An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

Subject Inspection of
Social, Personal and Health Education

REPORT

De La Salle College
Macroom, County Cork
Roll number: 62310O

Date of inspection: 23 May 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

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MAIN FINDINGS

• Teaching and learning were of a high standard in the lessons observed.
• Student engagement was maintained by the use of appropriate teaching methods and materials.
• Good classroom relationships had been established, facilitating a favourable environment for SPHE.
• Clear evidence of ongoing assessment, using a variety of methods, was observed in documentation and during lessons.
• The provision of SPHE is in accordance with Department guidelines and the ethos of the school.
• The SPHE plan is comprehensive and shows a commitment to review and self-evaluation.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

• Plans for the appropriate integration of information and communication technology (ICT) with SPHE lessons should be advanced in parallel with the development of the school’s new infrastructure.
• The policy on RSE should be advanced.
• Future reviews of existing policies should include an emphasis on the elucidation of the links between the various subject department plans and of the links between subject-department plans and school policies.
INTRODUCTION
De La Salle College, Macroom is a Catholic boys’ school catering for approximately 300 students of rural and urban backgrounds. The majority of classes are organised as mixed-ability groups, including two classes participating in the compulsory Transition Year (TY) programme. The school ethos is favourable to the provision of SPHE and staff members are committed to its development.

TEACHING AND LEARNING
- Teaching and learning were of a high standard in the lessons observed. It was clear, from the verbal and written responses of students, that effective learning was taking place, and had taken place in the course of previous lessons. Continuity was established through references to prior learning and to the content of lessons to follow.
- Lessons were well structured. The objectives of lessons were stated at the outset and learning was evaluated prior to their conclusion. Skilful staff interventions facilitated the incorporation of a range of activities that were appropriate to the abilities and interests of students and to the curricular module under discussion.
- Clear directions and explanations ensured that lessons were replete with valuable learning experiences for students that included work in groups, self-evaluation and regular references to items of current topical interest. Good classroom relationships underpinned learning and enabled the adoption of a conversational style that facilitated dialogue with teachers and among students.
- Students remained engaged throughout lessons and responded well to instructions. It was clear that students were familiar with the active learning methods appropriate to much of the SPHE syllabus and required no further advice regarding their implementation, thus avoiding student-management issues during the lessons.
- Evidence of ongoing assessment, using a variety of methods, was observed in documentation provided to students during the lessons and in individual student folders that had been assembled as a form of portfolio. In addition, questions were put to students that varied in level of complexity. While some questions demanded factual responses of students, others were of a higher order requiring a level of analysis and thought that was appropriate to the context. It is clear that staff engagement with the Assessment for Learning (AfL) initiative has been effective. This is reflected in the quality of ongoing assessment observed during lessons and in its consideration in the course of subject department planning.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT
- All junior cycle students have access to SPHE, in accordance with Department guidelines. Although the subject is not timetabled for students in the senior cycle, the involvement of the Religious Education (RE) department in its delivery, including the delivery of RSE, across all year groups is clear. This is in keeping with the aims of the school, which include the delivery of an integrated curriculum informed by Christian values.
- The value of the school’s establishment of some teacher-based classrooms was observed in one lesson. The room was decorated with items of relevance to SPHE and with students’ work. The presence of these materials added richness to the learning
environment, not only in diagrams and pictures, but also in print and written forms, thus supporting the development of students’ literacy and numeracy.

- Information and communication technology (ICT) was used effectively where the facilities were available. Creative use was made of a combination of teacher-generated material and material obtained from other sources. At the time of this inspection, the development of the school’s ICT infrastructure was in progress. Considering the increasing availability of digital materials of relevance to SPHE, this provides a good opportunity for the development of plans for the appropriate integration of ICT in SPHE lesson planning. Such planning should be advanced in parallel with the development of the school’s new ICT system.

**PLANNING AND PREPARATION**

- A comprehensive SPHE department plan has been compiled. The plan includes clear references to the educational philosophy of the school, based on that of St Jean-Baptiste de la Salle, whose educational principles are well reflected in the work of the department.

- The inclusion in the subject plan of students’ assessments of the value of each module of SPHE is very good practice, showing a clear role for students in subject planning. This inclusion of the student voice reflects the good standing of the long-established and well-structured student council in the school.

- The plan shows evidence of ongoing formal and informal review and self-evaluation. Structured meetings of staff are arranged on a regular basis and informal meetings are ongoing. These are well documented and noted in the subject plan. The individual planning of staff members is also well structured and documented. Plans include references to lesson objectives and to the principles of SPHE.

- Relevant school policies are included in the plan. It is recommended that the proposed development of the school’s policy on RSE be advanced and that parents be involved in its development, as recommended in Department guidelines. It is also suggested that, in the medium term, whole-school policies relating to referrals, assessment, confidentiality and the protocols associated with visitors to the school might be profitably developed.

- Future reviews of existing policies should include an emphasis on the elucidation of the links between the various subject department plans, and of the links between subject-department plans and school policies.

The draft findings and recommendations arising out of this evaluation were discussed with the principal, deputy principal and subject teachers at the conclusion of the evaluation.

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.

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