

**An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna**

**Department of Education and Skills**

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

**Tralee Community College  
Clash, Tralee, County Kerry  
Roll number: 70550H**

**Date of inspection: 12 May 2011**



**AN ROINN | DEPARTMENT OF  
OIDEACHAIS | EDUCATION  
AGUS SCILEANNA | AND SKILLS**

**REPORT**  
**ON**  
**THE QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN**  
**SOCIAL, PERSONAL & HEALTH EDUCATION (SPHE)**  
**INCLUDING RELATIONSHIPS SEXUALITY EDUCATION (RSE)**

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**INFORMATION ON THE INSPECTION**

<b>Dates of inspection</b>	9 May & 12 May
<b>Inspection activities undertaken</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Review of relevant documents</li><li>• Discussion with principal and teachers</li><li>• Interaction with students</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Observation of teaching and learning during three class periods</li><li>• Examination of students' work</li><li>• Feedback to principal and teachers</li></ul>

**MAIN FINDINGS**

- The quality of teaching and learning in SPHE is very good.
- High levels of student participation were observed in lessons.
- Classroom atmosphere was positive and conducive to learning.
- SPHE is appropriately timetabled, and school climate is supportive of the overall aims of the SPHE syllabus.
- RSE is provided for all students, albeit it with some scope for development.
- An agreed programme of work has been documented for first year, with planning underway for the preparation of agreed programmes for second year and third year.

**MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS**

- The experiential learning cycle is an approach that could further inform lesson design and delivery. Linked to this recommendation is the need to develop an assessment toolkit.
  - The school's model of provision for RSE should be reviewed and it is recommended that the board prioritise the development and ratification of a corresponding RSE policy.
  - A more systematic and incremental approach to SPHE teachers' continuing professional development (CPD) is recommended, as is training in the TRUST resource for senior cycle RSE teachers.
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## INTRODUCTION

Tralee Community College is a co-educational, vocational school under the auspices of Kerry Education Services (KES). It has a current enrolment of 101 students, and it also has 461 post-leaving certificate (PLC) students. The school participates in the School Support Programme of Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS), the Department's action plan for educational inclusion.

## TEACHING AND LEARNING

- The quality of teaching and learning in SPHE is very good.
- Lessons demonstrated consistency with the syllabus and, as relevant, the agreed programme of work.
- Lesson topics were identified at lesson outset, although best practice was where the teacher also identified the relevant module. In most lessons, the teacher shared the plan for the lesson with students. On occasion, this was grounded in learning outcomes, an approach which is encouraged in all lessons.
- In two lessons, well-chosen 'warm-up' or 'ice-breaker' activities were introduced. Students responded well to this strategy, participating enthusiastically in the associated tasks.
- Resources were well utilised to engage and motivate students, as well as to support their understanding and learning in a given topic.
- Lessons were student centred, providing for high levels of student participation. The incorporation of a variety of methodologies varied the demands placed on students, whilst also providing for each of the three main learning styles, namely auditory, visual and kinaesthetic. This approach also kept students attentive and interested, often inspiring significant levels of enthusiasm and curiosity.
- Questioning was a key feature of all lessons. It was good to note that questions were posed globally, and directed to named students. Opportunities existed at times for the extension of questioning, with a view to maximising the potential learning of a given activity and to deepening students' understanding.
- Pair and group work were well planned, organised and managed.
- The experiential learning cycle, with its four distinct phases of experiencing, processing, generalising and applying, is an approach that could further inform lesson design and delivery. To this end, teachers are referred to the recently revised Health Service Executive (HSE) West publications, namely *Healthy Living* and *Healthy Times*.
- It is suggested that time be provided as each lesson draws to a close to both summarise the key points and to evaluate students' levels of understanding and learning. As students' contact with SPHE is limited to once a week, it is also suggested that students be provided with a short preview of the work planned for the next lesson.
- Classroom atmosphere was positive. Students contributed eagerly in lessons, and their contributions were encouraged and affirmed. Students were generally well behaved, responding positively to teacher interventions. In the majority of lessons, room layout, which saw seating arranged in a semi-circle, supported a participative learning environment.

- There was a clear awareness in lessons around the development of students' literacy skills. This should remain a key focus during lesson planning and delivery.
- While there is a consciousness around the assessment of student learning in SPHE, there is a need to formalise the approach to assessment through the development of an assessment toolkit. The SPHE Teacher Guidelines, as well as the SPHE Handbook, will provide guidance to teachers in this task.

#### **SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT**

- SPHE is appropriately timetabled for all junior cycle students.
- Consistent with recommended practice, RSE is delivered as a module within the first year SPHE programme by the relevant teacher. In second and third year, a guest speaker addresses students in relation to RSE. In senior cycle, whilst acknowledging that elements of RSE are delivered as part of the school's religious education programme, guest speakers also play a significant role. In light of *Circular 0023/2010 - SPHE and RSE: Best Practice Guidelines for Post-Primary Schools*, it is suggested that a greater balance needs to be struck between the role of the class teacher and guest speakers in the delivery of RSE in some year groups.
- The board has ratified a range of supporting policies such as an anti-bullying and substance use policy. It is recommended that the school prepare an RSE policy. All concerned are referred to the guidelines and template provided by the Department of Education and Skills. It is suggested that a copy of the topics covered with each year group be appended to this policy.
- School climate is supportive of the overall aims of the SPHE syllabus. With a view to further enhancing the school's general provision for students' social, personal, and health education, the introduction of a class-tutor system is proposed for consideration.
- Deployment patterns are very good, with evidence of a gender-balanced, core team and, where possible, provision for continuity of teachers. While team members have engaged in some subject-specific training, a systematic and incremental approach to the CPD of SPHE teachers is recommended. Senior cycle, RSE teachers should also consider completing TRUST training, which relates to a recently published, senior cycle, RSE resource.

#### **PLANNING AND PREPARATION**

- Management's timetabling of formal subject department meetings, as well as teachers willingness to meet during non-timetabled periods, is most supportive of collaborative planning.
- An up-to-date subject plan, which accommodates action-planning for 2010/2011, is in place. It contains an agreed programme of work for first year, which offers valuable detail to inform lesson planning and delivery. The preparation of agreed programmes for each of second and third year is planned. This is fully encouraged.
- The provision of valuable co-curricular learning opportunities is a feature of the work of the SPHE department. A healthy-eating themed treasure hunt, organised by the post-leaving certificate social studies group, is an example of one such activity.

- There was evidence of very good quality planning and preparation for lessons observed. A range of resources, including specially prepared PowerPoint presentations and carefully selected video clips, had been gathered for use in lessons.

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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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