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

Mercy College
Coolock, Dublin 5
Roll number: 60871V

Date of inspection: 19 May 2011
REPORT
ON
THE QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN
SOCIAL, PERSONAL AND HEALTH EDUCATION (SPHE)

INFORMATION ON THE INSPECTION

<table>
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<th>Date(s) of inspection</th>
<th>16 &amp; 19 May 2011</th>
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| Inspection activities undertaken | • Observation of teaching and learning during seven class periods
|                       | • Examination of students’ work
|                       | • Feedback to principal and teachers
| Review of relevant documents | •
| Discussion with principal and teachers | •
| Interaction with students | •

MAIN FINDINGS

• High quality teaching and learning was observed in the majority of lessons visited.

• Lessons were most successful when students were very clear about their role in group work activities or when the teacher had prepared them appropriately for the task-at-hand.

• In a minority of instances, the teaching and learning strategies being used did not achieve the desired learning outcome.

• Some teachers have developed systems for storing students’ materials and are consistent in their monitoring of this work which is good practice.

• In some cases, students are not receiving the full Relationships and Sexuality (RSE) programme in junior cycle.

• The quality of individual planning and preparation for all lessons observed was very good.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

• Methodologies should be adapted when the desired learning outcome is not being achieved.

• All aspects of the RSE programme must be delivered in their entirety throughout the junior cycle.

• The RSE and anti-bullying policies should now be updated and a policy regarding the deployment of visiting speakers should also be developed.

• The SPHE plan should now be reviewed by the full teaching team with a view to ensuring that all ten modules are being delivered by all teachers each year.
INTRODUCTION

Mercy College Coolock, a voluntary secondary school, currently caters for 426 female students. Many curricular programmes including Transition Year (TY) are available here. The school participates in the Department of Education and Skill’s Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) action plan for educational inclusion. Many supportive whole-school initiatives are in place in the school.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

- The quality teaching and learning observed in the majority of lessons visited was very good.
- Overall, there was a very good balance between teacher and student input. This is important and should be borne in mind for all SPHE lessons.
- Almost all lessons were well structured and followed a logical sequence.
- In most lessons, learning outcomes were shared with the students and returned to at the end of the lesson. This is good practice as it enables both the teacher and the students to determine the extent of the learning taking place.
- Opportunities were provided to students to become active in their own learning. This occurred in pair work and group work activities or when students presented findings arising out of interviews with their partner.
- Good practice was observed when students were very clear about their individual role in pair work and group work activities or when they were well prepared prior to engaging with tasks.
- In some lessons, students were given the opportunity to evaluate their own learning and this strategy should be adopted in all lessons. The development of a template to support student evaluation is recommended.
- In one instance, it was evident that the teaching and learning strategies were not achieving the desired learning outcome. Care should be taken to monitor the learning and to adapt the lesson accordingly.
- Overall, teachers have developed very good relationships with their students and a warm atmosphere prevailed throughout.
- A class contract has been developed with some groups and this good practice should be adopted by all teachers.
- Good efforts have been made to create display areas of subject related materials in some rooms.
- Teachers used a range of questioning strategies in lessons and students were equally comfortable asking as well as responding to questions.
- Some SPHE teachers have developed systems for storing students’ materials and are consistent in their monitoring of this work. This practice should be adopted by all teachers.
- SPHE is not yet on the school report sent to parents and this should be addressed.
SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- The timetabling arrangements for SPHE are appropriate.
- The RSE programme in senior cycle covers all of the themes as recommended in the *Interim Curriculum and Guidelines for Post-primary Schools*.
- The RSE programme in senior cycle is delivered by one member of staff and this is very good. However, in order to avoid an over-reliance on this teacher, the school should now explore the feasibility of building capacity and expertise in this regard.
- Students are consulted prior to the delivery of the RSE programme which is very good practice.
- The SPHE department has engaged with training provided by the SPHE support service but information about participation levels and the title of courses attended was unavailable. This information should be collated, kept up-to-date and included in the SPHE plan.
- The school has allocated part of a post of responsibility for the co-ordination of SPHE and there is a high level of commitment to the fulfilment of this role.
- The SPHE department comprises twelve teachers all of whom are tutors to their class group. Overall, these teachers have a high level of awareness of their students.
- In order to facilitate planning of the full SPHE team more easily, the school should keep the size of the SPHE department under review. In the interim, the school should develop a core planning team comprising representatives from each year group.
- It is apparent that not all teachers are delivering all aspects of the RSE programme in junior cycle. It is important that the RSE programme is delivered in its entirety throughout the junior cycle.
- The SPHE department has developed a list of assessment procedures and this information has been included in the plan.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

- The SPHE department should indicate how it is fulfilling its obligations under DEIS in regard to planning for literacy and numeracy and include this information in the plan. The school DEIS plan must be progressed as a matter of urgency in these two areas.
- The RSE and anti-bullying policies should now be updated. A policy regarding the use of visiting speakers should also be developed.
- All inputs given by external speakers should be evaluated formally by students.
- An SPHE subject plan has been developed by the co-ordinator and programmes of work have been developed for all year groups. This level of commitment is to be commended.
- The school facilitates subject department planning meetings and the SPHE team has formally met once per year. The minutes of one meeting were available.
- A high level of informal contact is ongoing between individual members of the teaching team.
• Some teachers report a difficulty in meeting the requirement to teach all ten modules in the year. A review of the SPHE plan should now be undertaken by the teaching team. An estimated timeframe should be included for the delivery of topics to ensure that all ten modules can be delivered each year by all teachers.

• Topics should be linked to learning outcomes, methodologies and the modes of assessment being used to determine the learning.

• Individual planning and preparation for all lessons was of a very high quality. In one case, commendably, the teacher had also planned for the literacy needs of her students and this good practice should be observed by all teachers.

• Many resources have been developed by teachers which were seamlessly integrated into lessons.

• ICT was used to great effect in lessons.

The draft findings and recommendations arising out of this evaluation were discussed with the 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.

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