An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Subject Inspection of Social, Personal and Health Education
REPORT

Duiske College
Graiguenamanagh, County Kilkenny
Roll number: 70590T

Date of inspection: 19 March 2010
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 Duiske College, Graiguenamanagh. It presents the findings of an evaluation of the quality of teaching and learning in SPHE, including Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE), and makes recommendations for the further development of the teaching of this subject in the school. The evaluation was conducted over one day during which the inspector visited classrooms and observed teaching and learning. The inspector interacted with students and their teacher, examined students’ work, and had discussions with the teacher. The inspector reviewed school planning documentation and the teacher’s written preparation. Following the evaluation visit, the inspector provided oral feedback on the outcomes of the evaluation to the principal and the subject teacher. 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

Duiske College is a small rural co-educational school with a current enrolment of 103 students, which is under the auspices of County Kilkenny Vocational Education Committee (VEC). School management views SPHE as central to the development of a positive and supportive school culture. The SPHE co-ordinator is a member of the pastoral care team in the school and management reported that the SPHE programme contributes significantly to the welfare of students.

Appropriate timetable provision is made for SPHE at junior cycle in accordance with Circular Letter M11/03. RSE is embedded in the junior cycle SPHE programme. Some provision is made for the delivery of RSE at senior cycle, which is mostly through the religious education programme, and supplemented with some visiting speakers. However, there is a need for the specific time provision and personnel involved to be documented as part of a coherent approach by management to the delivery of the RSE programme for senior cycle students. It is recommended that the current arrangement for the delivery of the RSE programme at senior cycle be reviewed. The school should refer to the recently developed TRUST (Talking Relationships Understanding Sexuality Teaching) resource for teaching RSE to senior cycle students, which is available through the training programme for senior cycle RSE.

The SPHE department consists of one teacher who is highly committed to the subject and has extensive experience in delivering the programme. There are also two additional teachers on staff, who have received training in SPHE and are familiar with the subject. This ensures that there is good professional capacity within the school to deliver the programme. To further develop the SPHE subject department, consideration should be given to timetabling these teachers for the subject, with their agreement, whenever the next opportunity arises.
Engagement in continuing professional development (CPD) is fully supported and encouraged by school management. There is a strong commitment by staff to engagement in the professional development programme provided by the SPHE Support Service, in addition to the completion of other relevant courses and attendance at events related to elements of the SPHE programme. Management is supportive of SPHE and has also attended relevant inservice. The promotion of the principles of respect and care for the well-being of students permeate through all school activities. The organisation and provision of a number of courses and presentations, as part of staff development days, which addressed issues such as stress management, tackling bullying, developing emotional intelligence and promoting positive behaviour, are highly commended. As part of the strategic planning for professional development and to ensure the capacity to deliver the RSE programme, it is recommended that teachers, who are interested and possess the necessary skills, also receive training in RSE, particularly to support its delivery at senior cycle.

Policies relevant to SPHE have been developed to support the students and the work of the school, including policies on anti-bullying, substance use, a code of behaviour and dealing with critical incidents. The Child Protection Guidelines have been adopted in line with the requirements of the Department of Education and Skills. The present RSE policy is in need of review and updating and it is recommended that this work be progressed as a matter of priority for the school, in line with Circular Letter 0027/08. A template and sample RSE policy is available on the website of the Department of Education and Skills (www.education.ie), which will provide guidance in the completion of this work.

Links have been established with relevant health and social agencies that support and complement the work of the SPHE department through the provision of workshops and various presentations. It is good practice that students study the relevant topics prior to these events, as this ensures that they are more informed and better placed to engage with the visitors to the classroom. The school’s existing procedures in relation to visitors and guest speakers should be formalised and documented. The school may refer to the recently issued Circular Letter 0023/2010 and to the SPHE Handbook, Section 7, which set out such guidelines and best practice for schools in the use of visitors to the SPHE classroom.

The classroom used to deliver the SPHE programme, whilst a specialist practical room, is suitable to accommodate the interactive nature of SPHE lessons. Desks and chairs are easily moved and the room displays posters and charts related to the topics covered in SPHE. There is good access to a range of information and communications technology (ICT), including a data projector, and to a television and DVD player, when required. Management supports the purchase of additional resources and materials on a needs basis and the subject department is well resourced to deliver all aspects of the syllabus.

The school is proactive in promoting students’ well-being and social learning through a range of co-curricular activities and initiatives, including the organisation of a healthy eating week and through involvement with various charities and fundraising activities.

**Planning and Preparation**

An informative and thorough subject plan has been developed to support the organisation and delivery of SPHE in the school. The subject plan follows the template of the school development planning initiative (SDPI), sets out the aims and objectives of the subject in keeping with the syllabus, and documents the organisational and operational matters related to the delivery of the
subject. Management provides valuable support to the SPHE co-ordinator and they meet regularly to discuss planning for the organisation of the SPHE programme. This is commended, especially as SPHE is currently a single-teacher subject department in this school.

Planning for the ten modules at junior cycle, including RSE, follows the recommended framework in the Department’s Guidelines for Teachers. The practice of revisiting each module every year ensures that students’ knowledge, skills and attitudes are developed in an incremental and coherent manner. To build on the considerable work completed to date, it is recommended that the planning documents for the programme of work for each year group be expanded to identify the specific learning outcomes for each module. The outcomes that are outlined in the syllabus for each module will provide a useful reference to advance this task.

A number of appropriate cross-curricular links have also been identified in the subject plan. Some innovative modules have also been developed, such as one focusing on healthy eating for college, which supports senior students’ understanding and development of positive nutritional habits. Consideration should be given to planning for the concurrent delivery of related topics with relevant subject departments, as this can enhance and consolidate students’ learning. The inclusion of students’ participation in a range of activities that promote personal health and well-being and the development of social skills, social responsibility and citizenship are highly commended.

It is commendable that the SPHE department informs parents by letter of the delivery of the RSE programme for junior cycle. The specific topics to be addressed with each year group should also be identified in these letters. This will ensure that parents, who may have some concerns or issues regarding any of the topics being covered in class, may discuss these with the SPHE teacher prior to the delivery of the module.

A good range of resources such as DVDs, CDs and videos, textbooks and worksheets, has been developed or purchased, which provide good support to teaching and learning. These resources are neatly stored and easily accessible. A textbook is also used with each year group as a reference and resource. The judicious use of the textbook is commended.

There is a good review of the material covered in each module, of student engagement and of the supporting resources at a subject-department level. The involvement of students in a formal end-of-module review process should also be considered. This will provide useful feedback regarding students’ opinions of the content, resources, interest and on their level of engagement, which will further inform the planning process.

There was an excellent standard of planning and preparation for the lessons observed, including the advance readiness of all resources and supplementary materials.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

There was a high standard of teaching and learning in the SPHE lessons observed. Students rearranged the room furniture efficiently and were quickly settled. High expectations were set for student behaviour and engagement in their SPHE lessons, through a positive approach to classroom management. Following roll-call, the topic of the lesson was introduced to students. Lessons had a clear purpose and the intended learning outcomes were shared with students at the outset. This strategy, which is in keeping with the principles of assessment for learning (AfL), was effective in providing a focus for students and direction for their learning.
In the lessons observed, the topics taught were alcohol awareness and assertive communication. These topics were introduced briefly and placed in context for students. Throughout the lessons, questioning was effectively and skilfully used to assess learning, encourage student participation and to develop positive attitudes regarding the topics under discussion.

A number of very good strategies were used to develop students’ understanding of the topics. Brainstorming was well used to categorise the physical, social and emotional affects of alcohol use and abuse. An ice-breaker activity was also used to help students understand the variety of skills involved in effective communication. These interactive tasks were well organised and succeeded in engaging students and stimulating debate around the topics. Lessons progressed through well-structured and well-paced tasks, which were in keeping with the experiential learning cycle. A number of additional strategies engaged students’ successfully in reflective and discursive activities. Worksheets were also used to provide information and exercises that were completed individually or in pairs, and students were afforded sufficient time for the completion of these tasks. Consideration should be given to providing more opportunities for small group work to expand the discussion and debate, where applicable. Small group work may also help to further engage students who may not feel comfortable, or be willing, to share their work or express their opinions with the full class group.

Students’ responses to the set tasks were effectively processed and a flip chart was used to record these responses. Students recorded the results of their discussions and the key learning points into their SPHE copybooks. This is very good practice.

Students were confident and articulate, and able to communicate clearly about the topics and themes covered during their lessons. A very positive and respectful rapport was evident in all interactions between students and their teacher. Students were regularly affirmed for their contributions and efforts, which contributed to the positive atmosphere in the lessons.

Lessons concluded by reviewing the main points and outlining the topics to be covered in the next lesson. This is commendable as it ensures that students view each lesson as part of a progressive continuum of learning rather than a series of isolated topics.

**ASSESSMENT**

Students keep a copybook and folder for SPHE, which serves as a cohesive method of storing the information, responses to tasks and other materials from their lessons. All SPHE folders are retained in a secure cabinet in the classroom. This good practice of encouraging students to file their SPHE materials is commended as it ensures that students and parents have a visible record of work completed and of their progress and achievements at the end of each year.

A range of formative assessment strategies is currently used to determine students’ engagement and progress in SPHE. These include the completion of work sheets, written assignments and the completion of project work, in addition to regular oral questioning. Home tasks are given occasionally, which are reflective in nature and may stimulate some conversation between family members about a particular topic, which is commendable. Oral and written feedback is provided to students, which helps to guide their learning. Constructive feedback is important in SPHE where particular emphasis is placed on the development of students’ self-awareness and self-esteem.
To build on the very good work and systems in place for assessment, it is recommended that a consistent approach be decided upon to inform students’ learning and progress. This should consist of assessment milestones that are reached by all students as they progress through their programme of work. Assessment should be aligned to the attainment of the identified learning outcomes for each year group and each module of study. Further information and advice on assessment in SPHE is available in the Guidelines for Teachers (pages 59-68) and from the SPHE Support Service.

Communication with parents is maintained through school reports twice a year, information evenings, and annual parent-teacher meetings as appropriate. School reports include formative comments to affirm students’ engagement in SPHE. The student journal is also used as a means of communicating with parents as the need arises.

SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The following are the main strengths identified in the evaluation:

- There is good whole-school support for SPHE, which is viewed as an integral component of the school’s pastoral-care structures.
- SPHE is appropriately provided in line with Circular M11/03.
- Continuing professional development is encouraged and supported by school management.
- The SPHE programme is excellently co-ordinated, with a systematic and organised approach to subject planning and a detailed, comprehensive subject plan in place.
- A comprehensive range of suitable resources has been collated and developed to support teaching and learning.
- There was a high standard of teaching and learning in the SPHE lessons observed, with a clear emphasis on an interactive and experiential approach to promoting students’ learning.
- Teaching and learning took place in a positive and affirming environment, which was characterised by mutual respect.
- There is a good reporting system in place to inform parents of students’ engagement and progress in SPHE.

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

- The existing RSE policy should be updated and expanded to ensure that it provides clear guidance to parents, students and teachers on how all aspects of the programme are to be delivered, including at senior cycle.
- To develop the school’s professional capacity to deliver the RSE programme at senior cycle, it is recommended that teachers, who are interested and possess the necessary skills, receive the appropriate training and be included in the active teaching team.
- The school’s existing procedures in relation to visitors and guest speakers should be formalised and documented.
- It is recommended that the planning documents for the programmes of work be expanded to identify the specific learning outcomes for each year group and each module.
- The further development of the assessment process is recommended.
Post-evaluation meetings were held with the teacher of SPHE and with the principal at the conclusion of the evaluation when the draft findings and recommendations of the evaluation were presented and discussed.

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