An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

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

Boherbue Comprehensive School
Boherbue, Mallow, County Cork
Roll number: 81009B

Date of inspection: 11 March 2011
REPORT
ON
THE QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN SPHE

SUBJECT INSPECTION REPORT

This report has been written following a subject inspection in Boherbue Comprehensive School. 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 three days, during which the inspector visited classrooms and observed teaching and learning. The inspector interacted with students and teachers and examined students’ work. The inspector reviewed planning documentation and teachers’ written preparation. Following the evaluation visit, the inspector provided oral feedback on the outcomes of the evaluation to the principal, deputy principal and SPHE teachers. 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.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

The whole-school climate in Boherbue Comprehensive School, which is manifested in school systems, policies and practices, is supportive of the overall aims of the SPHE syllabus.

SPHE is timetabled appropriately in junior cycle. Most senior cycle students are also timetabled for SPHE. This additional provision is commended. RSE is appropriately delivered as a module within SPHE. Guest speakers support class-based instruction in relation to RSE and, in addition, there is some cross-curricular teaching of RSE material. As not all senior cycle students are timetabled for SPHE, some senior students get less exposure to RSE than their peers. This finding should be examined at school level, with a view to seeking to redress this imbalance.

An RSE policy has been developed. The fact that outline programmes of work for each year group have been appended to this policy is positive. This policy should be reviewed with reference to the relevant guidelines, policy template, and sample policy which are available on the website of the Department of Education and Skills.

The work of the SPHE subject department generally is supported by a well-established schedule of guest speakers. It is recommended that a visiting speaker policy be developed. This should be informed by Circular 0023/2010 - SPHE and RSE: Best Practice Guidelines for Post-Primary Schools. The SPHE Handbook also provides a relevant template.

In relation to staff deployment to the teaching of SPHE, a particularly positive finding is that all teachers are happy teaching SPHE. Considering the school’s co-educational status, the deployment of a male teacher to the teaching team is also positive. Management is encouraged in its efforts to ensure that teachers remain with their class group through each year of the three-year junior-cycle SPHE programme.
The SPHE teaching team is made up of teachers who are experienced and well-trained in teaching the subject, and teachers who are new to the subject. It is suggested that an audit of the team’s professional development needs would be valuable at this point. The outcomes of such an audit would help to inform a more systematic and incremental approach to teacher training in SPHE. The establishment of a continuing professional development (CPD) file by the subject department is proposed for consideration, as this would facilitate a more formal sharing of information and resources garnered by individual teachers at relevant professional development workshops.

**Planning and Preparation**

Subject department planning is supported by management’s provision of formal meeting time, and the appointment of a subject co-ordinator who oversees this aspect of the department’s work. Minutes are maintained for meetings of the subject department, and a subject plan has been prepared. There are clear indications that, in line with best practice, the subject plan is updated annually.

There is evidence of high quality, programme planning on the part of individual teachers. Some programmes of work are well developed, providing module-specific data in relation to desirable learning outcomes, suitable resources, and approaches to the assessment of student learning. This level of detail is commended. The very positive practice of building a list of guest speakers into programmes of work was also evident. It is recommended that the members of the subject department adopt a more collaborative approach to the development of programmes of work. This work should culminate in the development of agreed programmes for each year group. This approach to programme planning offers tremendous opportunities for talking about teaching and learning in the subject and for the sharing of good practice.

The subject co-ordinator, together with other team members, has compiled a very good range and large number of up-to-date resources, including information communication technology (ICT) based resources. It is positive that these resources can be readily accessed by all. In time, the members of the subject department might consider developing accompanying resource files. The SPHE subject department is well placed to embrace this latter suggestion.

The quality of planning and preparation for lessons observed was excellent. High quality resources, including ICT-based resources, had been accessed for use in lesson delivery. Many of these resources had been designed and prepared by the teachers.

**Teaching and Learning**

The overall quality of teaching and learning in SPHE is excellent.

Lessons observed were purposeful. The good practice of communicating intended learning outcomes to students was observed in all lessons. Teachers were keenly aware of the need to establish continuity with students’ prior learning, and this increased the relevance and meaning of topics under exploration. The delivery of lesson content was appropriately paced.
Resources were well utilised to support students’ understanding and learning. High levels of proficiency were evident in the use of ICT based resources and the related hardware.

Competent and highly skilled teachers delivered the lessons observed. Instruction was clear, concise, contextualised and value-laden. Teachers’ understanding and application of the experiential learning cycle was evident in both lesson design and delivery. This is particularly praised. Teachers went to great lengths to seek to provide for each of the three main learning styles, visual, auditory and kinaesthetic. In lessons where PowerPoint presentations featured, graphics were well utilised to evoke reactions, to foster student participation, and to support teacher talk thereby promoting better levels of understanding and learning. Numerous opportunities for co-operative learning were provided over the course of lessons. Students responded favourably to this student-centred approach to teaching, as evidenced by the high levels of student participation and engagement.

Classroom activities, which were plentiful, were well managed. Student participation in assigned tasks was supported by the provision of good explanations, as well as teacher monitoring of students’ engagement. As required, teachers availed of opportunities to provide additional help or support to individual students or groups. All classroom activities were well processed.

In one lesson in particular, there was clear support for the development of students’ literacy and numeracy through, for example, the incorporation of a crossword activity, a matching exercise and a costing task.

There was good provision for lesson summary, which facilitated the checking by teachers of students’ understanding and learning. Students’ responses indicated high levels of understanding and learning. In one lesson, a carefully designed, ICT-based ‘blockbuster’ type quiz provided a valuable and fun summary exercise. On occasion, a lack of time reduced teachers’ capacity to facilitate this important phase. As applicable, this should be addressed at either lesson design or delivery stage.

Classroom atmosphere was consistently positive, supported by an overall approach to the teaching of SPHE that was encouraging, respectful and affirming. In the teaching of RSE, as observed in one lesson, a very matter-of-fact, open and honest approach supported students’ participation and, therefore, their learning. Attractive, stimulating learning environments were created in lessons. In one lesson, for example, which focused on mental health, a series of relevant ‘food for thought’ statements were displayed on the walls.

**ASSESSMENT**

There is a clear consciousness amongst teachers, of the value and importance of assessment of student learning in SPHE. A number of teachers, for example, require students to complete end-of-module or end-of-year reflection exercises. Some provision is also made for ‘what did I learn’ tasks at lesson conclusion. In lessons observed, it was obvious that teachers sought to check students’ learning at key junctures in lessons. It is recommended that teachers now look at formalising the overall approach to assessment of student learning in SPHE. With an emphasis on the learning outcomes identified in the syllabus, consideration ought to be given to the introduction of strategies intended to evaluate student learning on a module-by-module basis. The SPHE Teacher Guidelines, as well as the SPHE Handbook, will provide guidance to teachers in relation to this task. The introduction of portfolio assessment is strongly suggested for consideration.
SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The following are the main strengths identified in the evaluation:

- SPHE is timetabled appropriately in junior cycle, and a large percentage of senior cycle students are also timetabled for SPHE.
- An RSE policy has been developed.
- RSE is appropriately delivered as a module within SPHE.
- There was evidence of high quality, programme planning on the part of individual teachers.
- The quality of planning and preparation for lessons observed was excellent, as was the overall quality of teaching and learning.
- High levels of proficiency were evident in the use of ICT based resources and the related hardware.
- Teaching was student-centred.
- There is a clear consciousness amongst teachers in the SPHE department, of the value and importance of assessment of student learning in SPHE.

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

- The adoption of a more systematic and incremental approach to teachers’ professional development in SPHE is recommended.
- Members of the subject department should adopt a more collaborative approach to the development of programmes of work.
- The overall approach to the assessment of student learning in SPHE should be formalised.

Post-evaluation meetings were held with the principal, deputy principal and subject teachers at the conclusion of the evaluation when the draft findings and recommendations of the evaluation were presented and discussed.

Published, November 2011
Appendix

School response to the report

Submitted by the Board of Management
Area 1  Observations on the content of the inspection report

The Inspection Report was a very fair assessment of the status of SPHE in our school. As a school, we are committed to the importance and value of SPHE on the school Curriculum while, at the same time, we acknowledge that there is still room for improvement. We found the inspection a very positive learning experience and teachers hard work was affirmed which is very encouraging.

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) Current SPHE policy to be referred to SPHE team and SDPI team for review with reference to guidelines/policy templates/sample policy available on DES website.

(b) Whole school SPHE in-service – promoting student welfare – was held on September 21st 2011.

(c) Following an audit of SPHE teams professional development needs one teacher attended two days of in-service and another attended one day of in-service.

(d) Subject plan to be updated.

(e) Decision made by SPHE teachers re pooling of resources in SPHE Resource room, also PDF files, PowerPoint’s etc. to be stored on server so that all SPHE teachers can access same.

(f) The recommendation of introducing a more formal approach to assessment is currently being discussed by SPHE team and structures will be put in place.