

**An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna**

**Department of Education and Skills**

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

**Carrigaline Community School  
Waterpark Road, Carrigaline, County Cork  
Roll number: 91388S**

**Date of inspection: 12 November 2010**



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

**REPORT**  
**ON**  
**THE QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN SPHE**

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**SUBJECT INSPECTION REPORT**

This report has been written following a subject inspection in Carrigaline Community School. It presents the findings of an evaluation of the quality of teaching and learning in Social, Personal & Health Education (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 the inspector visited classrooms and observed teaching and learning. The inspector interacted with students and teachers and examined students' work. The inspector reviewed planning documentation and teachers' written preparation. Following the evaluation visit, the inspector provided oral feedback on the outcomes of the evaluation to the principal, deputy principal and SPHE teachers. The board of management was given an opportunity to comment in writing on the findings and recommendations of the report; a response was not received from the board.

**SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT**

Carrigaline Community School demonstrates a tradition of providing for students' social, personal and health education, as illustrated by the fact that the school provided a relevant programme in advance of 2003, the year all schools were required to do so. There is also clear evidence of review and reflection in relation to how this education might be best provided in the school, and this has impacted very positively on the school's current provision for SPHE. Significantly, the school is also now well advanced in relation to achieving Health Promoting School (HPS) status. Much credit is due to management, staff, and students for this work but, in particular, to the staff members who are co-ordinating this endeavour.

The school's SPHE programme is appropriately timetabled for all junior cycle students, as per the requirements of Circular M11/03. In addition, the school provides a life-skills programme in Transition Year (TY). The content of this TY programme demonstrates clear links with a number of the modules studied by students in junior cycle SPHE, thereby firmly establishing the programme as an aspect of the school's formal provision for students social, personal and health education. This level of provision and planning is very highly praised. It is management's intention to introduce SPHE in senior cycle. This is credited, whilst also being strongly encouraged, as it will provide space for a more comprehensive delivery of RSE in senior cycle. Aspects of senior cycle RSE are currently delivered in Religion.

In advance of the formalisation of the school's senior cycle RSE programme, the review of the school's existing RSE policy needs to be finalised. A set of guidelines, a template and a sample policy, which were prepared with a view to supporting schools in the task of developing this policy, are available on the website of the Department of Education and Skills. In tandem with the further development of the school's existing RSE policy, an RSE programme for senior cycle will

need to be planned and documented. Ideally this, together with the school's existing junior cycle RSE programme, should be appended to the school's RSE policy. In relation to planning a senior cycle RSE programme, management and teachers are referred to the *RSE Interim Guidelines*. These, along with a number of other valuable resources, can be accessed at [www.ecdrumcondra.ie](http://www.ecdrumcondra.ie).

Management's intention to facilitate a number of teachers to up-skill and train in the area of RSE, in advance of the introduction of a senior cycle RSE programme, is positive and is indicative of considered, forward-planning. It is very good to note that the majority of SPHE teachers in the school have completed the all-important, two-day, introductory training. Teachers new to the subject are supported via an informal, induction and mentoring process. In instances where formal, introductory training cannot be facilitated, consideration ought to be given to the incorporation of a shadowing element into the school's existing induction process.

A core team of SPHE teachers exists in the school. This team enjoys the benefits of a total of thirty-five years of combined experience in the teaching of SPHE. This is a significant strength. The evaluation found that teachers are consulted in relation to being assigned to the teaching of SPHE. In order to enhance the already good deployment patterns observed, it is recommended that management seek to provide for continuity of teacher from first year through to third year. Considering the co-educational nature of the student cohort, management is encouraged in its efforts to expand the number of male teachers teaching SPHE.

The whole-school climate in Carrigaline Community School is one that is supportive of the five over-arching aims of the junior cycle SPHE syllabus. This is obvious in many of the systems, policies and practices that have been established in the school. An annual health week serves as a fine example of an established school practice that places a whole-school emphasis on general health and well-being. The establishment of a school welfare team and the introduction of a system of appreciation awards also demonstrate the extent to which the school is conscious of providing for its students social, personal and health education. Examples highlighted combine with a wide range of other systems, structures and practices to provide an overall atmosphere of care and guidance. Policies seen to support particular aspects of the SPHE programme, namely an anti-bullying policy and a substance use policy, have also been developed and ratified.

SPHE is well resourced in the school. A highly organised storage unit houses a fine collection of subject-specific resources and materials. The fact that this unit is classroom-based restricts ease of access for teachers to this valuable collection. The relocation of this unit should be considered.

Communication with parents in relation to SPHE is strong, facilitated by a number of means including letters home, talks and seminars, policy development, parent-teacher meetings and the inclusion of SPHE on the school's report template.

## **PLANNING AND PREPARATION**

There was much evidence to suggest that the members of the SPHE subject department engage in very good quality collaborative subject planning, with minutes indicating that teachers are proactive in relation to identified planning priorities. This work is supported by management through the provision of formal planning time, and through the facilitation of school visits from personnel attached to the SPHE Support Service. In addition, a co-ordinator, whose role is to lead and oversee the planning work of the subject department, is appointed on a rotational basis. As a

result of the above good practices significant progress has been made in the area of planning. It should be noted that a co-ordinator will also need to be appointed to organise the introduction and delivery of senior-cycle RSE.

Programmes of work have been agreed. These are quite well developed, and provide a good level of detail and guidance for teachers. The programmes possess a number of positive features. They are time-bound, identify work to be covered on a weekly basis, provide for each of the ten modules identified in the syllabus, and detail the related topics. Work has also been initiated in relation to the identification and inclusion of appropriate methodologies and assessment strategies, as well as relevant subject links. This, in particular, is recognised as very good planning and is, therefore, further encouraged. With a view to enhancing these important planning documents, teachers are encouraged to include provision for learning outcomes and resource lists. The latter is especially important in schools where continuity of teacher from first to third year is not guaranteed, as it reduces the likelihood of the repeated use of a resource. Teachers are encouraged to include visiting speakers and relevant whole-school events in the programme plans, as these occasions can inform when modules and topics might be delivered. The preparation of year-group resource folders is noted and commended.

There was evidence of a considerable amount of cross-curricular planning between the members of the SPHE subject department and other subject departments. This is highly praised. With a view to further supporting mainstream staff in their cross-curricular teaching, the use of the SPHE notice-board in the staffroom to highlight the modules and topics being explored with each year group, on perhaps a weekly or monthly basis, might be considered. This would support further communication of the areas being studied in SPHE in each year group at any given time.

Review and evaluation are key elements of a successful planning process. Accessing both the student and parent voice is recognised as an important part of any review. All concerned are asked to consider how the voice of students of Carrigaline Community School, together with the voice of their parents, might be accessed. These voices could be used to inform the annual review of the SPHE programme. This will be discussed again in the assessment section.

Individual planning for lessons observed as part of the SPHE subject inspection was of a very high quality. Some of the individual teacher folders reviewed as part of the inspection indicated that this level of planning is the norm. This commitment to lesson planning is very highly praised, and as appropriate, might be shared with the team as a whole. A large range and number of resources was prepared or collected for use in lessons. This is positive. It included the preparation of resources that relied on the use of information communication technologies (ICTs). Where and when utilised, such resources were used very effectively. There was a clear consciousness of the importance of providing for students with additional educational needs in lesson planning.

## **TEACHING AND LEARNING**

The overall quality of teaching and learning in SPHE in Carrigaline Community School is very good, with some excellent practice observed in lessons.

All lessons were purposeful, well structured and delivered at a pace that took account of students' levels and abilities. The very good practice of sharing the lesson purpose and aims with students was incorporated into all lessons. In some instances, this included a clear delineation of the intended learning outcomes, which in a number of lessons were provided on the board or as part of a PowerPoint presentation. As relevant, this is further encouraged. Building on this approach,

teachers should consider revisiting learning outcomes as lessons draw to a close, as a means of supporting lesson summary and conclusion, and as a tool to determine and measure students' understanding and learning.

Recapitulation was well provided for in all lessons, with some novel approaches utilised. One such approach was where questions such as "What 'A' do we use to prevent sweating?" were introduced to check students' prior learning. Ice-breakers, where incorporated, were very effectively used. In another lesson, for example, a naming game, where the teacher provided a letter on the board and students had to list as many illnesses as they could that begun with that letter, proved very valuable in terms of motivating and involving all students from the very outset.

Teachers' passion for, and belief in, the subject was evident in a large percentage of lessons. In some instances this was supported by the preparation of an SPHE noticeboard, which was used to highlight the modules studied in SPHE. In one lesson, the module and topic of the day were given centre stage on this board, together with a resource which was referenced as part of lesson delivery. This is excellent practice.

Instruction was clear and accurate and regularly contextualised. Teachers displayed a good level of competence and skill in their teaching. The experiential method, which is recognised as the most appropriate method for use in SPHE lessons, was in evidence in the majority of lessons. This is highly praised. Teachers structured lessons in a way that provided for a very good level of student participation. The incorporation of strategies such as placemat, that promote both independent student learning and co-operative learning, was also evident. A range of other strategies was utilised, for example: games; group tasks; mind-mapping; music; pair work; physical exercises; PowerPoint presentations; quizzes; self-evaluation exercises; and worksheets.

Activities were very well planned, organised and managed. Instructions were issued to students and teachers ensured student understanding before proceeding with activities. Activities were allocated an appropriate amount of time. Students were required to assume different roles and thereby, were made partially responsible for their own learning. Students' participation was closely monitored, and support and guidance were provided as appropriate. Question and answer sessions were well utilised to develop lesson content. The incorporation of strategies such as a mix-and-match worksheet, where students were required to untangle sentences, demonstrated teachers' awareness of accommodating students of all levels and abilities. This is praised.

Lessons were delivered in classrooms that reflected the more usual and traditional classroom layout. While taking cognisance of the difficulties attached to moving tables and chairs to create a free space, teachers are encouraged to deconstruct the traditional classroom layout for the delivery of SPHE lessons. Good classroom management resulted in good student behaviour and a positive classroom atmosphere. Class contracts were used appropriately to emphasise acceptable and unacceptable behaviour. The majority of students participated in a co-operative, interested and enthusiastic manner, and demonstrated an eagerness to learn.

## **ASSESSMENT**

There is an evident consciousness in relation to the assessment of students' progress and achievement in SPHE, but it is suggested that it is an area that requires a fresh focus and approach. It is recommended that the teachers consider developing an assessment toolkit.

The starting point for this work might involve individual teachers or groups of teachers, for example all first-year teachers, looking at how the outcomes that are provided at the end of each module could be assessed or determined on an ongoing basis. A number of options exist, for example: classroom activities; home tasks; self-assessment; peer-assessment; and portfolio assessment. Teachers are strongly encouraged to consider the merits and value of portfolio assessment. The *SPHE Guidelines for Teachers*, as well as the *SPHE Handbook*, deal with assessment quite extensively, and templates are provided for reproduction and use with students. The inclusion of SPHE on the school report, which is issued to parents biannually, is positive.

The use of lesson reviews is further encouraged, as is the inclusion of reflection exercises. Teachers should seek to use a variety of approaches to such activities, as students tend to tire of review and reflection exercises when the approach to it becomes predictable and repetitive. Such exercises should seek to provide opportunities for students to reflect, not just on the knowledge garnered but also on the skills or attitudes that may have been fostered and developed. End-of-module or end-of-topic, as opposed to end-of-lesson exercises, might be best placed to provide for all three. These could also be used to get feedback from students in relation to what went well, and what did not go so well, in each lesson. The outcomes of this can be used to inform future lesson planning and delivery, discussed previously in the planning and preparation section. Sample templates are provided in both the *Guidelines for Teachers*, as well as in the *SPHE Handbook*. Teachers are strongly encouraged to prepare and file summaries of students' evaluations on an ongoing basis.

## **SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

The following are the main strengths identified in the evaluation:

- SPHE is appropriately timetabled for all junior cycle students.
- The school is well advanced in relation to achieving Health Promoting School status.
- School culture is influenced by a wide range of school systems, structures and practices which combine to provide an overall atmosphere of care and guidance.
- The school's SPHE team benefits from thirty-five years' combined experience in the teaching of SPHE.
- Communication with parents in relation to SPHE is strong.
- Significant progress has been made in the area of planning.
- The overall quality of teaching and learning in SPHE is very good, with some excellent practice observed.
- The experiential method, which is recognised as the most appropriate method for use in SPHE lessons, was in evidence in the majority of lessons.

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

- Management should provide for the delivery of RSE in senior cycle as soon as possible. In advance of this, the review of the school's existing RSE policy needs to be finalised.
- It is recommended that in the future deployment of teachers to SPHE, management seek to provide for continuity of teacher from first year through to third year.
- All concerned are asked to consider how the student and parent voice might be accessed and how these might be used to inform the annual review of the SPHE programme.
- The teachers of SPHE should consider developing an assessment toolkit.

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