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

Saint Michael’s College
Ailesbury Road, Dublin 4
Roll number: 60561G

Date of inspection: 18 May 2011
REPORT
ON
THE QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN SPHE

INFORMATION ON THE INSPECTION

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<th>Date(s) of inspection</th>
<th>16 and 18 May 2011</th>
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<td><strong>Inspection activities undertaken</strong></td>
<td><strong>Conduct of structured interview with group of senior cycle students</strong></td>
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<td>• Review of relevant documents</td>
<td>• Administration of questionnaire to two groups of third-year students</td>
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<td>• Discussion with principal and teachers</td>
<td>• Examination of students’ work</td>
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<td>• Interaction with students</td>
<td>• Feedback to principal and teachers</td>
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<td>• Observation of teaching and learning during six class periods</td>
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MAIN FINDINGS

- Teaching and learning was of a good standard in all of the lessons observed.
- A number of methodologies were observed and many were used to good effect.
- Active and independent learning was promoted through effective use of group tasks.
- There is good whole-school provision for SPHE in the allocation of time, the provision of resources and support for continuing professional development.
- Considerable progress has been made in subject planning for SPHE.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

- A variety of teaching methods should be incorporated into all lessons to encourage active and personal engagement with SPHE.
- The policy and plan for the effective delivery of RSE to all students should be expedited as a matter of priority.
- The anti-bullying policy should be reviewed to ensure that it is in accordance with Departmental guidelines.
INTRODUCTION
St Michael’s College is a voluntary secondary school with 602 male students. It is a fee-paying school serving a student population from a wide area within Dublin city and county.

TEACHING AND LEARNING
- All lessons were well structured. Good practice was noted in instances where the lesson plan was shared with students. This practice should be extended to all lessons and articulated in terms of expected learning outcomes.
- Best practice was noted in lessons where a range of teaching methods was used affording students different opportunities to engage personally with the work in hand. This practice should be extended throughout. Brainstorming was effectively used in some lessons, making students aware of how their own knowledge can support new learning. Good question-and-answer sessions elicited higher-order responses and discussion in many lessons. However, there were some instances where students’ answers should have been further teased out in order to engage them more fully and personally with the topic.
- Information and communication technology (ICT) was effectively used to support learning in many lessons. In some instances, however, the use of ICT as an additional resource would have enhanced the work of the lesson.
- Where used, pair or group work tasks, facilitated active and independent learning. However, in some lessons, too much time was given for the task. All tasks should be kept short with the focus on experiential learning outcomes and personal engagement with the topic. Good practice was noted in one lesson where students presented projects they had completed on the topic in question. This served to enhance their self-presentational skills in addition to facilitating team-work on a given subject.
- One of the lessons involved recapping on the work that had been completed during the year. This lesson was efficiently delivered and there was good evidence that significant work had been completed. Furthermore, the practice of asking students to indicate areas where perhaps they would have liked more input is commended. However, when engaging in an end-of-year review, it is recommended that students be asked in advance to evaluate their learning and to identify outstanding deficits. The information accrued could then be used to support revision.
- Some class groups had folders for filing all their work, while other students had copybooks in which work was written up. However, the practice of students systematically recording and archiving their work was not universal. It is recommended that an assessment protocol be drawn up to evaluate the learning outcomes for students and to assess and record their progress. To this end, consideration should be given to the introduction of a personal reflection log.
- Most students were well behaved and applied themselves to the work in hand. There were some however, who remained disengaged despite the best efforts of teachers to encourage full participation. All students should be made aware of the importance of SPHE as a curricular subject and reminded of the charter outlining expected behaviour drawn up at the beginning of the academic year.
SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- Good whole-school provision for students’ holistic development is reflected in the appropriate allocation of time for junior cycle SPHE. SPHE is also delivered in Transition Year, where generous time is allocated to the subject. Relationships and sexuality education (RSE) is a core module in the SPHE curriculum. However, the formalised delivery of senior cycle RSE needs to be progressed as a matter of priority to ensure that every student completes the required programme of RSE.

- Professional development for teachers of SPHE has been facilitated over the years. Some teachers have attended in-service training for both SPHE and senior cycle RSE. An in-service programme has recently been delivered by the SPHE support service for all teachers currently involved or expressing an interest in teaching the subject. This is good practice. It is now recommended that all teachers involved in the delivery of senior cycle RSE should avail of the ‘TRUST’ in-service training programme to support them in their work.

- Most teachers have their own base room, which facilitates the display of subject-related posters and projects. It is recommended that the student charter be displayed in the room and referred to as appropriate. Otherwise, students should keep a copy of the charter on the cover of their books, folders or copybooks. There is good access to resources, including ICT to support teaching and learning.

- A number of guest speakers are invited to the school each year to speak to students on topics relating to the RSE programme. Teachers reported that such talks take place in a context of preparatory and follow-up work on the topics discussed. This integrated approach is good practice to support optimum learning and should be incorporated into a whole-school policy on visiting speakers.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

- The co-ordination of SPHE forms part of the teaching contract of a recently appointed member of staff who has SPHE-specific expertise. This has contributed to the considerable progress made in developing a long-term plan for the delivery of SPHE. The minutes of SPHE meetings indicate that forward planning is now accorded due emphasis at subject department meetings. It is recommended that teachers continue to work together under the guidance of the SPHE co-ordinator to identify desired learning outcomes and to document the resources, methodologies and assessment protocols to support these outcomes. Once planning for SPHE has become well embedded in practice, the position of co-ordinator should be rotated among the teachers to afford all members of the SPHE department the opportunity to develop subject-specific expertise.

- Most of the whole-school policies relevant to SPHE are in place. The RSE policy is still at draft stage and needs to be completed without delay. There are some deficits in the anti-bullying policy relating to procedures and the documenting of all allegations of bullying. The policy should be revised in accordance with Department guidelines.

- There was good preparation for the individual lessons observed.
The draft findings and recommendations arising out of this evaluation were discussed with the deputy principal and the subject teachers at the conclusion of the evaluation. The board of management was given an opportunity to comment in writing on the findings and recommendations of the evaluation; a response was not received from the board.

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