Subject Inspection of
Social, Personal and Health Education
REPORT

St Francis Capuchin College
Rochestown, Cork
Roll number: 62460K

Date of inspection: 29 September 2011
REPORT
ON
THE QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN
SOCIAL, PERSONAL AND HEALTH EDUCATION (SPHE)
INCLUDING RELATIONSHIPS SEXUALITY EDUCATION (RSE)

INFORMATION ON THE INSPECTION

<table>
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<th>Dates of inspection</th>
<th>19 and 29 September 2011</th>
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| Inspection activities undertaken | • Observation of teaching and learning during seven class periods
• Examination of students’ work
• Feedback to principal and teachers

• Review of relevant documents
• Discussion with principal and teachers
• Interaction with students

MAIN FINDINGS

• The overall quality of teaching of SPHE is satisfactory, with evidence of some areas for improvement and with some excellent teaching also observed.

• Teachers’ general classroom approach, and their styles of engagement, are of value in the SPHE classroom.

• Lessons were student centred, albeit it with some scope for varying the types of interaction and involvement required of students.

• The school has created a climate that is supportive of the overall aims of SPHE.

• SPHE and RSE are appropriately timetabled for junior cycle students.

• Programmes of work have been agreed for each year group, and work has been initiated on the development of corresponding resource files.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

• Provision for RSE at senior cycle needs to be reviewed and formalised, and the school’s RSE policy should be updated to include detail of such provision.

• A fuller exploration and application of experiential learning is recommended, as is the assessment of students’ learning in SPHE.

• The establishment of a smaller, more stable team of SPHE teachers is strongly recommended, together with the establishment of a more systematic and incremental approach to SPHE teachers’ professional development.

• The further development of programmes of work and supporting resource files is advocated.
INTRODUCTION

St Francis Capuchin College is an all-male, voluntary secondary school, under the trusteeship of the Capuchin Franciscan order. The school has a current enrolment of 659. In addition to the Junior Certificate and established Leaving Certificate programmes, the school provides a compulsory Transition Year (TY) programme.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

- The overall quality of teaching of SPHE is satisfactory, with evidence of some areas for improvement. Some excellent teaching was also observed, and this facilitated optimum student learning.

- Lessons were, in the main, purposeful. However, on occasion, lessons lacked direct relevance to the syllabus and the agreed programme of work. As relevant, teachers are advised that lesson planning should be informed by both, with particular attention being paid to module aims and learning outcomes in the syllabus.

- In a small number of lessons, the good practice of identifying the module, topic and intended learning outcomes was observed. All teachers are encouraged to incorporate this approach into lessons.

- While teachers demonstrated varying degrees of competence in the skills necessary to teach SPHE, their general classroom approach, together with their style of engagement, are of value in the SPHE classroom. Training, both initial and ongoing, will enhance overall levels of competency.

- Experiential learning, the most desirable method for teaching SPHE, was fully provided for in just one lesson, with facets of the approach obvious in other lessons. A fuller exploration and application of this method is recommended.

- Lessons were student centred. Discussion was the predominant methodology, often preceded by the organisation of pair or group work. All teachers are encouraged to explore the possibility of incorporating additional active-learning methodologies. To this end, a review of all available resources is strongly recommended. Furthermore, it is recommended that when choosing activities for each lesson, teachers seek to vary the demands placed on students.

- At times, teachers tended to revert to a lecture-style of delivery in order to reinforce key points in a lesson. Teachers are advised that their role should be facilitative in nature, supporting students in the drawing of their own conclusions and the realisation of their own learning.

- Teachers are strongly encouraged to explore the contribution that information communication technologies (ICT) can make to teaching and learning in the SPHE classroom.

- Some teachers were attentive to the identification and explanation of key terminology. In light of the role that all teachers need to play in enhancing students’ literacy levels, this approach is praised and further encouraged.

- Assessment of students’ learning in SPHE is identified as an area for development. The discussion of assessment modes and strategies, whilst reflecting on the learning outcomes for each module, will help teachers to develop a more formal and co-ordinated approach to assessment in SPHE.
SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

• Whole school climate is supportive of the overall aims of SPHE. The work of the year tutors, class teachers, pastoral care team, and a privately-funded chaplain, is significant in this regard.

• Appropriate provision is made for SPHE at junior cycle. In line with recommended practice, junior cycle RSE is delivered as a module within the SPHE programme.

• The main provision for RSE at senior cycle is in TY, through the use of guest speakers. Additional elements are delivered as part of the school’s fifth and sixth year Religious Education (RE) programmes. Provision should be reviewed in line with Circular 0023/2010 – SPHE and RSE: Best Practice Guidelines for Post-Primary Schools, and with reference to the relevant teacher guidelines. In turn, the RSE policy should be updated to include provision at senior cycle. The programme content in each of fourth, fifth and sixth years should also be documented.

• To enhance teachers’ access to resources, it is recommended that all available resources be catalogued and centrally stored. Further investment in resources suited to the delivery of the SPHE programme is also required.

• It is positive that all members of the SPHE team are happy to be teaching the subject. The team is, however, relatively large, and its composition changes significantly from year-to-year. The establishment of a smaller, more stable, core team of teachers is strongly recommended. Consideration should be given also to identifying deployment priorities for the subject. It is suggested that these include provision for continuity of teacher from first year through to third year.

• The establishment of a more stable team would support a more systematic and incremental approach to the professional development of the school’s SPHE teachers, which is also recommended.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

• Collaborative planning is supported by a number of whole-school systems and structures. However, three obstacles to such planning were identified. These include: the number of teachers involved, which mitigates against full attendance at all meetings; the fact that the overall composition of the team changes annually; and the practice that sees the position of co-ordinator being rotated regularly. The recommendation made in the previous section in relation to establishing a smaller, core team is, therefore, reiterated and it is suggested that the decision to rotate the role of SPHE co-ordinator be reviewed.

• Programmes of work, which identify the work to be covered each week with each year group, have been agreed. This detail is commended. Teachers are advised that all programmes of work should be based on the syllabus. In line with recommended practice, these programmes also identify, albeit with varying detail, suitable resources and corresponding methodologies, assessment strategies and links to other modules. Teachers are encouraged to further develop this practice, and to include provision for desired learning outcomes.

• Work has been initiated on the development of resource files to correspond with the programmes of work. This level of planning, while at an initial stage, is credited. The further development of these files is advocated.
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; a response was not received from the board.

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