

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

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

**Saint Columba's College
Stranorlar, County Donegal
Roll number: 62861F**

Date of inspection: 8 April 2011



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

REPORT
ON
THE QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN SPHE (INCLUDING
RELATIONSHIPS AND SEXUALITY EDUCATION)

INFORMATION ON THE INSPECTION

Date(s) of inspection	7 & 8 April 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 and teachers

MAIN FINDINGS

- All lessons took place in a secure and supportive atmosphere with positive relationships evident between the students and teachers.
- All lessons had a clear focus but there was scope to vary the teaching strategies used to enhance experiential learning opportunities and to foster deeper levels of understanding and application of learning.
- There is a whole-school approach to providing for students' personal and social development.
- Excellent timetabled provision is available for SPHE and high quality action planning underpins the school's involvement in the *Healthy Schools Scheme*.
- Teachers are committed to providing a high quality SPHE programme; however the whole-school structures to support collaborative subject department planning in SPHE need to be enhanced.
- Teachers are conscientious in planning for lessons; some high quality practice was noted.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

- Core junior and senior cycle SPHE teams, led by a co-ordinator should be established.
 - Formal meetings of the SPHE teams should be organised as part of the calendar of subject department meetings.
 - Common programmes of work for SPHE should be developed to facilitate consistent programme implementation.
 - A common assessment policy SPHE should be devised and implemented.
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INTRODUCTION

St Columba's College is a co-educational school under the trusteeship of Ceist. The school community, with a current enrolment of 844 students, is strongly committed to providing for students' personal and social development.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

- All lessons had a clear focus. On occasion there was scope to adjust the pace or pitch of the lesson to a level more commensurate with students' experiences and stage in the programme. This highlights the need to develop and implement a common programme plan.
- In the majority of lessons learning outcomes were shared with students. This practice proved effective in focusing students' attention and in scaffolding lesson structure. It is recommended that learning outcomes are shared at the outset of all lessons and are revisited to provide additional assessment opportunities.
- Active learning was noted in some lessons through the effective use of well-managed group work and pair work, and through the incorporation of drama. Additional resources such as worksheets, case studies and clips from DVDs were used in a number of lessons. Learning from these activities was optimised in instances where students discussed their findings in a plenary session and where probing questioning techniques enabled students to critically appraise the points raised. This is very good practice.
- There is scope to incorporate a wider variety of teaching strategies into SPHE lessons to avoid an over-reliance on oral discussion and teacher-led activity. It is recommended that the range of teaching strategies used be broadened to support all stages of the experiential learning cycle, as recommended in the curriculum framework for SPHE.
- Students made good progress in the lessons observed but evidence of the quality of learning from previous lessons varied significantly in the classes visited. It is recommended that students be provided with additional opportunities to complete a wider range of written activities which can then be monitored by the class teacher. The activities selected should be aligned to the key learning outcomes. An agreed system of folders that enables students to store and file information from their SPHE class from first year to third year, and fourth year to fifth year should also be introduced.
- Students who met with the inspector during the evaluation recognise the value of SPHE as a means of supporting their learning in a broad range of areas such as alcohol and drugs, healthy lifestyles and communication skills.
- Teaching and learning took place in a caring and supportive atmosphere. A high level of mutual respect and a positive student-teacher rapport were apparent.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- SPHE enjoys excellent timetable provision. All junior cycle students, as well as those in fourth and fifth year, are timetabled for one class of SPHE per week. RSE is provided as an integral component of SPHE.

- A whole-school climate for SPHE is supported through the school's participation in the *Healthy Schools Scheme*. High quality collaborative action planning underpins the implementation of this programme.
- The mandatory whole-school policies relating to SPHE have been ratified but they are in need of updating. This should be done as part of the school's ongoing policy review process.
- School procedures for the use of guest speakers are indicative of good practice. These procedures should be formalised into a policy on visiting speakers in line with Circular Letter 23/10.
- Current deployment practice results in there being a very large group of teachers assigned to teach SPHE. This practice inhibits the development of a cohesive subject department and presents significant challenges in ensuring consistency of programme provision. It is recommended that core teaching teams for junior cycle and senior cycle SPHE be established.
- There has been a very good level of past engagement with CPD but some gaps are apparent among current SPHE teachers. Senior management should carry out an analysis of CPD needs in SPHE and devise an action plan to facilitate a systematic and incremental approach to CPD among all teachers of SPHE.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

- Teachers are committed to providing a high quality SPHE programme but the absence of a subject co-ordinator and regular formal meetings of the team is impacting negatively on collaborative planning for teaching and learning. It is recommended that a subject co-ordinator be appointed. The co-ordinator should be experienced in SPHE and assigned to teach at least one SPHE class. Once sufficient capacity is built among staff, the position could be rotated.
- Formal meetings of the SPHE department should be facilitated as part of the calendar of subject department meetings to facilitate collaborative planning and the sharing of expertise. Records of each meeting should be kept and systematically filed to facilitate continuity and to foster a culture of reflective practice.
- The lack of implementation of common programme plans for junior and senior cycle SPHE is leading to variation in the quality and consistency of programme implementation. It is recommended that common programme plans for junior cycle and senior cycle SPHE, including RSE be developed by the team. The sequence of topics should be carefully considered and clear learning outcomes should be identified for each topic in each year to support incremental learning.
- Assessment practice is underdeveloped. Therefore, agreed assessment and reporting strategies for SPHE need to be considered and implemented by the team.
- Very good ongoing planning practice, including the compilation of up-to-date resources, was evident in the work of individual teachers. Some high quality planning folders containing excellent reflective practice was noted. This expertise should be used to inform the common programme plan.

- Current resources need to be catalogued for ease of access and to highlight and address any shortfalls identified.
- Teachers are conscientious in their preparation for lessons. Best practice was apparent where the planned lesson supported incremental learning and where the learning outcomes had an appropriate balance between knowledge acquisition and skills development among students.

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.