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

Saint Laurence’s College
Loughlinstown, Dublin 18
Roll number: 60262T

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

INFORMATION ON THE INSPECTION

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<th>Date(s) of inspection</th>
<th>10 and 11 May 2011</th>
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<td><strong>Inspection activities undertaken</strong></td>
<td><strong>Conduct of structured interview with group of senior cycle students</strong></td>
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<td>• Review of relevant documents</td>
<td>• Administration of questionnaire to two groups of third-year students</td>
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<td>• Discussion with principal and teachers</td>
<td>• Examination of students’ work</td>
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<td>• Interaction with students</td>
<td>• Feedback to principal and teachers</td>
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<td>• Observation of teaching and learning during five class periods</td>
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MAIN FINDINGS

• The quality of teaching and learning was good or very good in most of the lessons observed.

• A variety of methodologies was observed in all lessons, creating a satisfactory balance between teacher instruction and student activity.

• Best practice was noted in lessons where the group work activities facilitated personal engagement with the topic in question.

• An assessment protocol aimed at evaluating learning outcomes was effectively used in one of the lessons observed.

• There is appropriate whole-school provision for SPHE in the allocation of time and in organisation of in-service for teachers involved in the delivery of the subject.

• Good work has been completed in subject planning for SPHE.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

• Greater use of group work is recommended to enable students to fully benefit from the experiential learning inherent in the SPHE curriculum.

• Provision for RSE at senior cycle should be further progressed to ensure access to the full curriculum for all students.
INTRODUCTION

St Laurence’s College is a co-educational voluntary secondary school with 459 students. It serves a suburban population in south County Dublin and its students come from a variety of socio-economic backgrounds. The school participates in the DEIS (Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools) scheme. 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.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

- Good or very good quality teaching and learning was observed in most lessons. Lessons were well structured and paced and the content was appropriate to the students’ needs and interests. However, in a small number of instances, student learning would have been enhanced by more effective classroom management.

- The lesson plan shared with students in most lessons and the topic to be studied was clearly linked to the students’ previous learning. Teachers should consider reframing the lesson plan in terms of the proposed learning outcomes in accordance with the principles of Assessment for Learning (AfL). This would make students more aware of what is expected of them and should ensure more active student engagement.

- A range of methodologies was used in all lessons and there were good efforts to maintain an appropriate balance between teacher instruction and student activity. Effective question-and-answer sessions elicited good responses from students in most instances. The practice in some lessons of directing questions at quieter students also ensured good participation from all students. This good practice should be implemented in lessons where the same students tend to answer all the time. The use of brainstorming as a methodology enabled students to use their prior knowledge to support the work in hand.

- PowerPoint presentations were effectively used to introduce and develop topics and to visually support the students in their learning. The interspersing of the use of information and communication technology (ICT) with question and answer sessions or tasks ensured that students remained engaged throughout. A video clip supported by preparatory and follow-up activities was also effective in supporting students learning.

- All lessons included some student activities, including worksheets, artwork and group assignments. There was one instance where the approach adopted by the teacher and the effective use of group work afforded students the opportunity to engage very personally with the topic in question. This good practice of experiential learning should be extended and at least one group activity should be included in each lesson.

- Homework was given and corrected in some instances, thereby serving to evaluate learning outcomes. A reflection log to be completed by students was also used at the end of one lesson for the purpose of assessing student learning. These good practices should be formalised as part of an overall assessment policy for SPHE. Such a policy should also include provision for formally recording students’ progress to include in school reports.

- There was good classroom management in most instances. The majority of students were well-behaved and their responses indicated positive engagement with the work in hand. However, there were some lessons where a number of students disengaged from the work of the lesson. In these instances, better classroom management strategies, such as reminding students of the class charter, seating arrangements and classroom rules are recommended.
SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- There is good whole-school provision for SPHE at junior cycle. A life-skills programme offered in senior cycle affords further opportunities for students’ social and personal development. The relationships component of RSE is delivered through Religious Education and Guidance in senior cycle, while sexuality education is taught in Biology lessons. This, however, does not take into account those students who do not study Biology at senior cycle. It is recommended that the delivery of RSE is organised in such a way as to ensure that the full RSE curriculum is delivered to all students in senior cycle.

- Some teachers have attended in-service training for SPHE and the ‘TRUST’ course for senior-cycle RSE. In-service training from the SPHE support service has also been organised for those who have not already benefited from training. This is good practice.

- All new resources are put into a box and are filed at the end of each term. This is good practice in building up a bank of worksheets accessible to all teachers of SPHE. All classrooms are ICT enabled and there was evidence to indicate that ICT is used to support teaching and learning.

- Classrooms are teacher-based. Some SPHE related posters were displayed including the food pyramid created by the students and projects on alcohol and drugs. It is recommended that the SPHE class contract also be displayed in each classroom to remind students of the rules they developed for themselves in relation to their participation in SPHE. Good practice was also noted in the creation of an SPHE notice-board on the corridor. This is used to communicate SPHE related information in addition to affirming students who have won SPHE related awards.

- The morning prayer was transmitted on the school intercom midway through the first lesson and caused some disengagement from their work by students. It is recommended that the morning prayer take place at the beginning of lesson time to avoid disruption.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

- The position of SPHE subject co-ordinator is voluntary and rotated. Subject department meetings take place each term and the minutes indicate a good balance between planning and general organisational issues.

- Most of the whole school policies relevant to SPHE are in place. The RSE policy is currently in draft form. It is recommended that a RSE subject plan be developed as a matter of priority to support the effective implementation of the RSE policy.

- The subject plan for SPHE is well laid out, describing the school context and setting out the learning outcomes for each year group. Schemes of work have also been developed. Teachers should now build on the good work completed to date by expanding their schemes to include information on the resources, methodologies and assessment protocols to be used to support the identified learning outcomes contained in the long-term plan.

- All individual lessons were carefully prepared. In some instances, very good individual lesson plans were submitted.

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

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Appendix

School response to the report

Submitted by the Board of Management

Area 1: Observations on the content of the inspection report

Upon clarification of some elements, the school is satisfied with the Inspection Report.

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

- RSE policy document to move from draft to agreed form

- In-service (individual teachers) and whole staff opportunities will be maximised

- Revision of current arrangements with RSE to ensure all students are afforded the opportunity to receive this instruction