

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

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

REPORT

Nenagh Vocational School
Nenagh, County Tipperary
Roll number: 72440K

Date of inspection: 17 November 2011



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)**

INFORMATION ON THE INSPECTION

Dates of inspection	16 and 17 November 2011
Inspection activities undertaken <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Review of relevant documents• Discussion with principal and teachers• Interaction with students	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Observation of teaching and learning during seven class periods• Examination of students' work• Feedback to principal, deputy principal and teachers

MAIN FINDINGS

- The quality of teaching and learning ranged from very good to good in the majority of lessons observed, with evidence of some areas for improvement.
- Experiential learning needs greater application in some instances.
- Students demonstrated good knowledge and understanding of the concepts under study.
- The school is proactive in promoting students' well being.
- There is scope to further develop subject planning, policy, and assessment for SPHE.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

- Teachers should formalise the sharing of professional expertise so that the good practices observed during the evaluation can be consolidated across the entire department.
 - Practices and procedures in relation to assessment in SPHE should be reviewed and formalised.
 - The SPHE subject plan and curricular plans should be further developed.
 - A relationships and sexuality education (RSE) policy and a senior-cycle RSE programme should be developed and implemented in line with Circular 37/10.
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INTRODUCTION

Nenagh Vocational School is a co-educational school run under the auspices of North Tipperary Vocational Educational Committee (VEC). The school is one of three providers of post-primary education in Nenagh. The mainstream enrolment currently stands at 302 students, with a further 125 students enrolled in adult and continuing education courses.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

- The standard of teaching and learning was very good in the majority of lessons observed and good in almost all other lessons.
- Where very good practice was observed, the intended learning outcomes were shared at the beginning of the lessons and a review of the learning was conducted prior to the lessons' conclusion. These lessons also featured a good range of teaching methods, innovative resource integration and student-centred classroom activities. Teachers should formalise the sharing of professional expertise.
- Some good examples of the use of active learning methods such as discussion, pair work, artwork, reflection and group work were evident. These strategies were most effective where they were combined in a manner which appropriately limited teacher input and facilitated active student engagement with the lesson material. Some further refinement of the skills associated with group work is necessary.
- Experiential learning with its four required phases of experiencing, processing, generalising and applying, needs greater application in some cases.
- There was some use of differentiation, including questioning, combined with pair and individual learning tasks to facilitate students' engagement in their learning. This area should be further developed. Teaching and learning were most effective where students were appropriately challenged by a combination of higher-order and lower-order questions.
- A variety of teaching resources, including information and communication technology, was used to support learning effectively, in almost all lessons.
- The atmosphere in lessons was positive, conducive to learning, and marked by good interpersonal relations between teachers and students. Almost all students were well behaved and engaged in their learning.
- There is scope for the enhancement of the physical learning environment of some classrooms through displays of students' work and of SPHE-related materials.
- Interactions with students indicated that they had a good knowledge and understanding of the concepts related to the various topics under study, commensurate with their ability.
- A variety of practices exist regarding the collation and storage of students' work in SPHE. Best practice was observed when students dated their work. Practice in this area should be agreed and teachers should consider the further use of records of students' work as an assessment tool.
- There was evidence of assessment of student learning in some lessons; however, the SPHE team should further develop the process of assessment to ensure that there is an agreed and consistent approach to determining students' engagement and learning. In particular, the development of students' skills of reflection through portfolio work should be further explored. Teachers should also agree and document the criteria to be used for assessing students' progress in SPHE.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- There is a long tradition of good whole-school support for SPHE. The school is proactive in promoting students' well being and initiatives such as the guidance service, the care team, as well as the class tutors support students well.
- The SPHE programme, including RSE, is provided for all junior cycle students. Some aspects of RSE are currently delivered in the context of Religious Education (RE) and Guidance at senior cycle, supplemented with guest speakers. The effective delivery of this programme is hampered due to gaps in its delivery and by the absence of an agreed curricular plan for its implementation. It is recommended that a coherent senior-cycle RSE programme should be redeveloped and implemented.
- In keeping with best practice, a core team is involved in SPHE delivery and includes the guidance counsellor and a senior RE teacher. The role of SPHE co-ordinator is well established and undertaken as part of the duties of a post.
- While the SPHE teachers have undertaken some training in SPHE, it is recommended that an audit of teachers' current training needs in SPHE be undertaken. A systematic and incremental training plan should be implemented for SPHE teachers. As a minimum, all SPHE teachers should avail of the two-day introductory SPHE training provided by the SPHE support service and thereafter more specialised training should be availed of on a phased basis. A record of training needs and training undertaken should be maintained.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

- There was evidence of very good short-term planning and preparation for almost all lessons. However teachers should maintain records of work completed to aid continuity.
- Some discrete time for SPHE meetings is provided for during staff planning days and this is supplemented by ongoing informal planning.
- The existing subject plan based on the school-development-planning template is in need of review and further development. Outline curricular plans have been developed for each year group. These should be further developed to include more specific information with regard to the learning outcomes for each year group, specific timeframes for delivery, agreed assessment procedures and a review column.
- A range of whole-school policies that support the SPHE programme are currently under review. A RSE policy and programme should be redeveloped and implemented in line with Circular 37/10.
- As part of the development of a whole-school assessment policy, an assessment policy for SPHE should be devised and implemented.
- The SPHE team should develop a consistent approach towards promoting literacy skills to include the development strategies for the use of keywords and promoting correct spelling, as part of a whole-school approach.
- Provision should be made for the regular review of SPHE provision to comprise the views of students, teachers and parents.

- A central storage area for SPHE materials accessible to all teachers should be developed and an agreed borrowing system should be agreed.

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 was given an opportunity to comment in writing on the findings and recommendations of the report; a response was not received from the board.