

**An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna**

**Department of Education and Skills**

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

**REPORT**

**Sancta Maria College  
Louisburgh, County Mayo  
Roll number: 64660F**

**Date of inspection: 15 April 2011**



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

**REPORT**  
**ON**  
**THE QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN SOCIAL, PERSONAL AND**  
**HEALTH EDUCATION (SPHE)**

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**INFORMATION ON THE INSPECTION**

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| <b>Dates of inspection</b>  | 14 and 15 April 2011  |
| <b>Inspection activities undertaken</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Discussions with principal, co-ordinator, teachers and the student-support care team</li><li>• Review of relevant documents</li><li>• Interaction with students</li><li>• Observation of teaching and learning during six class periods</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Examination of some students' work</li><li>• Conduct of structured interview with senior cycle students</li><li>• Administration of questionnaire to third-year students</li><li>• Feedback to principal, teachers and co-ordinator</li></ul> |

**MAIN FINDINGS**

- The standard of teaching and learning was exemplary in over half of the lessons observed.
- There is positive whole-school support for SPHE.
- The SPHE programme is embedded in the pastoral-care provision at the school.
- Students demonstrated very good behaviour and were engaged in their learning.
- There is scope to further develop SPHE and RSE subject planning and assessment.

**MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS**

- In order to support the high standard of teaching and learning, subject planning for SPHE and RSE should be further developed.
  - The assessment of SPHE should be further explored with a view to formalising practice in the area.
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## **INTRODUCTION**

Sancta Maria College was established by the Sisters of Mercy in 1920 as the first Catholic co-education Secondary School in Ireland. There is a current enrolment of 300 students. 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.

## **TEACHING AND LEARNING**

- The standard of teaching and learning was generally good and in over half of the SPHE lessons observed it was exemplary.
- The good practice of sharing learning outcomes with the class at the outset and returning to them at lesson closure should be widely used.
- Lessons were generally well structured and sequenced, and delivered at a pace that allowed students time and space to engage with and reflect on the key concepts of the lesson.
- Experiential learning with its four required phases of experiencing, processing, generalising and applying, needs greater application in lessons.
- Some good examples of the use of active learning methods such as brainstorming, discussion, pair work and group work were evident. Some further refinement of the skills associated with group work is necessary.
- Best practice was observed where the teacher acted as a facilitator of learning where, for example, students were encouraged to think, consider, analyse and synthesise issues during activity-based learning. This practice assists students in developing higher-order thinking skills and should be further utilised.
- Good use is made of teaching resources, to enhance teaching and consolidate learning. However, due to space restrictions, these are currently located in the co-ordinators classroom. There was some use of information and communication technology (ICT) and this is fully encouraged.
- Students were well managed in all learning activities and their work was monitored by teachers in a supportive and caring manner. The quality of the student-teacher relationships and the warm and enthusiastic manner in which the teachers interact with the students have a positive effect on classroom atmosphere and reflects well the student-centred ethos permeating the school.
- Classroom management was effective. Students demonstrated very good behaviour and were engaged in their learning.
- Interactions with students indicated that they had a good knowledge and understanding of the concepts related to the various topics under study, commensurate with their ability. Students also demonstrated good communication and teamwork skills.
- Although practice varies somewhat among teachers, a combination of assessment modes is used to assess students' competence and progress.
- Students' workbooks and portfolios were well organised and indicate good progression. Students compose short reflections on their work and undertake end-of-module reviews.

- In order to enhance current practices, the SPHE team should further explore and extend the range of assessment modes appropriate to SPHE and particularly the area of *Assessment for Learning*. Teachers should also agree on the criteria to be used for assessing students' progress in SPHE. In particular, the development of reflection through portfolio work should be further developed and assessed.

#### **SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT**

- Appropriate timetable provision is made for SPHE at junior cycle. The Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) programme is provided as an integral part of junior cycle SPHE and is delivered in the context of Religious Education (RE) at senior cycle. The provision of an SPHE class, including RSE, in the Transition Year (TY) programme is also commendable.
- There is very good whole-school support for SPHE. In line with the school's ethos, various structures such as the pastoral care team, class tutors, mentors, guidance and home-school community liaison personnel, support the SPHE programme well.
- In keeping with best practice, a core team is involved in SPHE delivery and they display a high level of commitment. The role of SPHE co-ordinator is well established and undertaken on a voluntary basis by a teacher who has considerable experience in teaching SPHE.
- Management is committed to supporting the continued up-skilling of teachers as appropriate. The school works closely with the SPHE Support Service and whole-staff in-service has been provided in a range of SPHE-related topics.
- All SPHE teachers have availed of the two-day introductory training in addition to other relevant in-service courses. Management should ensure that teachers continue to avail of RSE training.
- Management endeavours where possible to allow teachers to retain their assigned class group from first year through to third year and some SPHE teachers teach the class for another subject.
- There is great support for cross-curricular, co-curricular and extracurricular SPHE activities.
- Practices in relation to assessment in SPHE are progressing well. However these should be formalised and included in the school's homework and assessment policy.

#### **PLANNING AND PREPARATION**

- There was evidence of good short-term planning and preparation for lessons and teachers maintain records of work completed to inform future planning.
- The SPHE team engages in collaborative planning both on a formal and informal basis and progress has been made to date in developing a subject plan based on the school-development-planning template. As part of the planning process, teachers are encouraged to formalise the sharing of professional expertise, in terms of subject knowledge, methodologies for experiential learning and assessment of SPHE.
- Currently the SPHE teachers follow a time-framed course outline. Some also follow the relevant teachers' manual; however, the practice of individually tailoring curricular plans to meet the needs of individual groups should be developed.

- It was evident, from the outline curricular plan for senior cycle RE, that RSE is delivered in that context. However, coherent RSE programmes within junior cycle SPHE and for RSE in the context of RE at senior cycle should now be documented.
- Existing curricular outlines should be developed into short-term curricular plans on a phased basis. These should outline topics to be taught within shorter timeframes and indicate the learning outcomes, the corresponding methodologies, resources and assessment modes. The incorporation of a review section for comments on the achievement of the learning objectives would facilitate regular review.
- School-planning groups have developed and reviewed a range of policies that support the SPHE programme well. The school's policy for SPHE and RSE would benefit from further review.
- The school is committed to evaluating the effectiveness of its student-support systems, for example, senior students undertake an RSE survey.
- The school informs parents of students' progress in SPHE through school reports and parent-teacher meetings. The school report is accompanied by a short questionnaire which aims to get students and their parents to reflect on the outcomes of the report.

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

# **Appendix**

**SCHOOL RESPONSE TO THE REPORT**

**Submitted by the Board of Management**

### **Area 1 Observations on the content of the inspection report**

The Board of Management thanks the SPHE inspectorate for the positive and complimentary report on the recent inspection in SMC.

The Board endorses the very high level of pastoral care and teaching and learning evident in the school.

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

The SPHE Department and all other subject department areas are committed to ongoing planning and review.