An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

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

Pobalscoil Rosmini
Drumcondra, Dublin 9
Roll number: 91344V

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

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

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SUBJECT INSPECTION REPORT

This report has been written following a subject inspection in Pobalscoil Rosmini, Dublin 9 conducted as part of a whole-school evaluation. It presents the findings of an evaluation of the quality of teaching and learning in SPHE (including Relationships and Sexuality Education) and makes recommendations for the further development of the teaching of this subject in the school. The evaluation was conducted over three days during which the inspector visited classrooms and observed teaching and learning. The inspector interacted with students and teachers, examined students' work, and had discussions with the teachers. The inspector reviewed school planning documentation and teachers' written preparation. Following the evaluation visit, the inspector provided oral feedback on the outcomes of the evaluation to the principal and teachers of SPHE.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

There is a good level of whole-school support for SPHE. All junior-cycle students are timetabled for one class period of SPHE per week, in accordance with the requirements of the Department of Education and Science Circular Letter M11/03. One junior-cycle class which comprises students with additional educational needs has been allocated an additional weekly period for SPHE. The feasibility of introducing a personal development module as part of the Transition Year (TY) programme is being explored. This would be an effective means of extending the social and personal development programme in the senior-cycle.

In accordance with Department Circular Letter 27/08, Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) is provided as an integral component of the junior-cycle SPHE programme. At senior cycle, RSE is provided by the SPHE teachers who are also members of the religious education (RE) department. A number of visiting speakers support the facilitation of the senior-cycle RSE programme.

A range of valuable whole-school events is organised to support the SPHE programme. Activities such as *Friendship Week* as well as the upcoming *Intercultural Event* are examples of provision in this area. The work of the SPHE co-ordinator in organising these events, together with the commitment of other staff members who actively support the activities are very praiseworthy.

Good practice is evident in the deployment of teachers to SPHE. The SPHE core team comprising three teachers has been established for four years. School management is committed to maintaining this team as the yearly timetable is drafted. In some instances the teachers also teach a second subject to their SPHE class. This helps to establish a good rapport with the group. This is especially important in the context of SPHE which is timetabled for only one class period per week. In some cases teachers retain their class from first year through to third year. This is the optimal arrangement as the continuity can assist in the establishment of a secure learning

environment for students and it enables better planning for the delivery of the three-year spiral programme. Therefore, management should aim to ensure that SPHE class groups have the same teacher for the full duration of the junior cycle. There is evidence of a high level of willingness, commitment and enthusiasm among team members for the ongoing development of SPHE in the school. Senior management needs to be mindful of the importance of retaining the core SPHE team to ensure the good work already underway continues and is built upon.

Senior management supports and facilitates teachers' release to attend relevant continuing professional development (CPD). Some teachers have attended an extensive range of courses to enhance their skills in SPHE and RSE. While this has impacted very positively on the quality of teaching and learning evident in lessons, some training gaps are still apparent. Therefore, it is recommended that the SPHE team carries out a needs analysis to devise a CPD plan that facilitates the systematic and incremental approach to building capacity among all team members. Due to the nature of SPHE training, it is recognised that not all team members can, or may wish to, attend all of the elective courses. Therefore, it is advocated that a copy of the information supplied at each in-service course attended be filed in a subject-specific CPD folder. This would ensure that the information is available to each member of the team and can be referred to during team meetings as a means of sharing good practice.

There is a limited range of resources for SPHE. Most of the up-to-date materials belong to individual teachers. The shared resources are catalogued. This is good practice. It is recommended that the SPHE team carries out an audit of existing resources to identify gaps. Senior management and the SPHE co-ordinator should then devise an action plan to redress the shortfalls identified.

The whole-school procedures for staff photocopying impact negatively on planning for SPHE lessons. At the start of each year teachers are given one photocopy-card free of charge. Teachers are charged for additional cards. The nature of learning in SPHE necessitates the use of handouts. Therefore, it is recommended that senior management give strong consideration to the introduction of a SPHE-card for photocopying, as is the case with the TY and Leaving Certificate Applied programmes.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

Whole-school policies in the areas of substance use, anti-bullying and RSE have been ratified by the board of management. Consultation involving students, parents and key members of staff informed the development of most of these policies. This model should be used in the context of future policy review and development to encourage collective ownership of the whole-school development planning process. During the evaluation concerns regarding the effectiveness of the implementation of a number of these policies were expressed by staff members. It is recommended that senior management, in consultation with relevant staff, reviews the implementation of these policies and takes appropriate actions to redress the issues raised.

The RSE policy would benefit from further development. It is recommended that this policy be reviewed to comply with Department guidelines. The revised publication from the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) *Responding to Critical Incidents: Guidelines for Schools* should inform the drafting of a whole-school response to a critical incident policy. This information and other relevant publications are available on the Department's website (www.education.ie).

Some very good practice is evident when inviting visiting speakers to support SPHE lessons. The relevant class teacher liaises with the outside agency to plan the content of the presentation. It is particularly praiseworthy that such interventions are evaluated by students at the end of the process. The outcomes of these evaluations should inform ongoing programme planning. To support these good practices agreed procedures should be documented in a whole-school policy on the use of visiting speakers. Further advice is available in Circular Letter 0023/2010 and in the SPHE *School Handbook* that was produced by the SPHE Post-Primary Support Service.

Subject department planning is underway in the school. However, some whole-school practices pertaining to the organisation and operation of subject department structures merit review. The co-ordinator has been instrumental in creating a subject department for SPHE. Since taking up the position, the co-ordinator has played a significant role in raising the profile of SPHE and in contributing to the development of relevant whole-school policies. At present there is no agreed policy on filling the position of subject co-ordinator. The current co-ordinator is in place for four years in a voluntary capacity and is also co-ordinating another subject department. To alleviate this significant workload it is recommended that the position of co-ordinator of SPHE be decoupled from the second subject area. A role description for a co-ordinator should be agreed with senior management and documented in the subject plan. Consideration should also be given to rotating the position of co-ordinator once capacity is built amongst team members.

Measures to support continuity in teaching and learning in SPHE need to be reviewed. It is recommended that procedures be put in place at whole-school level to support smoother transitions in the event of staff turnover than has been the case to date. For example, it should be routine practice that a copy of the programme plan together with a record of the work covered with classes is left in the school when staff members leave. This would support effective continuity with classes.

Senior management facilitates formal planning time for subject departments as part of the calendar of meetings scheduled throughout the year. Records are kept of each meeting to support ongoing planning. However, full attendance at SPHE meetings is often difficult. This has had a negative impact on the extent of collaborative planning evident in SPHE. To date there has been no full meeting of the SPHE team in this academic year. This may be due to the manner in which the meetings of different subject areas are scheduled. It is recommended that senior management reviews the scheduling of meetings to facilitate as many as possible of those teachers who teach more than one subject to attend the formal team meetings in both subjects.

Programme planning for junior-cycle SPHE is at an early stage of development. While there is very close collaboration evident among some members of the teaching team there is no common programme of work. The RSE policy lists the topics that will be covered in junior and senior cycle. It was noted positively that there is a very good breadth and balance in the range of RSE themes and topics chosen. It is apparent that the school's engagement with CPD to support the use of the TRUST (*Talking Relationships Understanding Sexuality Teaching*) resource pack has impacted positively on the range of topics chosen. However, there is no written programme of work to facilitate programme delivery.

To support the implementation of high quality junior-cycle SPHE and senior-cycle RSE programmes there is significant need to develop common programmes of work. This would optimise students' learning experiences and support teachers in teaching the subject. It is recommended that the SPHE team devises a common plan for junior-cycle SPHE. This plan should demonstrate a balanced and coherent coverage of all of the ten modules of the junior-cycle SPHE curriculum framework. Due to the spiral nature of the SPHE curriculum, modules are re-

visited each year. Therefore clear learning outcomes that facilitate an incremental approach to the development of students' knowledge, attitudes and skills should be identified for each module of work from first year through to third year. The number of class periods planned for each topic should also be noted. Specific information with regard to suitable teaching and learning strategies, as well as suggested resource materials, can be incorporated over time. This enhanced approach to collaborative planning will assist with the pace and pitch of lessons and inform on-going reflective practice. Further information on subject planning is contained in the SPHE *Guidelines For Teachers* produced by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA).

The same planning template should be used for the development of a common senior-cycle RSE programme of work. To maximise the learning potential of guest speaker presentations, such events should be incorporated into the collaborative programme plan in a manner that illustrates how the lessons planned prior to and after supports the guest speaker's visit.

Some teachers made individual planning documentation available during the evaluation. These programme plans outlined a schedule for the delivery of topics with different classes. As a first step to devising a common programme of work it is recommended that each teacher uses her own class plans as a working document. Information such as the intended learning outcomes for each topic and the number of class periods taken to cover each of these should be noted. In reviewing lessons, teachers should pay particular attention to recording the effectiveness of the teaching strategies and resources used. This information should then be used to inform the development of the common programmes of work. This information should be routinely discussed as part of the agenda of planning meetings in order to share good practice in facilitating SPHE lessons.

The quality of short-term planning varied in the lessons observed. Best practice was evident in lessons where the content was paced and pitched appropriately and where the balance of teacher-led and student-led activity supported the experiential learning cycle that underpins the SPHE programme. Some very good planning for the use of additional resources such as posters, photographs and handouts was evident. In line with the school's particular care for the visually impaired, a handout was specifically adapted to support a student with a visual impairment in one lesson observed.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

All of the lessons observed had a clear purpose though on occasion there was scope to adjust the pace and pitch of the lesson to optimise learning. In some instances the lesson began by sharing key learning outcomes with the students. This strategy proved very effective in setting the scene for the lesson and in assisting in the development of a logical lesson structure that was clearly focused on high-quality student learning. To enhance the assessment potential of this strategy, time should also be taken at the end of the lesson to revisit the intended outcomes. It is recommended that all lessons begin by sharing the learning outcomes with students. When lessons are based on clear learning outcomes it can also assist teachers in their selection of appropriate teaching and assessment strategies.

In some lessons there was a very good balance between teacher-led and student-led activity. For example in one lesson a series of well-chosen activities facilitated students in acquiring knowledge and reflecting on factors that influence decision making. The lesson began with an ice-breaker activity where students gave examples of decisions they took that morning. Appropriate teacher intervention supported learning and encouraged responses. Students, using a

well-designed worksheet, then reflected on key people in their own lives that supported their decision-making. The subsequent processing of this information allowed students to share their experiences and ideas. This set the scene for the remainder of the lesson where a collection of well-chosen photographs actively engaged students to think about wider influences on decision-making. Observation of students completing the final worksheet of the lesson indicated that they understood key concepts and were able to apply their knowledge. In other lessons there was scope to adjust the balance between teacher and student-led activity. SPHE is concerned with the acquisition of knowledge, the fostering of positive attitudes and the development of skills that have implications for behaviour. Therefore it is recommended that teaching strategies that support experiential learning be an integral component of all lessons.

Some good quality learning was evident in the lessons observed. Students enjoy SPHE. Teachers demonstrated a commendable concern for students' understanding of key terminology and literacy development. This good practice supports learning. Interaction with and observation of students' responses to questions indicated that they had a good understanding of the topic being discussed in the lesson concerned.

Evidence of the quality of student learning from previous SPHE lessons varied significantly in the classes visited. In two lessons observed students had a folder or copybook that had some written work. However, there was scope to increase the volume of work to demonstrate a level of progression that was commensurate with the students' stage in the junior cycle. In the case of two classes there was no evidence that students had completed any written work. This may be due to the fact that there is no agreed system of folders for the systematic storage of information from lessons.

The aims of SPHE highlight the need for students to be provided with opportunities for review and reflection. Therefore it is recommended that students be provided with additional opportunities to complete written activities. Further use of exercises, from either the students' textbook or other resources would build up a bank of work that students could reflect on throughout their SPHE programme. They could be provided with worksheets, quizzes, case studies or personal-reflection activities to enable them to grapple with the topics under discussion, challenge their own ideas and reflect on their learning. It is essential that the activities selected be linked to the learning outcomes and assessment strategies planned for the lesson.

Due to the integrated and holistic nature of the SPHE programme, students need to reflect on work covered in previous years. Therefore it is recommended that an agreed system of folders that enables students to store and file information from their SPHE class from first year to third year be introduced. This good practice allows the students build up a body of work over the years, to which they can refer, and facilitates the safe storage of personal information.

The learning environment in some classrooms was greatly enhanced by the provision of a dedicated space to display SPHE material. Colourful wall displays, posters of class goals and agreed rules for SPHE served to create a stimulating learning environment and establish a sense of shared student ownership in the creation of an attractive learning environment.

A secure and supportive atmosphere was evident in all of the classrooms visited. There was a very good student-student and teacher-student rapport evident. Positive interactions are promoted by the close attention paid to establishing ground rules for SPHE lessons. It was noted that the absence of a school bell places a significant challenge for teachers and students in the time management of lessons. The lack of a bell also prolongs the changeover of classes thus eroding

tuition time. In the interests of student management it is recommended that this issue be resolved by senior management as soon as is feasible.

ASSESSMENT

Some good practice in integrating formative assessment strategies was evident in the lessons observed. Questioning strategies together with teacher monitoring of activities served to assess individual levels of learning as well as to provide affirmation and feedback on the tasks assigned. This is good practice. In some classes students complete a range of learning statements in SPHE as part of their participation in the Junior Certificate School Programme (JCSP). In addition, cross-curricular learning statements are rooted in SPHE and link with Home Economics or Science. This very good practice could be an agreed strategy to complement the profiling of all JCSP students. Feedback is an essential component of student assessment. This is significant in SPHE where particular emphasis is placed on students' self-awareness and self-esteem. There is considerable scope for the further use of written tasks as already discussed earlier in the report to provide opportunities for the provision of constructive feedback and teacher monitoring.

To enhance existing practice, it is recommended that the SPHE team devises an assessment policy. Existing assessment practices should be collectively reviewed and a range of assessment tools that could be used with all class groups should be agreed among the team. It is important that these assessment modes are fully compatible with the aims and objectives of the SPHE syllabus. Information and support on assessment is available in the SPHE *Guidelines for Teachers* (pp 59-68).

The SPHE team should use the end-of-module review forms to allow students to provide feedback on the work covered and to assess their learning. The information obtained from such review mechanisms can prove useful in informing ongoing programme development. A mechanism that would allow parental feedback to inform the cycle of review and evaluation could also be considered.

The school operates the good practice of providing feedback to parents on students' progress in SPHE at parent-teacher meetings. In the context of developing an assessment policy for SPHE, the team should consider the use of school reports as an additional means of providing feedback to parents and students. As part of the review of the RSE policy parents should also be informed in relation to implementation of the annual RSE programme.

SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The following are the main strengths identified in the evaluation:

- All junior-cycle students are timetabled for one class period of SPHE per week. Appropriate provision is also made of senior-cycle RSE.
- Good practice is evident in the deployment of teachers to SPHE.
- Senior management supports and facilitates teachers' release to attend relevant CPD.
- The core team demonstrates a high level of commitment and enthusiasm for the ongoing development of SPHE.

- Good progress has been made in the development of a number of whole-school policies that support the social and personal development of students.
- All of the lessons observed had a clear purpose. Teachers demonstrated concern for students' understanding of key terminology and literacy development.
- A secure and supportive atmosphere was evident in all of the classrooms visited.
- The learning environment in some classrooms is greatly enhanced by the provision of a dedicated space to display SPHE material.
- Some good practice in integrating formative assessment strategies was evident in the lessons observed.

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

- The SPHE team should conduct an audit of existing resources for SPHE. Senior management and the SPHE co-ordinator should then devise an action plan to redress the shortfalls identified.
- A common programme of work for SPHE and senior-cycle RSE should be collaboratively devised by the SPHE team.
- Teaching strategies that support experiential learning should be an integral component of all lessons. Additional opportunities for students to complete written activities should be provided as part of this approach.
- An agreed system of folders that enables students to store and file information from their SPHE class from first year to third year should be introduced.
- An agreed assessment policy should be devised for SPHE.

A post-evaluation meeting was held with the teachers of SPHE and senior management team at the conclusion of the evaluation when the draft findings and recommendations of the evaluation were presented and discussed.