

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

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

**Marian College
Ballsbridge, Dublin 4
Roll number: 60500J**

Date of inspection: 14 December 2010



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

REPORT
ON
THE QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN SPHE

SUBJECT INSPECTION REPORT

This report has been written following a subject inspection in Marian College, Ballsbridge. It presents the findings of an evaluation of the quality of teaching and learning in SPHE (including Relationships and Sexuality Education) and makes recommendations for the further development of the teaching of this subject in the school. The evaluation was conducted over three 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 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

There is a strong tradition of inclusion and care for the well-being of students in Marian College. This is underpinned by a high quality whole school guidance plan into which planning for SPHE is currently incorporated. All junior cycle students are allocated one period a week for SPHE in line with Departmental requirements.

The deployment of teachers to the delivery of SPHE also reflects good whole-school commitment to the subject. The registered teaching subjects of the teachers currently involved in the delivery of the subject complements the SPHE curriculum. Classes in each year group are timetabled concurrently to facilitate a modular approach whereby teachers deliver the components of the programme that are best in accordance with their areas of expertise and interest. Furthermore, all teachers have been facilitated to engage in in-service training for SPHE. In addition, the SPHE team has recently worked with members of the SPHE Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST) for the purpose of advancing the quality of the programme currently being delivered.

The delivery of relationships and sexuality education (RSE) forms part of the SPHE curriculum in junior cycle. However, the RSE policy, which is a requirement for all schools, has not as yet been completed. This needs to be expedited as a matter of priority. Furthermore, provision for RSE at senior cycle needs to be formally embedded into the relevant curricular areas and given the required allocation of time. In a focused interview carried out during the course of the evaluation, senior cycle students indicated that provision for RSE in senior cycle was limited. They reported that work had been completed with them in the area of relationships, but they had not received formal sex education. This needs to be addressed. It is recommended that the teachers involved in the delivery of the RSE programme in senior cycle should avail of the TRUST in-service training programme to support them in their work. A whole school policy on visiting speakers is also required in accordance with Department circular 0023/2010 *Social, Personal and Health*

Education (SPHE) and Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE): Best Practice Guidelines for Post-Primary Schools

A good range of resources is available to all teachers to support the delivery of SPHE, including many articles, worksheets and useful planning templates downloaded by individual teachers from the internet.

Marian College has an anti-bullying policy in place and organises an anti-bullying week each year in the school to ensure that students are informed of policy and procedures in relation to bullying, in addition to promoting positive initiatives to discourage bullying behaviour. A whole-school substances use policy is also in place. Other commendable SPHE related initiatives include the organisation of a healthy eating week in the school to promote healthy lifestyles.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

A core team of teachers has been put in place for the delivery of SPHE and planning for both SPHE and RSE have been prioritised. There is a subject co-ordinator, a position which is voluntary and rotated. Formal meetings for SPHE subject planning take place at the beginning of the year. However, more frequent meetings of the SPHE team are planned in the current school year for the purpose of advancing the planning process. This is welcome as the subject plan currently in place would benefit from further work focusing on the development of learning outcomes for each year group. The subject plan should also include information on available resources, proposed methodologies and assessment protocols. A plan for the delivery of RSE should be prepared in tandem with the SPHE plan.

There was evidence of good preparation for the lessons observed. Relevant technical equipment was in place and there was advanced readiness of supplementary worksheets and materials.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

Evaluation activities included the observation of three junior cycle SPHE lessons. Interaction between the inspector and the students and a review of their SPHE folders was also facilitated. One of the lessons involved the delivery of RSE related topics.

Lessons were well structured and paced and the content was appropriate to requirements of the SPHE curriculum. The topics studied included relationships, which forms part of the RSE programme, personal safety and healthy eating. The lesson plan was outlined to the students in all of the lessons observed. To further build on this good practice, it is recommended that teachers reframe their lesson plans in terms of the intended learning outcome for the lesson. Some lessons began with a quick recap on previous learning and its contribution to the work of the lesson in hand. Other lessons began with a brainstorming session which engaged the students actively from the outset. These are good practices which should be extended to all lessons.

Good question and answer sessions were observed in most lessons and resulted in some very insightful comments from a number of students. There were some instances however, where student learning would have further benefited from questions which brought them beyond the stage of information retrieval to exploring attitudes and feelings.

Effective use was made of information and communication technology (ICT) in some lessons. A PowerPoint presentation was constructively used in one lesson to support learning. However, to improve the visibility of the presentation it is recommended that a coloured background be used

on the slides. A good choice of DVD in another lesson facilitated active student engagement with the topic being studied. In this instance to further the learning process, it is recommended that students be given an introductory task prior to the showing of the DVD. The use of preparatory tasks helps to elicit what students already know about the topic and enables them to feed their existing knowledge into the work in hand.

Individual student-based tasks were assigned in some lessons and this is good practice in promoting active and independent learning. In one instance the teachers brought in samples of products to demonstrate to students the importance of reading the ingredients contained on packaging and their nutritional value. This intervention helped ground the topic in the realities of the students' experiences and in turn fed in very effectively to the subsequent student-based task. The use of student-based tasks is encouraged as it facilitates a more personal response to the topic in hand as observed in some lessons. Students should be given a number of group tasks during all SPHE lessons. Such activities promote teamwork which is one of the aims of the SPHE programme and they also afford students the opportunity to share their opinions and responses with their peers and feed back answers from the more comfortable confines of a smaller group.

There was good classroom management throughout and there was evidence of a positive rapport between students and teachers. Most students applied themselves to the work in hand and many of their responses indicated positive engagement with the subject. However, further strategies to strengthen students' personal engagement with the work carried out in SPHE lessons are recommended.

ASSESSMENT

Student learning is generally assessed through question and answer sessions in class. Some students also keep folders to store supplementary materials and any work completed by them during lessons. However, there are currently no formal homework or assessment practices for SPHE and teachers do not keep records of individual students' progress. While it is acknowledged that assessment practices for SPHE will differ from the traditional format of homework and tests, it is important for students to be informed of their progress and for teachers to evaluate if the learning outcomes identified for SPHE are being achieved. To this end students should keep a folder containing records of all work completed. Teachers should also consider the use of a personal reflection log to afford students the opportunity to assess their own participation and learning in addition to providing teachers with important information helpful for the completion of school reports.

SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The following are the main strengths identified in the evaluation:

- There is a strong tradition of inclusion and care for the well-being of students in Marian College.
- The current deployment of teachers to SPHE and the modular approach facilitates the delivery of the subject in accordance with teachers' areas of expertise and interest.
- The SPHE team has recently engaged with the PDST in order to progress the quality of the SPHE and RSE programmes to be delivered in the school.
- A range of effective methodologies was observed including brainstorming, question and answer sessions and the use of ICT.

- Where used, group work effectively supported active learning.

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

- Completion of the RSE policy should be expedited as a matter of priority.
- Subject planning for both SPHE and RSE should be progressed in tandem to ensure the optimum delivery of the relevant programmes to all year groups.
- Greater use of higher order questions is recommended to enable students to engage more personally with the topics being studied.
- All lessons should include a number of student-based tasks to support active learning.
- An agreed assessment strategy should be put in place to enable teachers evaluate whether or not the desired learning outcomes have been achieved and to facilitate the formal recording of students' progress.

Post-evaluation meetings were held with the teachers of SPHE and with the principal at the conclusion of the evaluation when the draft findings and recommendations of the evaluation were presented and discussed.

Published October 2011