

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

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

**Ashbourne Community School,
Ashbourne, Co. Meath
Roll number: 91495T**

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 SPHE (INCLUDING
RELATIONSHIPS AND SEXUALITY EDUCATION)

INFORMATION ON THE INSPECTION

Date(s) of inspection	14 & 15 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

- The overall quality of teaching and learning was very good, with exceptionally good facilitation of experiential learning noted in a number of lessons.
- Information and communications technology (ICT) was used effectively to support learning.
- Students made very good progress in all lessons observed but assessment strategies need to be enhanced.
- Excellent timetabled provision is made for SPHE.
- All the mandatory policies relating to SPHE are in place, but are in need of updating.
- Teachers are committed to providing a high quality SPHE programme; however, formal collaborative planning for the taught SPHE programme should be enhanced.
- Individual teacher planning is very good, with considerable efforts being made to source and develop additional resources for SPHE lessons.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

- A core planning team should be established to lead ongoing planning, review and further development of the taught SPHE and RSE programmes.
 - Designated subject department meetings for SPHE should be organised.
 - The breadth of the senior cycle SPHE and RSE programmes should be reviewed. Continuing professional development (CPD) should be accessed to support this work.
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INTRODUCTION

Ashbourne Community School is a large co-educational school with a current enrolment of 1039 students. A strong commitment to providing for the personal and social development of its student cohort is evident. SPHE is a core subject from first year through to sixth year.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

- High quality teaching was evident during the evaluation. All lessons had a clear focus and many contained a very good balance between teacher-led and student-led activity. Some further consideration should be given to the pace of lessons to provide adequate time to incorporate, more fully, strategies that summarise learning and assess students' progress in the lesson.
- Learning outcomes were shared with students in some lessons. It is recommended that key learning objectives be shared with students at the beginning of each lesson. The objectives chosen should facilitate incremental learning and support a good balance between knowledge acquisition and skills development among students. The outcomes should be revisited during the lesson to facilitate further opportunities for student reflection and self-evaluation.
- ICT was effectively used through the use of DVDs, well-chosen music, and *Twitter*. Some digital presentations were particularly well designed by including visual images and items from newspapers which effectively linked the lesson to life experiences.
- Some good links were made with previous lessons to support incremental learning. Commendably many of the teaching strategies deployed encouraged higher-order thinking skills such as the analysis, reflection and critical appraisal of information. In all lessons deliberate efforts were made to affirm students' progress, cultivate a positive self image and build self-esteem among students.
- Junior cycle students are provided with a wide range of learning experiences in SPHE. Some very good work was evident in copybooks but the standard and range of written work undertaken varied between classes. Particularly good practice was noted where the range of written activities undertaken supported the development of skills as well as the acquisition of knowledge. This is an area for further development by the SPHE team. An agreed system of folders that enables students to store and file information from their SPHE class from first year to third year, and through the senior cycle should be introduced.
- Some very good assessment practices were noted such as the assigning of home tasks, the organisation of competitions, the issuing of class certificates and the regular use of feedback marking. There is a need to extend and standardise these practices across all class groups. It is recommended that a formal assessment policy for SPHE should be devised to enhance the evidence base that informs the feedback to parents and students.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- There is a high level of commitment and interest in the SPHE programme throughout the school. SPHE is a core subject for all junior and senior cycle students. This impacts

positively on the school's stated aim of developing confident students who have a healthy self-image and sense of responsibility.

- It is a well-established practice that tutors are assigned to teach SPHE to their class and are normally assigned to teach them a second subject. Teachers continue with their class throughout the junior cycle or senior cycle programme. This practice proves effective in generating a secure learning environment. However, collaborative planning for and consistent implementation of a SPHE programme is difficult, given the large teaching team. Therefore, it is recommended that a core planning team, comprising the co-ordinator and a small number of junior cycle and senior cycle SPHE teachers be established.
- All teachers are very committed to teaching SPHE with some good levels of attendance at relevant CPD noted. Training needs remain apparent. Senior management should carry out an analysis of CPD needs and devise an action plan to facilitate a systematic and incremental approach to upskilling all teachers of SPHE.
- The whole-school policies in substance use, RSE and anti-bullying are in need of updating. It is recommended that the board of management makes arrangements for the review and ratification of these policies, in line with relevant Department of Education and Skill's guidelines.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

- A committed and enthusiastic approach is taken to the co-ordination of SPHE and a culture of reflective practice is evident. The co-ordinator is newly appointed to the area and is currently not teaching SPHE. It is recommended that the co-ordinator be assigned to teach SPHE in the next academic year. Relevant CPD, specifically for newly-appointed co-ordinators, should be accessed.
- Planning meetings for SPHE traditionally form part of the year head and tutor meetings. This is not sufficient. It is recommended that meetings of the junior and senior cycle SPHE teams be organised as part of the calendar of subject department meetings.
- Programme planning has evolved over many years. The junior cycle plan should be further developed to reflect the very good work underway by including learning outcomes for each topic in each year, suitable teaching and assessment strategies, and lists of useful resources. Very good reflective practice was noted in some individual teachers' planning folders. This information, along with relevant data collated from using the end-of-topic review forms, should inform this work.
- School procedures on the use of guest speakers should be documented in a policy on visiting speakers in line with Circular Letter 23/10. The integration of the peer education programme into first-year SPHE merits review. The content of all lessons should be carefully planned for in close collaboration with the SPHE class teacher to ensure that the material is pitched accordingly and complements the sequence of lessons in the yearly programme plan.
- The senior cycle SPHE programme plan is underdeveloped. It is recommended that the range of topics be broadened and learning outcomes, that demonstrate incremental progression from junior cycle be devised for all topics, including RSE.
- A very good range of easily-accessible resources is available. Individual teachers are making very good efforts to develop and source additional material.

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, and the response of the board will be found in the appendix of this report.

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 of Ashbourne Community School welcomes the inspection of SPHE and the subsequent report and is appreciative of the many aspects commended by the inspector during her time in our school. The main findings were very positive, including excellent timetable provision of a high quality SPHE programme with the overall quality of teaching and learning very good.

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 Board welcomes the three main recommendations contained in the report and commits itself to their implementation where feasible. In fact, the review of the RSE and SPHE programmes at Senior Cycle has already commenced and designated subject department meetings have been already scheduled for this year.