

**An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna**

**Department of Education and Skills**

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

**Firhouse Community College  
Firhouse Road, Dublin 24  
Roll number: 70140L**

**Date of inspection: 13 December 2010**



**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)**

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**INFORMATION ON THE INSPECTION**

<b>Dates of inspection:</b>	8, 11 and 13 December 2010
<b>Inspection activities undertaken</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Discussions with principal, deputy principal and subject co-ordinators</li><li>• Informal discussions with teachers</li><li>• Review of documents and records, including the subject plan</li><li>• Observation of teaching and learning in classrooms</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Examination of some students' work</li><li>• Conduct of structured interview with group of senior cycle students</li><li>• Administration of questionnaire to two groups of third-year students</li><li>• Feedback to teachers and subject co-ordinators</li><li>• Feedback to principal and deputy principal</li></ul>

**MAIN FINDINGS**

- The level of whole-school support and provision in SPHE is very good, and the subject supports the school's strong pastoral ethos.
- The quality of teaching and learning in all the lessons observed was either good or very good.
- A very good range of co-curricular activities and themed weeks complements the formal teaching of SPHE.
- Subject planning in SPHE is good, but with scope for development.
- There is scope for development as regards assessment of students' learning, and record-keeping.

**MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS**

- Yearly plans of work should be further developed to provide more detail, especially as regards learning outcomes, teaching methods and assessment.
  - A common assessment policy for SPHE should be developed and implemented.
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## **INTRODUCTION**

Firhouse Community College is a large co-educational post-primary school under the aegis of County Dublin Vocational Education Committee. It has an enrolment of 623 students and serves a suburban catchment area, with students drawn from a variety of social and cultural backgrounds. The board of management of the school was given an opportunity to comment on the findings and recommendations of the report; the board chose to accept the report without response.

## **TEACHING AND LEARNING**

- Lessons observed during the evaluation were very well prepared, had clear learning objectives, and used appropriate resources and teaching methods. Where the teaching was good rather than very good, a sharper focus on learning outcomes and greater challenge to students is recommended.
- The provision of teaching resources for SPHE is very good. These resources include various handouts and worksheets prepared by the teachers, some of very high quality.
- In all cases, classroom management was effective, and student behaviour and student-teacher rapport was very good. Students engaged well with the subject of the lessons, and participated readily in group work and whole-class activities. In some of the classes observed, the seating arrangements (circle or U-shape) facilitated discussion and easier interaction between students.
- In some of the lessons observed, questioning could have been more challenging and questions could have been more evenly distributed among students. Using a longer 'wait time' before accepting answers and a 'no hands' rule when questioning can make for more effective questioning.
- There is scope to broaden the range of teaching approaches used in SPHE. Consideration could be given to making greater use of approaches such as debating, art work, project work, role play, poetry and music.
- The focused interview with students and an analysis of the student questionnaires reveal that the majority of the students agreed that their experience of SPHE had contributed to their development of social and personal skills and to their understanding of issues such as substance misuse and personal safety. The students reported that SPHE had given them clear facts and a good understanding of the various topics covered.
- There is scope for development as regards assessment of students' learning in SPHE. At present, assessment in SPHE tends to be informal: the main form of assessment evidenced was questioning in class. It is recommended that greater use be made of students' folders and copybooks to record their learning and reflection on the various topics studied in SPHE, and that an agreed assessment policy for SPHE be developed and implemented.

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

- There is a strong pastoral ethos in Firhouse Community College, and SPHE is seen as an important element of the school's pastoral care for its students. The quality of subject provision and whole school support for SPHE is very good, and arrangements for student access to SPHE are very good.
- The school's commitment to the students' social, personal and health education is evidenced by the range of co-curricular activities, modules and themed weeks which complement the formal teaching of SPHE.
- The school has policies in place for RSE and for substance abuse and has an anti-bullying policy. The policies are clear and comprehensive. However, the RSE policy should be reviewed to take into account the requirements of Circular 23/10 regarding visiting speakers.
- In first year, SPHE is taught for two class periods a week for a ten-week block which rotates with Civic, Social and Political Education (CSPE) and Information and Communication Technology (ICT). This provision is supplemented by the weekly tutor class, where aspects of SPHE are routinely dealt with. If this arrangement is to continue, it is important to ensure that SPHE is allocated the equivalent of the recommended one period a week. The time allocation to SPHE and RSE in other years is satisfactory.
- There are a large number of teachers involved in teaching SPHE, and the school management endeavours to ensure that they are chosen on the basis of interest and aptitude, and that they have the opportunity to avail of appropriate in-service for SPHE. It is recommended that, as far as possible, all teachers of SPHE should have attended at least the "Introduction to SPHE" in-service course.

## **PLANNING AND PREPARATION**

- There is a coordinator for SPHE and subject department planning meetings are held at the start of each school year. There is a very good level of cooperation between the teachers of SPHE, the pastoral care team and teachers of subjects which overlap with SPHE.
- Annual plans for each year group specify which modules will be dealt with month by month. It is recommended that these plans be further developed to provide greater detail as regards learning outcomes, teaching methods and assessment. These plans should be incorporated into a single, cohesive subject plan for SPHE, which shows how the treatment of various topics develops from year to year.
- Provision should be made for the regular review of the SPHE programme, with input from students and parents.
- The school has initiated a series of in-school professional development sessions which will focus on a review of its SPHE and RSE policies. It is recommended that progress on this work be documented as it advances.

- There is scope for development as regards record-keeping in SPHE. Records of work completed, of students' engagement with the subject and the results of assessment of students' learning should be kept for each class group.

## **CONCLUSION**

A summary of the draft findings and recommendations arising out of this evaluation was presented to the principal, deputy principal and acting subject coordinators at the conclusion of the evaluation. These were discussed with the inspector.