

**An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna**

**Department of Education and Skills**

**Subject Inspection  
of  
Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE)  
REPORT**

**Loreto College  
Foxrock, Dublin 18  
Roll number: 60240J**

**Date of inspection: 11 November 2010**



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

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

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**SUBJECT INSPECTION REPORT**

This report has been written following a subject inspection in Loreto College, Foxrock. It presents the findings of an evaluation of the quality of teaching and learning in SPHE (including Relationships and Sexuality Education) and makes recommendations for the further development of the teaching of this subject in the school. The evaluation was conducted over three days during which the inspector visited classrooms and observed teaching and learning. The inspector interacted with students, examined students' work and had discussions with the principal and SPHE teachers. The inspector reviewed school planning documentation. Following the evaluation visit, the inspector provided oral feedback on the outcomes of the evaluation to the principal and the teachers of SPHE. The board of management was given an opportunity to comment in writing on the findings and recommendations of the evaluation, and the response of the board will be found in the appendix to this report.

**SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT**

Whole school provision and support for SPHE and RSE in Loreto College Foxrock reflect the school's strong commitment to the social and personal development of its students. All students have access to SPHE for one period a week. It is delivered as SPHE in junior cycle and Transition Year (TY) and as Health Education in fifth year and in sixth year. RSE is delivered as an integral part of the SPHE and the fifth year health education programmes. In sixth year it is delivered as a two discrete three week modules in rotation with other aspects of students' personal and educational development.

Very good practice was also noted in the current deployment of teachers to SPHE. All teachers involved in the delivery of the subject have had relevant training in a range of SPHE related issues and many have engaged in the recently developed TRUST (*Talking Relationships Understanding Sexuality Teaching*) an RSE in-service programme for junior and senior cycle. In addition, some of the staff days organised in the school have had a strong SPHE focus and the school is currently funding the attendance of a significant number of teachers from the general staff at a 'Moodwatchers' personal development programme.

Following a review of whole-school policies relating to SPHE it is recommended that the anti-bullying policy be amended. The policy should document the supports in place for both an individual who is being bullied and an individual who is bullying to ensure that both are fully integrated into the school community in the wake of a bullying incident and that bullying does not reoccur.

The school does not currently have a written policy in relation to visiting speakers. While the protocols in place are acknowledged, it is recommended that these be developed into a written policy and ratified by the board of management in response to Department Circular 0023/2010.

An extensive range of resources has been built up, catalogued and made available to all teachers. Copies of all manuals, relevant documentation, videos and DVDs are stored in a designated area of the library and in the staff room. In addition, all teachers of SPHE have been issued with a folder containing a range of relevant resources and worksheets. An SPHE notice board on the corridor provides information on issues pertaining to students' social and personal development in addition to displaying contact numbers for a number of relevant social or health-related agencies.

Co-curricular activities include the organisation of an annual 'Healthwise' week during which students' physical health is promoted through a range of enjoyable activities extending across the curriculum. Plans are in place this year to extend this very good initiative by incorporating activities to promote students' emotional well-being. Good practice is also noted in the cross-curricular links which are promoted between SPHE and Guidance, Science, Home Economics, Physical Education and Religion. For example, a co-ordinated approach between SPHE and Guidance is undertaken to link issues such as decision making or self-management to subject choices or study skills.

### **PLANNING AND PREPARATION**

An examination of the planning documentation made available during the course of the inspection indicates that the work completed to date in planning for the delivery of SPHE and RSE is of a very high standard. School management facilitates subject planning meetings at regular intervals during the year and planning for SPHE is accorded the same importance as all curricular subjects. While there is a subject co-ordinator for SPHE, senior management reported that all the teachers of SPHE work together as a core team. Co-ordination duties consist of overseeing the effective implementation and resourcing of the programme in addition to supporting teachers who are new to the subject. Minutes are kept of all formal meetings. A review of these minutes indicates that planning for SPHE and RSE is a dynamic process with due emphasis placed on both issues of a 'housekeeping' nature and forward planning for the subject.

There is a common programme plan for the delivery of the subject at junior cycle. This has been devised in accordance with the *Junior Cycle SPHE Curriculum Framework* produced by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA). An incremental approach to the study of the designated topics supports the development of students' knowledge, attitudes and skills in a measured and age-appropriate manner. A similar approach is adopted at senior cycle. The programme plan is divided out into individual lesson plans which are set out in terms of the topic to be studied, their aims and proposed learning outcomes, the resources and methodologies to be used, the context in which the lesson takes place and the proposed assessment. As an integral part of the SPHE programme, planning for RSE is carried out in the same way. Of particular note is the practice adopted by all teachers of evaluating the lessons once they are completed. This very good self-evaluation practice provides a strong evidence base from which teachers can review their overall programme of work and amend where necessary for the future.

The school has an RSE policy in place, developed in conjunction with the relevant school partners. While it is embedded in the school's ethos, the programme responds to the requirements of the Department of Education and Skills curriculum. However, it is recommended that reference to teaching and learning and the programme requirements should be included in the policy.

The collaborative approach to lesson planning facilitates the very thorough individual lesson preparation that was in evidence during the course of the evaluation. When planning for

individual lessons teachers use a specific template to identify the aims and objectives for the lesson and to construct the four key phases of the lessons; activity, process, generalising and application of the learning. This facilitates the preparation of a well structured and purposeful lesson.

## **TEACHING AND LEARNING**

Evaluation activities included the observation of five lessons; four junior cycle SPHE lessons and one senior cycle RSE lesson. Interaction between the inspector and the students and a review of their SPHE folders was also facilitated. There was a very high standard of teaching and learning in all of the lessons observed.

All lessons were well structured and appropriately paced and the topics covered responded to the needs of the students and the demands of the SPHE and RSE curriculum. The lesson plan was communicated to the students at the beginning of each lesson. In some instances it was written up on the board in terms of the proposed learning outcome for the lesson. This good practice of engaging students from the outset should be extended to all lessons as it makes students more aware of their role in the learning process.

Question and answer sessions were very effectively used to consolidate students' previous learning and to integrate it into the lesson in hand. There were some good examples of higher-order questions which engaged the students, provoked thoughtful answers and fed into the next phase of the lesson. This transition was effectively supported in some lessons by good use of the board to record the students' answers. Drawings of stereotypes were used in one instance to illustrate the different behaviours being discussed in the lesson. While the use of visual supports is good practice, some of the stereotyped attributes contained in the drawings led to confusion among students between aspects of an individual's being and of their behaviour. It is important in these instances to clarify students' interpretation of such drawings, before proceeding with the next phase of the lesson. Other resources effectively used in lessons included worksheets, 'feeling cards' and sheets of blank paper or templates where students had to record their responses to different stimuli, either visually or in writing.

An appropriate balance was maintained in all lessons between teacher instruction and student activity. Students engaged in at least one pair or group activity in all of the lessons observed. Of particular note were the lessons where a number of short focused student-based activities were used and where there was a seamless progression between the different phases of the lesson. Students moved furniture, got into pairs or small groups, reverted back to a whole class activity and reflected on their learning without any disruption, distraction or loss of time. The seating of students in a horseshoe shape for the whole class activities also benefited the overall experiential learning dynamic. It is recommended that all teachers review their seating arrangements to facilitate a similar process.

A very positive learning environment prevailed in all lessons characterised by good classroom management and empathic teacher student relationships. Students were enthusiastic and active in their participation and there was good willingness to engage in all phases of the lesson. To further enhance the benefits of experiential learning it is recommended that all teachers encourage students to make 'I' statements when sharing their ideas and experiences. This will enable them to take greater ownership of their thoughts and feelings in addition to improving their communication skills and confidence. The interaction between the students and with the inspector indicated good evidence that learning in all lessons was both enjoyable and productive.

All students keep an SPHE folder in which they keep the worksheets, written activities, drawings and personal reflections completed during lessons. These are catalogued in the folder under the relevant topics and the folders are in many instances held by the SPHE teacher.

## **ASSESSMENT**

Student progress is currently monitored informally and is based on criteria such as participation in lessons, question and answer sessions in class, the use of worksheets and questionnaires and the quality of the student folders. Teachers reported that students may complete work at home. However, there are currently no formal homework or assessment practices for SPHE and teachers do not keep formal records of individual students' progress. Students' folders are checked and some teachers are planning to assign students a grade at the end of term for the quality of the work contained in them. Other proposals mentioned for assessing students' progress include the introduction of class awards at the end of the year for the best kept folders, best participation in class and other such criteria. Given the nature of SPHE and the very good planning practices in place, it is recommended that the members of the SPHE and RSE departments devise an agreed assessment policy as part of subject department planning. This will help them evaluate whether or not the desired learning outcomes have been achieved and will facilitate the formal recording of student progress. Initiatives such as the use of a personal reflection log are recommended for consideration. A comment on SPHE is included in school reports and parents are informed about both SPHE and RSE at information nights for first-year students and at parent-teacher meetings.

## **SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

The following are the main strengths identified in the evaluation:

- There is very good whole school provision and support for SPHE in the allocation of time and timetabling and in the facilitation of ongoing teacher professional development for the members of the SPHE and RSE departments.
- The school has an extensive range of SPHE and RSE resources to support the delivery of the subjects and these have been catalogued to ensure that all teachers have ready access to them.
- The annual 'Healthwise' week provides a good opportunity for students to apply their learning from SPHE to their everyday lives.
- Subject development planning for SPHE is a dynamic process involving all the members of the department.
- The school has a common programme plan for SPHE and RSE both of which respond to the requirements of the Department of Education and Skills curricula.
- Individual lesson plans have been developed to a very high standard.
- The standard of teaching and learning was very high in all of the lessons observed.
- A variety of methodologies was observed and all were used to very good effect.
- A good balance was maintained in all lessons between teacher direction and student activity.

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

- The school's anti-bullying policy should be amended to document the supports provided for both an individual who is being bullied and an individual who is bullying in the wake of a bullying incident.

- A written policy relating to visiting speakers should be drawn up.
- The members of the SPHE and RSE departments should devise an agreed assessment strategy which will help them evaluate whether or not the desired learning outcomes have been achieved and which will facilitate the formal recording of students' progress.

A post-evaluation meeting was held with the principal and SPHE co-ordinator at the conclusion of the evaluation when the draft findings and recommendations of the evaluation were presented and discussed.

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# **Appendix**

## **School response to the report**

### **Submitted by the Board of Management**

#### **Area 2: Follow-up actions planned or undertaken since the completion of the inspection activity to implement the findings and recommendations of the inspection**

- A working group has been set up to review the school's anti-bullying policy. This group is currently amending the procedures to document the comprehensive support for the individual who is being bullied and the individual who is bullying in the wake of a bullying incident.
- Plans are in place to draw up a policy relating to visiting speakers; members across a range of subjects will work on this.
- Members of the S.P.H.E. and R.S.E. Departments are devising an assessment strategy to allow for a more formal recording of the students' progress.