

**An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna**

**Department of Education and Skills**

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

**Gallen Community School  
Ferbane, County Offaly  
Roll number: 91515W**

**Date of inspection: 29 March 2011**



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

**REPORT**  
**ON**  
**THE QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN SOCIAL, PERSONAL AND**  
**HEALTH EDUCATION (SPHE)**

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**INFORMATION ON THE INSPECTION**

<b>Date of inspection:</b>	29 March 2011
<b>Inspection activities undertaken</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Review of relevant documents</li><li>• Discussions with principal and teachers</li><li>• Interaction with students</li><li>• Observation of teaching and learning during three class periods</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Examination of 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 principal and teachers</li></ul>

**MAIN FINDINGS**

- The quality of teaching in all the lessons observed was very good.
- Students were very well behaved, engaged well with the lessons and showed good evidence of learning.
- Whole-school provision and planning for SPHE is of a very high standard.
- The teachers of SPHE are committed, professional and reflective in their approach to the subject.
- Very good use is made of information and communication technology (ICT) and other resources in the teaching of SPHE.

**MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS**

- The school's draft Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) policy should be ratified as soon as possible.
  - A detailed senior cycle RSE programme should be drafted and made available to parents.
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## **INTRODUCTION**

Gallen Community School is a co-educational, non-selective post-primary school, which was established in 2004. It has an enrolment of 364 students and serves a rural catchment area, with students drawn from a variety of social backgrounds. The school has a special purpose-built unit for students with autistic spectrum disorder (ASD).

## **TEACHING AND LEARNING**

- In all the lessons observed, there was a very high standard of teaching: lessons were interesting, well-prepared and well presented. The topics were obviously relevant to the lives of the students. There was a clear focus on learning outcomes, which were shared with the students at the beginning of lessons.
- The lessons were rich in content and information, and the material was appropriately challenging for the students. There was a good balance between knowledge, attitudes and skills in the teaching and learning observed. The teachers' expertise in other subjects was used to good effect, and connections were made, as appropriate, with other curricular areas.
- A good range of carefully-selected teaching resources was used in the lessons observed. These included high-quality handouts prepared by the teachers. Information and communication technology (ICT) was integrated skilfully and seamlessly into the lessons. The content and quality of ICT material was very high.
- Classroom management was very good, and group-work was used effectively as a means of collaborative learning. Lessons were purposeful and class time was used effectively.
- Skilful questioning fostered independent thinking in the students. Reflection and responsible decision-making based on sound information were encouraged. Students demonstrated maturity in discussing sensitive issues.
- Students' attention, motivation and behaviour were very good. Their efforts and contributions were affirmed by the teachers. Very good student-teacher rapport was evident in all classes.
- The students' copybooks and folders provided evidence of work already completed. The students are given opportunities to evaluate modules by filling out end-of-module reviews. Connections with prior learning are made during lessons, and the attainment of learning outcomes is verified by questioning and recapitulation.
- Commendably, SPHE is included in student report cards, and parents are invited to meet their children's SPHE teachers at parent-teacher meetings.
- Students were very positive in the focus group and in the student questionnaires about the benefit and importance of SPHE.

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

- SPHE fits well with the school ethos, which places a strong emphasis on self-esteem and seeks to promote a sense of pastoral and social responsibility. SPHE and RSE are clearly important to the school community. One example of the importance the school attaches to

the subject is the fact that plans of work and teaching materials for SPHE have been specially adapted for the ASD unit.

- The timetabled allocation for SPHE and RSE is in line with Department recommendations.
- The SPHE team is compact and committed to delivering a high quality SPHE programme. They are very professional in their approach to the subject. There is a co-ordinator, whose role is defined in the subject plan, and the post is rotated. The team meets regularly—at least once a term—and detailed records of the meetings were made available during the inspection.
- School management is committed to continuing professional development (CPD) for SPHE teachers, who are equally committed in this respect. A record is kept of courses and training which teachers have attended. Whole-staff CPD with outside facilitators has also been organised on topics such as suicide awareness.
- There is an excellent collection of well-catalogued and easily-accessible resources for SPHE and RSE. The school has a very good ICT infrastructure, and many of the SPHE resources (for example, PowerPoint presentations prepared by the teachers) have been uploaded onto the school's server, and this work is ongoing.
- Almost all of the SPHE and RSE programme is delivered by the teachers themselves, with very occasional input from visiting speakers. Parents are kept well informed regarding the RSE programme and visiting speakers.
- An anti-bullying policy and a substance use policy are in place. An RSE policy was in draft form at the time of the inspection and was due to be finalised within weeks. Parents were involved in drafting this policy, and the students council was consulted.
- The formal teaching of SPHE is complemented by themed weeks, such as Positive Mental Health Week.

#### **PLANNING AND PREPARATION**

- There is a strong culture of planning in the school and the SPHE department has been very active in planning over a number of years. There is a comprehensive written plan for each year group, and the plans ensure that the delivery of the various topics is developmental from year to year. The plans, although based on the syllabus, are clearly specific to the school and year group. They are 'live', and show evidence of regular review and change. They also have a strong emphasis on learning objectives.
- Teacher evaluation of lessons is built into the planning process, a commendable example of the reflective practice which was evident throughout the inspection.
- Individual teachers' planning is exemplary, and the lessons observed were very well planned.
- There is an outline plan for RSE in senior cycle. It is recommended that this plan be amplified in line with NCCA draft SPHE curriculum framework and guidelines and the school's own RSE policy, and that this detailed programme be made available to the parents.

- There is a policy for assessment in SPHE, which includes student self-assessment, peer assessment and teacher assessment. It is recommended that the SPHE department devise a system for keeping a record of each individual student's learning from year to year.

## **CONCLUSION**

The draft findings and recommendations arising out of this evaluation were discussed with the principal, deputy principal and subject teachers at the conclusion of the evaluation.

The board of management of the school was given an opportunity to comment in writing on the findings and recommendations of the report, and the response of the board will be found in the appendix of this report.

# **Appendix**

**SCHOOL RESPONSE TO THE REPORT**

**Submitted by the Board of Management**

**Area 1 Observations on the content of the inspection report**

The Board of Management of Gallen Community School Ferbane welcome the findings of this report and commend the school on the excellent work evidenced in this report.