

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

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

**Drogheda Grammar School
Drogheda, County Louth
Roll number: 63870L**

Date of inspection: 18 November 2010



**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)

SUBJECT INSPECTION REPORT

This report has been written following a subject inspection in Drogheda Grammar School. It presents the findings of an evaluation of the quality of teaching and learning in Social, Personal and Health Education (including Relationships and Sexuality Education in senior cycle) and makes recommendations for the further development of the teaching of this subject in the school. The evaluation was conducted over two days during which the inspector visited classrooms and observed teaching and learning. The inspector interacted with students and teachers, examined students' work, and had discussions with the teachers. The inspector reviewed school planning documentation and teachers' written preparation. Following the evaluation visit, the inspector provided oral feedback on the outcomes of the evaluation to the deputy principal and subject teachers. The board of management of the school was given an opportunity to comment on the findings and recommendations of the report; the board chose to accept the report without response.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) is very well provided for as a curriculum subject and it benefits from strong whole-school support. Each junior-cycle class is timetabled for SPHE in line with the requirements of circular letter M11/03. Commendably, SPHE is timetabled in fifth year for the full year while in sixth year, some aspects of SPHE are provided during Guidance. This report is confined to the teaching and learning of SPHE in junior cycle and to the provision of Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) in senior cycle.

Currently, the SPHE department comprises six teachers including the guidance counsellor. Commendably, some of these teachers are delivering SPHE to more than one class group. All teachers met with during the evaluation were clearly committed and dedicated to this subject. Almost all members of the current team are experienced in teaching SPHE and this is very good.

The RSE programme in senior cycle covers all of the themes as recommended in the *Interim Curriculum and Guidelines for Post-primary Schools*. This is partially delivered by external speakers and partially by the guidance counsellor. It is good that the school has developed expertise within the staff to complement all external inputs. However, the school should examine the feasibility of building the SPHE teachers' skills in this regard so that there is not an over-reliance on one member of staff. The school has very clear about its procedures regarding visiting speakers. However, these procedures should now be formulated into a policy for future reference. Currently, parents are not informed prior to the delivery of the RSE programme. It is recommended that this should be done.

From evidence gathered during the evaluation, it is very apparent that very little RSE had been delivered to the current senior cycle students while they were in the junior cycle. Notwithstanding the fact that RSE is now included in the SPHE plan, the deficit of learning regarding RSE that

currently exists among senior-cycle students must be addressed by the school as a matter of urgency. This is recommended.

All teachers are timetabled to teach SPHE in rooms which facilitate the inclusion in lessons of the learning methodologies advocated in the syllabus for the successful delivery of the subject. Very good efforts have been made by all SPHE teachers to ensure that there are appropriate displays of SPHE materials in their classrooms. These are very useful for maximising the potential of the students' immediate learning environment to stimulate and retain their interest in issues and topics relevant to the subject.

Management is very supportive of teachers' continuing professional development and there has been a good level of engagement with the SPHE support service to enhance the professional competencies of SPHE teachers. Some of the teachers have attended the *Introductory* training while others were scheduled to do so at the time of the evaluation. The guidance counsellor has attended professional development courses, many of which are relevant to SPHE.

The school is clearly committed to the promotion of SPHE in a wide whole-school context. Many systems which support the work of the SPHE teachers are in place. These include the year head and tutor system; the mentoring system between fifth-year and first-year students, and an anti-bullying week due to take place shortly after the evaluation. The school has also provided courses to staff and this has included inputs on *Stress Management* and *Conflict Management*. This support for staff is very good.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

The systems that are in place in this school are supportive of collaborative planning. Time is made available for all subject departments including SPHE to meet. Records have been kept of all such meetings. In addition, there is much informal contact between the teachers. It is very clear that SPHE is a core element of the pastoral care structure in this school. All of the key policies relevant to or supportive of SPHE have been developed. However, the RSE policy should now be updated so that it accurately describes RSE provision in this school. Materials are available at www.education.gov.ie which will support this work.

Planning and co-ordination of SPHE in this school is of a very high quality. Co-ordination of the SPHE department is divided between two teachers with each teacher responsible for either junior cycle or senior cycle SPHE. The co-ordinators carry out their roles conscientiously and are clearly committed to SPHE. Materials have been made available to teachers which support the teaching and learning of SPHE. These are stored centrally and can be accessed by all members of the SPHE department. In addition, individual teachers have also compiled or designed their own materials and this is very good. Some of these materials have been added to the centrally stored resources, audited and catalogued into different year groups and this is good.

Planning documentation was presented on the day of the evaluation and it contained information about the organisation of the department and all relevant planning materials for the SPHE and the RSE programmes. The SPHE programme for each year group consists of all ten modules as recommended in the syllabus designed by the National Council of Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA). Modules are presented in a spiral and developmental way.

All the SPHE programmes of work presented contained a list of topics and included an estimated weekly timeframe for their completion and the resources used. The inclusion of common learning

objectives for each topic would enhance this work. All teachers provided individual schemes of work and some of these included details of the methodologies that would be used to deliver each topic. This is very good practice and should be adopted by all members of the team. Attention has also been paid to the development of differentiated worksheets and handouts where appropriate. The SPHE department has also developed a template to aid each teacher in the evaluation of each lesson. Generally, good use has been made of this template.

In all lessons observed, individual preparation was very good. This was evident through, for example, the provision of handouts and worksheets which were seamlessly integrated into lessons at appropriate stages. Information and communication technology (ICT) was used effectively in all lessons observed. All classes have developed a class contract which was on display in all classrooms.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

Four lessons were observed during the course of the evaluation. The quality of teaching in all of these lessons was very good. All teachers engaged in effective individual planning and preparation for their lessons. Good practice was observed where the aims and objectives were shared with the students for their consideration as part of the learning process and returned to at the end of the lesson. In some lessons, students were informed regarding the content of a subsequent lesson. These are very good practices as they provide a focus and structure for the students. Good routines were established which included monitoring attendance at the start of each lesson.

Students were provided with ample opportunities to engage actively with their own learning. Strategies included questioning, discussions, quizzes, group and pair work. Where necessary, resources were deliberately differentiated to meet the learning requirements of those students with particular learning needs. Questions were varied and provided students with ample opportunities to think critically. All teachers made very good efforts to ensure that questions were distributed to a wide range of students and this facilitated a high level of student participation.

All lessons evaluated were well organised, characterised by smooth transitions from one stage to the next and they contained a variety of learning activities. There was very good balance between the level of teacher and student input. This ensured that lessons were not led by the teacher. One example of this occurred in a lesson where the topic-at-hand was 'Friendship'. A range of methodologies was used and these included reflective tasks, discussions, the creation of a newspaper advertisement and a summary of learning by the students.

There was a friendly and caring atmosphere in all of the classes visited and a positive rapport had been developed between teachers and their students. In all cases, instructions were clear and precise. Students' participation in the classroom activities was closely monitored by the teacher in all lessons and help and assistance were afforded when necessary. Students' efforts and contributions were respected and appropriately affirmed in all lessons. Almost all lessons were very well managed and discipline was very good. In the one lesson where a small minority of students were distracted, attention should be paid to the seating arrangements of these students. All discussions remained focussed on the topic-at-hand.

The quality of learning was very good in the lessons observed. This was evidenced by the quality of the discussions which took place during lessons, written work which occurred in lessons,

feedback from group work activities and the responses to questions. The level of written work in copies and folders was appropriate for the time of year.

ASSESSMENT

The SPHE department uses a range of assessment modes to determine students' progress. These include teachers' observations of students' engagement in pair work, group work, class discussions, questioning, completion of worksheets and responses to tasks. The SPHE teachers should formalise this work into an agreed policy which will guide teaching and learning into the future. Reference should be made to *Social, Personal & Health Education: Guidelines for Teachers pp.60-68*.

In almost all lessons, students were required to evaluate their learning either verbally or in a written assignment. This is very good work and worthy of praise. The development of a template to support the process of student reflection and self-evaluation is now recommended.

In all lessons, students were provided with resources by the teacher. This took the form of handouts or worksheets. In all classes, a system is in place for students to store and file personal materials such as these in a folder which is retained by the teacher and distributed to students at the beginning of lessons. It is good to note that this practice has been consistently implemented by all teachers. Communication with parents is maintained through the school journal, school reports and annual parent-teacher meetings as appropriate.

SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The following are the main strengths identified in the evaluation:

- Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) is very well provided for as a curriculum subject and it benefits from strong whole-school support.
- The school is clearly committed to the promotion of SPHE in a wide whole-school context.
- The RSE programme in senior cycle covers all of the themes as recommended in the *Interim Curriculum and Guidelines for Post-primary Schools*.
- All teachers met with during the evaluation were clearly committed and dedicated to this subject.
- Planning and co-ordination of SPHE in this school is of a very high quality and all teachers engaged in effective individual planning and preparation for their lessons.
- All lessons evaluated were well organised, characterised by smooth transitions from one stage to the next and contained a variety of learning activities.
- Students were provided with ample opportunities to engage actively with their own learning.
- The quality of learning was very good.

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

- The RSE policy should now be updated.
- The deficit of learning regarding RSE that currently exists among senior-cycle students must be addressed.

A post-evaluation meeting was held with the teachers of SPHE and with the deputy principal at the conclusion of the evaluation when the draft findings and recommendations of the evaluation were presented and discussed.

Published May 2011