

**An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna**

**Department of Education and Skills**

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

**Saint Augustine's College  
Dungarvan, County Waterford  
Roll number: 64890W**

**Date of inspection: 23 March 2011**



**A N R O I N N | D E P A R T M E N T O F  
O I D E A C H A I S | E D U C A T I O N  
A G U S S C I L E A N N A | A N D S K I L L S**

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

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**INFORMATION ON THE INSPECTION**

<b>Dates of inspection</b>	22 & 23 March 2011
<b>Inspection activities undertaken</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review of relevant documents</li> <li>• Discussion with principal and teachers</li> <li>• Interaction with students</li> <li>• Observation of teaching and learning during four class periods</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Examination of students' work</li> <li>• Feedback to principal and subject co-ordinator</li> <li>• Administration of questionnaires to two third-year class groups</li> <li>• Focused interview with six senior students</li> </ul>

**MAIN FINDINGS**

- There was a good quality of teaching and learning in the lessons observed.
- Students' learning was supported through a range of effective teaching and learning strategies, appropriate resources and well planned and paced tasks. Some lessons had an over emphasis on whole-class question and answers.
- Lessons were characterised by a very positive and affirming rapport between teachers and their students, which resulted in a supportive and productive learning environment.
- St. Augustine's College actively supports students' personal development through the SPHE and Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) programmes and a whole-school approach to the pastoral care and well-being of students.
- SPHE is appropriately timetabled at junior cycle, with additional exemplary provision at senior cycle. A small number of students, in receipt of learning support, may not have access to their SPHE lesson.
- The subject is very well co-ordinated, with a good quality of planning and preparation evident for the organisation and delivery of the SPHE and RSE programmes.

**MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS**

- Interactive tasks should be introduced earlier in lessons to give students sufficient time to reflect, discuss and evaluate the topic or theme.
  - The SPHE department should further develop a common approach to the assessment of students' learning and progress in SPHE.
  - Management must ensure that all students have access to their weekly SPHE lesson.
  - The draft RSE policy should be ratified and implemented.
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## **INTRODUCTION**

St Augustine's College is a co-educational voluntary secondary school with 610 students. The school provides the Junior Certificate, established Leaving Certificate and an optional Transition Year (TY) programme.

## **TEACHING AND LEARNING**

- The quality of teaching and learning observed was of a good standard. Lessons were well planned and paced, with the topic and tasks set and selected resources appropriate to the age and ability of students.
- Teachers appropriately contextualised the lesson content and established links with students' previous learning and experiences. Students were more focused and engaged when, in addition to sharing the content, clear expectations for their learning were also established at the outset. All teachers should adopt this assessment-for-learning approach.
- A variety of appropriate and effective teaching and learning strategies were used in most lessons, including group discussion, self-reflection tasks, pair work and small-group work.
- Questioning was used effectively to engage students and to assess their understanding. Teachers skilfully endeavoured to include all students in the lesson through targeted and differentiated questioning. Sufficient time was given for students to formulate their answers and teachers often probed and challenged them to support or rationalise their responses.
- Most lessons achieved a good balance between teacher input and student activity. Sometimes, there was a prolonged emphasis on whole-class questioning, which reduced the amount of time available for students to reflect, discuss and evaluate topics in depth. In keeping with the experiential learning approach advocated in SPHE, teachers should strive to set students active tasks earlier in the lesson and reserve the amount of whole-class questioning until the processing, generalising and applying stages of the lesson.
- Resources such as worksheets, video clips and posters were well selected and succeeded in stimulating discussion, challenging misconceptions and in providing exemplars of the social pressures affecting adolescents.
- Classroom management and organisation was of a high standard and teachers have established a very positive and affirming rapport with their students.
- Students were fully engaged and making good progress in the lessons observed. Good practice was observed in lessons where students recorded elements of their work in a dedicated copybook, although a minority of students did not have a copybook in class. A review of some copybooks indicated that the volume of work covered and the quality of presentation and annotation by teachers varied between class groups. A consistent approach to recording and retaining class work should be implemented.
- Homework is set from time to time and provides useful opportunities for students to further examine the lesson topic relative to their own life experiences.
- The further development of the assessment process in SPHE is recommended. Teachers should agree on the use of a diversity of modes of assessment and establish a number of key assessment milestones for each year group in keeping with the planned programmes of work and agreed learning outcomes.
- Teachers' maintain good records of students' participation and progress in their lessons.

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

- SPHE is appropriately timetabled for all class groups in accordance with Circular Letter M11/03. However, the current practice whereby a small number of students may be withdrawn for learning support during their SPHE lesson should be avoided.
- The provision of a dedicated weekly SPHE class for fifth-year and sixth-year students, in addition to a number of personal development modules for TY students, is exemplary. Senior students interviewed as part of the evaluation expressed their appreciation for this time and opportunity to discuss issues relevant to their personal development and well-being.
- Policies relevant to SPHE have been appropriately developed and ratified. The draft RSE policy should be finalised and ratified as soon as practical.
- Five dedicated and interested female teachers are currently deployed to teach SPHE and RSE in the school. Professional development opportunities are supported by management and most teachers have attended relevant inservice courses. Given the co-educational nature of the school, management should consider expanding the current team of SPHE teachers to include interested male teachers, where appropriate. Teachers interested in teaching the subject should be facilitated to attend a programme of relevant inservice prior to their deployment.
- Teacher-based classrooms worked well and are suitable to facilitate the range of possible pedagogical approaches. A high quality information and communication technology (ICT) infrastructure is available and the planned availability of data-projectors and laptops for all classrooms will greatly enhance resources to support students' learning.
- SPHE is an integral component of the school's pastoral care system and a whole-school approach is taken to promoting health and well-being.
- A comment on students' progress in SPHE is included on the regular school reports to parents.

## **PLANNING AND PREPARATION**

- Good structures are in place to facilitate subject department planning and a detailed subject plan for SPHE has been devised. A collaborative approach is taken to the organisation and delivery of the SPHE and RSE programmes. The subject department is very well co-ordinated and all elements of good planning are in place.
  - The programmes of work for junior cycle SPHE and senior cycle RSE are well developed and in line with the *Guidelines for Teachers*. The development by the SPHE department of schemes of work to support the delivery of each module for each year group is good practice.
  - Teachers should continue to develop the programmes of work for each year group to include the key learning outcomes, the development of an agreed approach to the assessment process, the incorporation of a regular review of the programmes and the further development, acquisition and storage of additional resources to support teaching and learning.
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The draft findings and recommendations arising out of this evaluation were discussed with the principal and subject co-ordinator at the conclusion of the evaluation. The board of management of the school was given an opportunity to comment in writing on the findings and recommendations of the evaluation; the board chose to accept the report without response.