with ample opportunities to engage actively with their own learning. Strategies included questioning, discussions, games, group and pair work and the use of case studies for analysis and discussion. Questions were varied and provided students with ample opportunities to think critically. Overall, questions were distributed to a wide range of students and this facilitated a high level of student participation. It is important that this practice be adopted from the outset in any lesson.

All lessons evaluated were well organised, characterised by smooth transitions from one stage to the next and they contained a variety of learning activities. Generally, there was a very good balance between the level of teacher and student input. This ensured that lessons were not led by the teacher. On occasion, there was a tendency to lecture students. Although the rationale for doing so was well intentioned, prolonged use of this strategy should be avoided so that students are continuously active in the learning process. Very good links were made to concepts relevant to the students. For example, in a lesson based on 'Friendship', reference was made to the film *Cast Away*.

There was a friendly and caring atmosphere in all of the classes visited and a positive rapport had been developed between the teacher and her students. In all lessons, instructions were clear and precise. Students' participation in the classroom activities was closely monitored by the teacher and help and assistance were provided when necessary. Pair work and group work activities were very well paced and an appropriate level of feedback was taken and suitably processed.

The quality of learning was very good in the lessons observed. This was evidenced by the quality of the discussions which took place during lessons, the written work examined, feedback from group work activities and student responses to questions. For example, in a lesson on 'Bullying', which was a continuation of a previous lesson, students had to apply their knowledge. Students were required to compile information and create a 'Guide to Being a Friend'. This was a very successful activity and indicated that a good level of learning had taken place. The quality of written work in copies and folders was very good. Commendably, students' work is well

organised and their sense of pride in it is very apparent. This has been well nurtured by the teacher.

ASSESSMENT

The SPHE department uses a range of assessment modes to determine students' progress. These include teachers' observations of students' engagement in pair work, group work, class discussions, questioning, completion of worksheets and responses to tasks. The SPHE department should formalise this work into an agreed policy which will guide teaching and learning into the future. Reference should be made to *Social, Personal & Health Education: Guidelines for Teachers pp.60-68*.

In all lessons, students were provided with resources by the teacher. These took the form of handouts or worksheets. In all classes, a system is in place for students to store and file their personal materials in a folder which is retained by the teacher and distributed to students at the beginning of lessons. Communication with parents is maintained through the school journal, school reports and annual parent-teacher meetings as appropriate.

SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The following are the main strengths identified in the evaluation:

- SPHE benefits from strong whole-school support.
- All of the teachers met with during the evaluation were clearly committed and dedicated to this subject.
- The RSE programme in senior cycle covers all of the themes as recommended in the *Interim Curriculum and Guidelines for Post-primary Schools*.
- SPHE is a core element of the pastoral care structure in this school.
- Planning and co-ordination of SPHE in this school is of an exceptional quality and all lessons observed were thoroughly prepared.
- The quality of teaching and learning is very good.

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

- The practice of consistently removing students from SPHE to attend SEN support must be reviewed.
- The RSE policy should now be updated so that it accurately describes RSE provision in this school.
- The SPHE department should now formalise its assessment practices into an agreed policy.

A post-evaluation meeting was held with the teachers of SPHE and with the principal and deputy principal at the conclusion of the evaluation when the draft findings and recommendations of the evaluation were presented and discussed.

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