

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

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

Castlecomer Community School
Castlecomer, Co. Kilkenny
Roll number: 91360T

Date of inspection: 11 December 2012



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

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

INFORMATION ON THE INSPECTION

Dates of inspection	11 December 2012
Inspection activities undertaken <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Review of relevant documents• Discussion with principal and teachers• Interaction with students	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Observation of teaching and learning during five class periods• Examination of students' work• Feedback to principal and teachers

MAIN FINDINGS

- The quality of teaching and learning in the lessons observed was very good.
- Lessons were conducted in a supportive and affirming learning environment.
- Lessons were characterised by positive relationships and active engagement in well-structured developmental tasks.
- SPHE is an integral component of the pastoral care structures in the school.
- SPHE, including Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE), is appropriately provided for all junior cycle students and additional modules are also provided at senior cycle, which continue to support students' social, personal and health education.
- Teachers have developed comprehensive programmes of work, but there is a need for greater structures to support the subject department planning process.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

- A RSE policy should be drafted and ratified and the school should formally document its procedures for guest speakers in accordance with Circular Letter 0023/10.
 - Structures to support formal planning meetings of the co-ordinator and SPHE team should be established, together with a structured approach to engagement in the continuing professional development (CPD) programme available to support teachers
 - Additional approaches to the assessment process should be discussed and implemented.
-

INTRODUCTION

Castlecomer Community School is a coeducational post-primary school, with a current enrolment of 588 students. The school provides the Junior Certificate, a Transition Year (TY) programme, the Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA), the established Leaving Certificate and the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP). The school also provides a Post Leaving Certificate Course (PLC) for 20 students.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

- Overall, the quality of teaching and learning in the lessons observed was very good.
- Teachers were well prepared with all the necessary materials and resources to hand. This good practice supported students' engagement in well-paced developmental tasks.
- Classroom management was of a high standard and teachers established a positive rapport with their students. There was an open and supportive atmosphere in all lessons. The display of students' work in SPHE contributed to the print and graphic rich environment of most classrooms visited.
- In most lessons, the learning intentions were explicitly shared with students following an introduction to the topic. This helped to provide students with a focus on what they should know and be able to do as a result of their engagement.
- Very good links were established between students' previous learning and the focused topics. The topics covered in the lessons observed included bullying, relationships, nutritional choices, communication skills and body image. In all lessons teachers facilitated students to discuss the topic and to reflect on its relevance in their lives. Most lessons involved students examining their own perceptions, opinions and behaviours related to the topic.
- Teachers used questioning to very good effect to encourage students' contributions to the class and to assess their understanding. Teachers endeavoured to include all students through targeted and differentiated questioning. An approach such as think-pair-share was effectively used, in some lessons, which resulted in considerably higher levels of engagement.
- Lessons had a good balance between teacher input and student activity through the effective use of independent and collaborative tasks. This reflective and discursive approach is an important element of experiential learning in SPHE. A common feature of lessons was the effective processing of students' responses to the tasks set, with very good oral feedback. This good practice supports the development of positive attitudes and informed decision making.
- An appropriate range of resources were used to support learning. Information and Communications Technology (ICT) was used effectively to display images, show short video clips or to highlight key points for learning. This approach proved very useful in stimulating students' interest.
- A number of approaches are taken to assessment in SPHE. Elements of assessment were incorporated into the lessons observed, through the completion of assignments in students' textbooks and on-going questioning. Good practice was observed where students maintained a file for their SPHE work in some classes. A range of formative and summative approaches to assessment are identified in the subject plan. Of particular note are some of the approaches to assessing students learning in SPHE-related modules at senior cycle.

However, there is a need for a common and consistent approach across the whole SPHE department. The identification of key learning outcomes and assessment milestones would assist in this regard.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- A whole-school approach is taken to students' personal development. SPHE is an integral component of the pastoral care structures and supports in the school. This is a significant strength of the programme. This is reflected in the many initiatives currently being implemented, including the first-year induction programme and friendship week and the mentor programme. Structures such as the chaplaincy and additional guidance counselling services also support students' social and personal development.
- The subject is timetabled in accordance with Circular Letter M11/03. RSE is appropriately embedded and delivered as part of the junior cycle SPHE programme. While there is a comprehensive and very well planned RSE programme delivered at sixth year, consideration should be given to also delivering elements of this programme in TY and fifth year. This will support students in a more developmental manner as they mature.
- As a priority, management should develop, ratify and implement a RSE policy to reflect current practice and guide the delivery of the subject in the school. Policies relevant to SPHE such as the anti-bullying policy and substance use policy are in place to support the work of the school in this regard.
- The deployment of class tutors to also teach SPHE works well in this school. Consideration should be given to taking a structured approach to engagement in the continuing professional development (CPD) programme available to support teachers in the delivery of the SPHE programme.
- The role of guest-speakers and the procedures for their inclusion to complement the SPHE and RSE programme, as outlined and observed during the evaluation, are in keeping with good practice. However, the school should formally document these procedures in accordance with Circular Letter 0023/10.
- The majority of SPHE teachers are based in their own classrooms, with access to all resources to effectively engage and support students' learning. The classrooms visited were suitable to accommodate a range of interactive methodologies.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

- Individual teacher planning for the lessons observed was very good. The SPHE subject plan provides a general overview of the organisation and delivery of the programme. However, there is scope for this plan to be advanced and to document the significant work being undertaken by teachers.
- Time for formal planning meetings of the SPHE team is problematic for the co-ordinator, due to the size of the group. This should be addressed and some solutions devised. This will assist with planning the consistent delivery of the programmes of work for each year group.
- The programmes of work are in keeping with the guidelines for teachers. To build on the good work undertaken to date, the SPHE department should identify the key learning outcomes for each year group, as outlined in the syllabus, and align these to each of the modules and topics. This will also inform the assessment process.

- Modules on mental health, substance use and RSE at TY, fifth year and sixth year respectively are well planned. These modules aim to further guide the development of positive attitudes and values.
- A good range of resources are available to support the delivery of the programme including textbooks, DVD's & videos, information leaflets and teacher resource packs from relevant support agencies.

The draft findings and recommendations arising out of this evaluation were discussed with the principal and 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 report; a response was not received from the board.

Published June 2013.