Subject Inspection of Social, Personal and Health Education
REPORT

Coláiste Mhuiire
Johnstown, County Kilkenny
Roll number: 70600T

Date of inspection: 6 April 2011
REPORT
ON
THE QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN SOCIAL, PERSONAL AND
HEALTH EDUCATION (SPHE) INCLUDING RELATIONSHIPS AND SEXUALITY
EDUCATION (RSE)

INFORMATION ON THE INSPECTION

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dates of inspection</th>
<th>5 and 6 April 2011</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Inspection activities undertaken</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Review of relevant documents</td>
<td>• Observation of teaching and learning during five class periods</td>
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<td>• Discussion with principal and teachers</td>
<td>• Examination of students’ work</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Interaction with students</td>
<td>• Feedback to principal and teachers</td>
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MAIN FINDINGS

• The quality of teaching and learning observed was generally very good.

• Lessons were characterised by good pace and structure, a variety of active and experiential learning experiences and mature student engagement.

• Teachers achieved a good balance between concept formation, discussion and application as well as opportunities for personal skill development.

• Whole-school support is very good, characterised by appropriate timetabling, time for departmental planning and the co-ordination of whole-school student support.

• The quality of planning in the subjects is excellent and is supported with clear reflective and evaluative processes and an effective subject department with very good leadership.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

• Ongoing work is necessary to ensure recent developments in assessment are embedded in practice and consistency is achieved in portfolio use and students’ written work.

• Participation in initial and continuation training should be addressed through a three-year CPD plan to consolidate capacity in teachers deployed to SPHE and RSE.

• The RSE policy should be updated and, if possible, the existing senior-cycle RSE programme extended in fifth and sixth year.
INTRODUCTION

Coláiste Mhuire Johnstown is a vocational school under the auspices of Co Kilkenny Vocational Education Committee with an enrolment of 393 students. The school provides the complete range of curricular programmes. The school is involved in the Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) programme. SPHE is provided on the timetable for one period per week during first, second, third and transition year (TY). RSE is delivered as a component of the SPHE programme for each of these year groups and as a module during both fifth and sixth year for Leaving Certificate students. Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) groups complete a two-year course in Social Education and this includes a developmental programme of RSE. The board of management was given an opportunity to comment in writing on the findings and recommendations of the evaluation, and the response of the board will be found in the appendix to this report.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

• All lessons matched the requirements of the relevant syllabus and guidelines and were characterised by a high level of preparation and very good structure and pace. It was always clear to students what teachers intended in terms of learning or tasks to be achieved. In some lessons, teachers shared the intended learning outcomes with students and used them to reinforce learning at key points and this practice merits expansion.

• Teachers made very good use of stimulating resources, including visual texts, music and lyrics, websites and other information and communication technology (ICT) applications.

• In almost all lessons, learning was active and experiential; teachers integrated a very good variety of tasks for students and adopted an open and facilitative teaching style that enabled high quality learning experiences.

• Very good opportunities were provided for reflection and discussion at a deep level on lesson content. In an age-appropriate way, students were challenged and enabled to process, generalise and apply information and facts through the use of scenarios, and to reflect on factors that affect their own and others’ decision making.

• Very good rapport and respectful and mature engagement by students were characteristic of all lessons. Student enthusiasm was effectively channelled into productive outcomes. The establishment of clearly understood ground rules secured the learning environment and enabled the sharing of opinions and overall development of the person in terms of communication skills, social skills and self confidence.

• The needs of students with special educational needs and English as an additional language were very well met through verbally and visually reinforced pre-task teacher instructions and, sometimes, the structuring of the lesson through differentiated learning outcomes.

• In many class groups, students had built up good-quality relevant work in copies or folders. Student writing sometimes extended to longer pieces such as learning logs and reflective tasks. Within the subject department structure, it would be worthwhile discussing and establishing consistency of standards for student written work and linking these standards with the whole-school DEIS plan for student literacy.

• Commendable work is initiated in developing assessment in the subjects, including the introduction of student portfolios. Teachers are working on an assessment tool kit to provide a wide variety of structured approaches including classroom and homework.
tasks, parental feedback and end of module reviews. Ongoing work is necessary to ensure these developments are embedded in practice.

**SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT**

- Whole-school support is very good with the appropriate timetable allocation of one lesson per week for SPHE throughout junior cycle as well as TY. The time allocated to RSE in senior cycle meets requirements but extension seems possible and is desirable.
- School structures and pertinent policies are co-ordinated, enabling the principles of SPHE to inform practice at whole-school level as well as in-class level. A whole-school approach is taken to fostering student well-being and self-esteem.
- An extensive range of resources for teachers and students is easily accessible and continually expanding. These include electronic resources to fully utilise classroom ICT facilities and practical resources for students with special educational needs.
- Staff professional development is supported by management. Most teachers have participated in a recent SPHE course. Participation in initial and continuation training is recommended for all and this should be addressed through a three-year CPD plan to consolidate capacity in SPHE and RSE. Teachers are urged to avail of training in the delivery of the senior-cycle RSE resource entitled *TRUST* and use it in reviewing the senior-cycle RSE programme.
- Deployment of teachers to SPHE and RSE ought to be more purposefully managed when constructing the timetable annually so that only those with recent training and long-term interests are involved. A gender balance among the teaching team is desirable.

**PLANNING AND PREPARATION**

- The SPHE department is reflective and evaluative of the programmes and resources with a view to continually enhancing the learning experience for students. Highly effective leadership is provided by the co-ordinator. Co-ordination is enabling collaboration and the selection of fresh approaches to teaching, learning and assessment.
- The subject plan for SPHE is comprehensive and in keeping with syllabus requirements. It provides a structure and rationale for all aspects of provision.
- The curricular programme for SPHE is of a very high quality. It is supportive of individual teacher planning and enables a co-ordinated uniform approach to delivery. The programme is structured so that the learning outcomes for each module are integrated with teaching strategies, learning experiences and adaptations for students’ abilities.
- The programme for RSE is developmental and follows the recommended framework with strong emphasis on relationships. It is evolving at senior cycle and consideration is being given to the balance between the use of guest speakers and teacher instruction. Over time, the senior-cycle RSE programme could be structured similarly to that for SPHE.
- The current RSE policy should be updated in line with circulars 27/2008 and 23/2010 and Department guidelines. The policy should include agreed procedures for the use of guest speakers, including teaching practices prior to and following the speaker visit and processes for student evaluations. Plans to involve the parents’ association in a RSE working group and for keeping parents informed of the programme should proceed.
The draft findings and recommendations arising out of this evaluation were discussed with the principal and subject teachers at the conclusion of the evaluation.

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Appendix

School response to the report

Submitted by the Board of Management

Area 1: Observations on the content of the inspection report

Area 2: Follow-up actions planned or undertaken since the completion of the inspection activity to implement the findings and recommendations of the inspection

• Gender balance among the SPHE teaching team has been addressed in the current school year.

• The R.S.E. policy has been updated in line with the recommendation and ratified in September 2011.