An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

Subject Inspection of
Social, Personal & Health Education
REPORT

Presentation Brothers College
The Mardyke, Cork
Roll number: 62570R

Date of inspection: 30 March 2011
REPORT
ON
THE QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN
SOCIAL, PERSONAL & HEALTH EDUCATION (SPHE)
INCLUDING RELATIONSHIPS SEXUALITY EDUCATION (RSE)

INFORMATION ON THE INSPECTION

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dates of inspection</th>
<th>29 and 30 March 2011</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Inspection activities undertaken</td>
<td>Observation of teaching and learning during four class periods</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Review of relevant documents</td>
<td>• Examination of students’ work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Discussion with principal and teachers</td>
<td>• Feedback to principal and teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Interaction with students</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

MAIN FINDINGS

- The quality of teaching and learning in lessons evaluated was good, with some excellent practice observed.
- Provision for the ‘activity’ phase of the experiential learning method was very good, while there was scope for development in terms of provision for the ‘processing’, ‘generalising’ and ‘applying’ phases of this method.
- SPHE is appropriately timetabled for all junior cycle students, with RSE delivered as a module within SPHE.
- The school has Health Promoting School (HPS) status since 2005.
- There are many positive aspects to deployment practices in relation to SPHE.
- Individual teachers engage in very good quality, detailed planning work.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

- It is recommended that provision for RSE at senior cycle be improved.
- It is recommended that the subject co-ordinator be reassigned to teach SPHE and that every effort be made to provide for continuity of teachers for class groups.
- The adoption of a more systematic and incremental approach to teacher’s continuing professional development (CPD) in the area of SPHE is recommended.
- It is strongly suggested that the collaborative approach that is evident in the general planning work of the SPHE subject department, be extended to programme planning.
INTRODUCTION

Presentation Brothers College is an all male, Catholic post-primary school, under the trusteeship of the Presentation Brothers Schools’ Trust. It has a current enrolment of 652 students.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

- The quality of teaching and learning in lessons evaluated was good, with some excellent practice observed.
- In some lessons, obvious reference was made to the module, topic and intended learning outcomes. This very good practice is recommended in all lessons.
- As relevant, links with previous lessons or prior student learning were highlighted. This is further encouraged, particularly as students’ contact with the subject is limited to once a week.
- A range of well-chosen resources, many of which supported the active participation of students, were utilised in lessons. Some scope exists for greater incorporation of information communication technology (ICT) based resources, particularly in light of recent resourcing in this area.
- Provision for the first phase of the experiential learning method, namely the experiencing or ‘activity’ phase, was very good. In a number of lessons, for example, text- or video-based case studies were utilised to evoke students’ personal reactions or responses to real-life scenarios.
- Overall, there was scope for development, in relation to provision for the remaining three phases of the experiential learning method. In some lessons, too much time was spent on activities, which meant that insufficient time was provided for reflection, analysis and evaluation. In some cases, teachers tended to draw conclusions for students, as opposed to facilitating students to do this for themselves. Of all four phases, the applying phase, which can support teachers in the evaluation of student learning, was least well accommodated. Teachers are referred to the recently revised Health Service Executive (HSE) West publications, namely Healthy Living and Healthy Times, as these illustrate how all four phases can be provided for within one lesson.
- Excellent practice was observed where a variety of activities were provided for students over the course of the lesson. This approach, which aims to provide for the preferred learning style of each student, while offering opportunities for independent and collaborative learning, is commended and further encouraged.
- Teacher-student relations were notably positive. Students were attentive and well behaved, but also very happy to contribute to lesson content with answers to questions, queries or comments. Classroom atmosphere was, therefore, most conducive to student learning.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- SPHE is appropriately timetabled for all junior cycle students.
- As is recommended, junior cycle RSE is delivered as a class-based module within SPHE. There is scope for development in relation to the school’s provision for class-based
instruction in relation to senior cycle RSE. The *RSE Interim curriculum and guidelines for post-primary schools* should guide this work.

- As guest speakers support the delivery of the school’s SPHE and RSE programmes, the preparation of a visiting-speaker policy is suggested for consideration. *Circular 0023/2010 - SPHE and RSE: Best Practice Guidelines for Post-Primary Schools* will inform this work.

- The board has ratified an RSE policy. The next review of this policy should be informed by the sample policy provided by the Department of Education and Skills. The policy should include ratification and proposed review dates, together with the signature of the chairperson of the board.

- It is clear that care for the well being of students generally, is a priority in the school and this provides a supportive environment for SPHE. Significantly, the school was awarded HPS status in 2005. The associated work is all encompassing and broadly emphasises the well being of students. Health promotion weeks have been organised, on themes such as mental health, sexual health and fitness. The school’s achievements here are notable.

- Current deployment patterns suggest the emergence of a core team. This is fully encouraged. Other positive deployment-related findings include: teachers’ willingness to teach SPHE; gender balance in team composition and the fact that a sizeable percentage of SPHE teachers also teach their assigned class group for another subject. To build on this, it is recommended that the subject co-ordinator be reassigned to teach SPHE, and that every effort be made to provide for continuity of teachers for class groups.

- While some teachers are relatively well trained in the area of SPHE, others are not. It is recommended that an audit of teachers’ training needs in the subject be completed, the outcomes of which should inform a more systematic and incremental approach to teachers’ CPD in the area of SPHE. Ideally, introductory training ought to be completed by teachers before they are assigned to teach SPHE.

**PLANNING AND PREPARATION**

- Regular meetings, formal and informal, of the members of the SPHE subject department, support a collaborative approach to subject department planning.

- A detailed subject plan is in place. The preparation of a synopsis of the plan for all SPHE teachers, together with the collation of a bank of resources, indicates the co-ordinator’s commitment to both the subject and the duties attached to subject co-ordination.

- Individually, teachers engage in detailed planning work. It is suggested that an element of collaboration be incorporated into this work, with an emphasis on programme planning, and planning for resources and assessment. This approach will facilitate a greater sharing of teachers experiences’ in relation to the delivery of each module.

- As a first step in collaborative programme planning, it is recommended that the teaching team agree a programme of work for each year group, ensuring that provision is made for all ten modules.

- Planning for assessment has begun and some very good ideas are emerging, such as the development of an SPHE journal. Teachers are referred to module learning outcomes, as identified in the syllabus, when designing strategies to assess student learning in SPHE.
The draft findings and recommendations arising out of this evaluation were discussed with the principal and 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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