

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

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

**Christian Brothers Secondary School
New Ross, Co. Wexford
Roll number: 63600F**

Date of inspection: 21 September 2010



**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)

SUBJECT INSPECTION REPORT

This report has been written following a subject inspection in Christian Brothers Secondary School (CBS) New Ross, conducted as part of a whole school evaluation (WSE). It presents the findings of an evaluation of the quality of teaching and learning in SPHE, including Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE), 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 time the inspector visited classrooms and observed teaching and learning. The inspector interacted with students and their teacher, examined students' work, and had discussions with the teacher. The inspector reviewed school planning documentation and teacher's written preparation. Following the evaluation visit, the inspector provided oral feedback on the outcomes of the evaluation to the principal and the subject co-ordinator. 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

The personal development and well-being of students is highly valued by the school and all students are provided with one period of SPHE per week. While the timetable provision at junior cycle is in accordance with Circular Letter M11/03, the provision of the subject for all senior cycle students is exemplary and ensures that their personal development and well-being continues to be supported, through the formal curriculum, as they grow and mature. RSE is embedded in the SPHE programme for both junior cycle and senior cycle students, as appropriate.

A consultative and collaborative approach is taken to the development of school policies. A number of policies relevant to SPHE have been developed including anti-bullying and substance use. The final RSE policy is currently in the process of being drafted. Good use has been made of the Department's RSE policy template and guidelines to inform this work. Once completed this policy should provide clear guidance for management, teachers, students and parents on all aspects related to the content, organisation and delivery of the RSE programme in the school. The early completion of this work to ratification and implementation is recommended.

While two teachers are currently deployed to teach the SPHE and RSE programmes in the school, all of the classes, with the exception of a third-year class group, are assigned to one teacher. This teacher has extensive experience of teaching the subject and has also engaged in significant professional development, both through engaging with the professional development programme provided by the SPHE support service, and through the completion of an extra-mural certificate in teaching SPHE. Consideration should be given to expanding the current team of teachers available to teach SPHE and RSE in the school. Management should invite teachers with an interest in the subject to participate in the introductory inservice programme provided by the support service. Additional teachers deployed to teach the subject will help to create a core team

and a collaborative subject department to share in the responsibility for the planning and organisation of the programmes of work.

Links have been established with a number of appropriate external agencies to support the work of the school and the SPHE department. Guest speakers are used occasionally to support students' learning of various topics. These visitors to the SPHE classroom are briefed about the aims and content of the SPHE programme and the context for their input, which is in keeping with the guidelines set out in the *SPHE Handbook*, Section 7. The school should also refer to Circular Letter 0023/2010, which sets out such guidelines for schools on the use of visitors to the SPHE classroom.

Teachers are classroom based and this arrangement works well for the delivery of SPHE. The classroom provides a suitable environment to support the interactive nature of the subject, with sufficient space for students to move around. The furniture can also be easily rearranged to suit the various interactive teaching and learning methods. A television and DVD player and a data projector are available in the classroom to facilitate the use of multi-media and electronic resources. The availability of a dedicated desktop computer or laptop should also be considered, resources permitting, to ensure the optimum use of the data projector. Appropriate arrangements are in place to support the purchase of additional resources and materials to support teaching and learning.

It is commendable that the school also contributes to students' well-being through a number of whole-school initiatives. The active school week organised each year promotes students' engagement in a range of physical activities and is a good example of the type of initiatives that can make positive impacts on students' attitudes and behaviour towards their well-being. In addition, the involvement of students in fund-raising initiatives to support a variety of charities is highly commended. Involvement in these activities positively contributes to the promotion of concepts such as social responsibility and active citizenship.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

Subject department planning for SPHE is advancing well. A co-ordinator is in place, on a voluntary basis, with a number of key tasks assigned to this role, such as leading subject department planning, convening meetings, the dissemination of information and the promotion of relevant events. A formal meeting to support the subject department planning process takes place at the start of the school year. While this is sufficient at present, additional time, where feasible and practical, should be considered in the event of an enlarged subject department and to assist teachers who are new to the subject.

A subject plan has been developed for SPHE and it provides a good overview of the organisation and delivery of the SPHE programme in the school. It is commendable that the subject plan includes documentation related to students with special educational needs and identifies strategies to support their inclusion and learning. Good cross-curricular links have been established with relevant subject departments and common themes have been identified to reinforce students' learning in each of the subject areas.

Programmes of work for each year group in junior cycle are also documented and follow the modules and topics as outlined in the *SPHE Guidelines for Teachers*. The SPHE programme at senior cycle continues to develop students' knowledge of important themes affecting their

emotional, social and physical well-being. Goal-setting, organisational skills and study skills are all components of the senior-cycle programme that build on learning from the junior cycle and help students to identify the steps required to achieve their personal, educational and vocational goals. Revisiting topics related to mental health, substance use, physical activity and nutrition also ensure that students' have opportunities to examine and discuss issues that are appropriate to their age and level of maturation, and they continue to be supported in the formation of positive attitudes and behaviours. An extensive RSE programme is planned for each year group in senior cycle. The recently developed *TRUST* (Talking Relationships Understanding Sexuality Teaching) resource for teaching RSE to senior-cycle students is available and is used to support students' learning. The themes included in the programme include human relationships, human reproduction, family planning, gender, sexual orientation, sexually transmitted infections and a study of sexual harassment and abuse.

To build on the good work already completed, it is recommended that planning for the programmes of work be expanded to include the specific learning outcomes for each year group and module. These learning outcomes should be expressed in terms of the knowledge, skills and attitudes that students are expected to acquire and develop. The learning outcomes should then be aligned with the most appropriate learning-and-teaching methods and modes of assessment for each module. This will provide a reference framework to guide individual planning and preparation, and ensure a consistent approach to the delivery of the programme.

A significant amount of resources and texts have been collated to support the delivery of the programmes of work, including the RSE programme. A textbook is used judiciously at junior cycle and it provides a useful resource and reference to support students' learning. Resources to support teaching and learning are neatly stored in the classroom and are easily accessible.

There was a high quality of individual planning and all lessons observed were thoroughly prepared.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

There was a good standard of teaching and learning in the lessons observed. The topics taught in the lessons observed were appropriate to the age and stage of development of students and included making new friends, goal-setting and gender stereotyping. These topics were effectively introduced through relating the material to students' previous learning or to their life experiences. This good practice helped to focus students and ensure that they had a good sense of continuity in their learning. In addition to the content of the lesson, the learning outcomes should also be explicitly shared with students, with a particular focus on the knowledge and skills that they are expected to acquire and develop as a result of their learning.

A range of effective teaching methodologies was used, which included individual reflection, pair work, group work and whole-class discussion. Good efforts were made to involve all students in the learning process and class activities. Questioning was a common feature of lessons and included most students by carefully directing questions to named individuals. This was particularly noteworthy in a senior class group with a significant number of newcomer students. This good practice encouraged students' involvement and was affirming of their responses and contribution to the class discussion. The greater social integration of newcomer students should also be considered, whenever appropriate, in class activities. For example, when organising group work, consideration could be given to the composition of each group to include both Irish and

newcomer students, especially when the topic allows for students to share their own cultural experiences.

All lessons included a good commitment to active learning methods, in keeping with the experiential approach to learning. Students had good opportunities to reflect on the topic and to discuss and record their own attitudes, behaviours and opinions, prior to processing and generalising their learning experiences arising from their engagement in the tasks. Tasks set provided students with meaningful opportunities to develop key social and communication skills in addition to giving them opportunities to confidently express their opinions. For example, a first-year lesson that explored the challenge of making new friends set the task for students to find out key pieces of information about the people in their class. This involved students interacting with each other and encouraged them to find out about their classmates' family, interests and achievements. This task provided an enjoyable means of enhancing students' confidence to converse in a meaningful way and to establish connections and common interests with their classmates. However, in a small number of instances, too much time was spent on the initial whole-class discussion, which reduced the time available for the interactive tasks. It is recommended that the reflective and interactive tasks be set and used earlier in the lessons. This will ensure that sufficient progress continues to be made throughout the lesson. The processing of students responses from class tasks was well facilitated and the board was used effectively in many instances.

Classroom management was effective and contributed to positive student behaviour. In one lesson, students re-visited their SPHE class contract to ensure that they were familiar with the agreed code of behaviour required to create a positive learning environment. This is good practice. All interactions were positive and affirming and a good rapport has been established between students and their teacher. Students were appropriately challenged and engaged in their lessons and a respectful and caring atmosphere was evident in all cases.

There was a good quality of learning in the lessons observed. Students were confident in expressing their opinions and found the topics and tasks both enjoyable and relevant and were enthusiastic about the subject. Lessons concluded with effective questioning by the teacher that assisted students' to summarise the main points of the lessons. The topics to be covered in the next lesson were also outlined for students, which is in keeping with good practice.

ASSESSMENT

The attention to assessment in SPHE in the school is commended. A range of assessment strategies is used to determine students' engagement and progress in SPHE. In addition to frequent oral questioning and feedback from group work, students' learning is also supported and assessed through the completion of class tasks and written assignments. Home tasks are given occasionally and often involve research and reflective exercises to further promote and reinforce the development of students' social and personal awareness and skills. All students maintain a folder containing their completed worksheets and assignments. This is stored in the classroom and distributed at the start of each lesson, in line with good practice.

In order to extend the range of assessment modes it is recommended that assessment-for-learning practices be further developed to complement the assessment of learning. This would ensure that the focus is on development of positive behaviour and attitudes as well as the acquisition of knowledge. For example, material in students' folders could provide a basis for self-assessment, where students are provided with opportunities to select elements of their work that exemplify

their learning. Student reflection and self-assessment could also inform planning and review of teaching and learning. Further information and advice on assessment in SPHE is available in the SPHE Guidelines for Teachers (pages 59-68) and from the SPHE Support Service. In addition, the NCCA website (www.ncca.ie) contains information on assessment for learning.

Students' progress in SPHE is reported to parents through the formal school reports system twice per year and through the annual parent-teacher meetings. These reports contain a comment on students' participation and progress in class, which is determined from teachers' records and observations. The expansion of the modes of assessment will provide further evidence of students' achievements and learning in SPHE.

SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The following are the main strengths identified in the evaluation:

- The personal development and well-being of students' is highly valued by the school. A supportive school climate exists for SPHE and the subject is a core component of the junior cycle and senior cycle curriculum.
- A number of whole-school policies that support the personal and social development of students have been developed.
- Subject department planning for SPHE is advancing well and a detailed subject plan has been developed.
- There was a good standard of teaching and learning in the SPHE lessons observed.
- Students were appropriately challenged in their SPHE lessons through a range of effective strategies.
- Lessons were characterised by a caring and respectful approach to all aspects of students' engagement and learning. All interactions were positive and affirming and a good rapport has been established between students and their teacher.
- A number of co-curricular and whole-school events are organised to support students' social and personal development during the school year.

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

- Consideration should be given to expanding the number of teachers deployed to teach SPHE and RSE in the school.
- The draft RSE policy should be ratified and implemented to support the delivery of the planned programmes of work.
- Planning for the programmes of work should be expanded to include the specific learning outcomes for each year group and module.
- Assessment-for-learning practices should be further developed to complement the assessment of learning.

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

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