Subject Inspection of Social, Personal and Health Education

REPORT

Coláiste Bhréanainn
Killarney, County Kerry
Roll number: 61320M

Date of inspection: 22March 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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dates of inspection</th>
<th>21 and 22 March 2011</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Inspection activities undertaken</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Review of relevant documents</td>
<td>• Observation of teaching and learning during five class periods</td>
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<td>• Discussion with principal and teachers</td>
<td>• Examination of students’ work</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Interaction with students</td>
<td>• Feedback to principal and teachers</td>
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MAIN FINDINGS

• Teaching and learning of a very high quality was observed in lessons.
• A comprehensive programme of SPHE and RSE lessons is provided for all classes.
• SPHE is a key curricular element of the school’s student-support structure.
• Planning for SPHE is collaborative and includes staff of other departments.
• SPHE planning and policy documents show a clear commitment to the ethos of the school and to Department policies.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

• The RSE policy should be finalised and ratified.
• Existing departmental policies on, for example, confidentiality, visitors and referrals, should be developed as whole-school policies in collaboration with other relevant staff.

INTRODUCTION

Coláiste Bhréanainn was founded in 1860 as the diocesan seminary and remains in the trust of the Kerry diocese. The school’s mission is clearly of relevance to SPHE, including its aspiration to provide a holistic education, to develop the full potential of each student and to foster life skills, leadership and equal opportunity. Five hundred and thirty-seven students are currently enrolled.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

• The quality of teaching observed was very good. The objectives of each lesson were stated clearly at the outset in most lessons and were, in some cases, in written form. Lessons were well structured and, although some were of thirty-five minutes timetabled
duration, all included a roll call, some announcements and brief reviews of students’ learning.

- Lessons were relevant to students’ experience, facilitating student engagement both in groups and as individuals. Teaching methods varied appropriately according to the material being presented and involved students in personal reflection and work in smaller groups in addition to participation in whole-class activities.

- The content of lessons was varied appropriately to the level and needs of students. The topics in all lessons were in keeping with the SPHE syllabus. Creative use was made of available resources, including the available space, information and communication technology (ICT), white boards and wall charts. A balanced approach to the use of personal experience, on the part of both teachers and students, was noted in all lessons.

- Lessons were well paced and, where appropriate, enabled student involvement in the experiential learning cycle that includes sharing, understanding, generalising and applying learning. It is important that this be maintained during lessons in which the subject matter demands such approaches, especially in the context of thirty-five minute lessons.

- The atmosphere during each lesson was positive and engaging. Students responded well to directions. It was clear that good relationships had been established, enabling immediate engagement with the tasks prescribed and effective responses by students.

- Assessment of student progress was ongoing in all lessons. Skilled use was made of questions, comments, advice and encouragement such that students remained engaged and responded appropriately. Reference was made regularly to the content of previous lessons and to topical news items, providing additional context and continuity to the work in hand. It was clear from students’ oral and written responses that the content of previous lessons had been retained and had accommodated the integration of the material being presented.

- Textbooks were used sparingly and appropriately. Where consulted, brief reference was made to a relevant work sheet or point of information as an enhancement of lessons and to supplement the extensive information presented by staff.

**SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT**

- SPHE and RSE are provided for all classes, demonstrating their clear consistency with the stated aims of the school.

- The arrangement of the timetable into lessons of forty and thirty-five minutes induces some pressure on the time for completion of tasks in the shorter lessons. It was observed, however, that timely and efficient interventions enabled the completion of lessons in the allocated time.

- The commitment of senior management to continuing professional development (CPD) is evident in its encouragement and facilitation of CPD for SPHE teachers. Staff collaboration in support of colleagues newly initiated into teaching the subject is ongoing and focused on CPD.

- The SPHE department is engaged, with the Physical Education (PE) and other departments, in the organisation of events and programmes that are not only co-curricular, but also cross curricular. These include programmes such as the Active
Schools Week and the Healthy School Initiative. Such collaboration is characteristic of the SPHE department.

**PLANNING AND PREPARATION**

- A comprehensive SPHE department plan has been drawn up by staff. The emphasis on good relationships and on Christian values is clearly inspired by the school’s mission and is in keeping with the objectives of SPHE.

- The plan is well compiled and presented, and includes a list of resources and reference to staff involved in teaching SPHE. The inclusion of brief descriptions of teaching methods appropriate to SPHE is a helpful reminder of the importance of these to the subject and to teaching in general.

- The plan includes school policies of relevance to SPHE and RSE, establishing clear links between policy and provision. SPHE department policies regarding confidentiality, assessment and referrals are also included. This is good practice. It is recommended that such policies be developed as whole-school policies in collaboration with other departments, such as the guidance department, as whole-school policies.

- The SPHE plan also lists the visitors proposed to address students during SPHE lessons. The addition of a column to outline collaboration with other departments is suggested as a simple way to emphasise the effective collaboration that exists. It is further suggested that the development of a whole-school policy regarding visitors to the school be developed with reference to recent Department guidelines on the matter.

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.

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