

**An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna**

**Department of Education and Skills**

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

**REPORT**

**Scoil Mhuire  
Strokestown, County Roscommon  
Roll number: 65100S**

**Date of inspection: 18 May 2011**



**AN ROINN OIDEACHAIS AGUS SCILEANNA | DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION 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>  | 17 and 18 May 2011   |
| <b>Inspection activities undertaken</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Discussions with principal, co-ordinator, teachers</li><li>• Review of relevant documents</li><li>• Interaction with students</li><li>• Observation of teaching and learning during seven class periods</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Examination of 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 subject co-ordinator</li></ul> |

**MAIN FINDINGS**

- The quality of teaching and learning in SPHE is good, with some excellent practice observed.
- The experiential method of learning was in evidence in all lessons.
- Good classroom management resulted in good student behaviour and a positive classroom atmosphere.
- Individual teacher planning was good and most teachers maintain records of work completed.
- There is scope for the further development of subject planning and assessment in SPHE and a need to review associated policies.

**MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS**

- A systematic and incremental training plan should be implemented for SPHE teachers.
  - Discrete time for SPHE planning meetings should be provided for during staff planning days.
  - Assessment in SPHE should be further explored with a view to formulating policy in this important area.
  - The relationships and sexuality education (RSE) policy should be reviewed and coherent RSE programmes should be developed and delivered to all students. The SPHE curricular plans should be further developed and action plans based on target setting should be implemented.
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## **INTRODUCTION**

Scoil Mhuire, Strokestown, was originally established by the Sisters of Mercy in 1920 and the current campus was opened in 1967. This co-educational post-primary school is the sole provider of second-level education in the area and draws its students from a wide area. The mainstream enrolment currently stands at 419.

## **TEACHING AND LEARNING**

- The overall quality of teaching and learning in SPHE is good, with some excellent practice observed. Lessons were purposeful, well structured and delivered at a pace that took account of students' levels and abilities.
- The good practice of sharing the learning outcomes with students at the beginning of lessons was observed; however, these should always be returned to at the lesson closure.
- The experiential method of learning, which is recognised as the most appropriate method for SPHE lessons, was in evidence in all lessons. A range of well-managed strategies was utilised, for example: pair work; group tasks; music; worksheets and meditation. These strategies were most effective where they were combined in a manner which appropriately limited teacher input and facilitated active student engagement with the lesson material.
- Good classroom management resulted in good student behaviour and a positive classroom atmosphere. The majority of students participated in a co-operative, interested and enthusiastic manner.
- Good use is made of a variety of teaching resources, including information and communication technology, to support learning effectively. On occasion, visiting speakers are invited to provide SPHE-related workshops and talks to students and their parents.
- Students demonstrated a good knowledge and understanding of the topics under study, commensurate with their ability. With regard to student copybooks and folders, best practice was observed when students dated their work chronologically.
- There was evidence of some thought and action regarding the assessment of student learning; however, the SPHE team should further develop the process of assessment to ensure that there is an agreed and consistent approach to determine students' engagement and learning. In particular, the development of reflection through portfolio work should be explored over time, supported by appropriate training.

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

- The school is proactive in promoting students' well being, and whole-school initiatives such as healthy-eating week and anti-bullying strategies support students well.
- SPHE is a core subject on the timetable of all junior and senior cycle students. However, not all Transition Year, fifth-year and sixth-year students have received the full SPHE programme and not all have received the RSE programme in line with circular 37/10. While the school is commended for introducing senior cycle SPHE, it is difficult currently to evaluate its impact on student welfare due to gaps in its delivery and the

absence of an agreed curricular plan for its implementation. These issues should be addressed urgently.

- The school is advised regarding best practice in the deployment of teachers for SPHE. This includes assigning teachers by consultation, maintaining continuity of teacher throughout the cycle and when possible, teaching the class for another subject. Management endeavours to ensure that there is a gender balance in the deployment of SPHE teachers.
- 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. However, given the large teaching team and the need to further develop a coherent senior cycle RSE plan, consideration should be given to having both a junior and senior cycle co-ordinator to steer planning teams.
- Whole-staff in-service has been provided in some SPHE-related topics. While the co-ordinator and some of the teachers have some training in SPHE/RSE, it is recommended that an audit of teachers' current interest in and training needs in SPHE be undertaken. A systematic and incremental training plan should be implemented for SPHE teachers. As a minimum, all SPHE teachers should avail of the two-day introductory SPHE training provided by the SPHE support service and thereafter more specialised training could be availed of on a phased basis. A record of training needs and training undertaken should be maintained.
- In addition to the need to develop an agreed whole-school assessment policy, an assessment policy for SPHE should be devised and implemented.
- The school informs parents of students' progress in SPHE appropriately through school reports, letters and parent-teacher meetings.

## **PLANNING AND PREPARATION**

- Subject planning for SPHE is predominately informal and relies on the tremendous good will of the teachers involved. This makes consistent implementation of an SPHE programme challenging. Discrete time for junior and senior cycle SPHE planning meetings as well as occasional whole-team SPHE meetings should be provided for during staff planning days.
- Some progress has been made to date in developing a subject plan and teachers currently follow a list of course content for each year group. Programme planning for SPHE is underdeveloped; therefore more comprehensive short-term curricular plans should be developed for junior and senior cycle to include the time frames for topics, the learning outcomes to be attained, and the corresponding methodologies and agreed assessment modes. Plans should also include a review mechanism to support teachers in undertaking regular reviews.
- The RSE policy and other school policies that support the SPHE programme would benefit from further review, in line with the Gay and Lesbian Equality Network (GLEN) Guidelines for School Policies and to reflect the requirements of circular 23/10.
- Coherent RSE programmes within junior and senior cycle SPHE should now be documented, delivered and included in the revised RSE policy.

- Individual teacher planning was good and most teachers maintain records of work completed. This could be further developed into reflection on both student learning and the teacher's own skills.
- In order to promote self evaluation, provision should be made for the regular review of SPHE provision, to include the views of students, teachers and parents. The findings from the third-year questionnaire should provide a useful starting point. The team should then develop and implement action plans, based on target setting, with clear time-bound steps to achieve them.

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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.