

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

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

**Dominican College
Wicklow Town
Roll number: 61860V**

Date of inspection: 11 February 2011



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

REPORT ON THE QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN SPHE

SUBJECT INSPECTION REPORT

This report has been written following a subject inspection in Dominican College, Wicklow. 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 two 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 subject teachers. The board of management was given an opportunity to comment in writing on the findings and recommendations of the report, and the response of the board will be found in the appendix of this report.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

School management's strong commitment to the social and personal development of students is reflected in the appropriate allocation of time for SPHE in junior cycle, in the range of personal development programmes afforded to students in Transition Year (TY) and in the delivery of Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) at senior cycle.

There is a committed core team whose general teaching subjects complement the effective delivery of SPHE. All teachers in the team have engaged in in-service training for either SPHE or junior cycle RSE. Some of those involved in the delivery of senior cycle Religious Education (RE) have also attended the TRUST in-service training programme for RSE.

There is good evidence to indicate that RSE is fully delivered both as a module of SPHE in junior cycle and through the RE programme at senior cycle. Furthermore, a key input on sex education is delivered in senior cycle by a member of staff who has specific training in the delivery of this component of the programme. This intervention was highly praised by the senior cycle students who engaged in the focused interview session. These students also reported that all aspects of relationships and sexuality were covered in senior cycle and that they had benefited from the programme.

Classrooms in Dominican College are teacher-based. There were some SPHE related materials posted up on the walls of a number of the rooms visited. In some instances, the class contract was also displayed. This is good practice in serving to remind students of the rules which they themselves drew up for the SPHE lessons.

A good range of resources has been built up for SPHE and these are stored in the teachers' work room. All resources are readily accessible to teachers of the subject. The integration of information and communication technology (ICT) into teaching and learning is progressing well in the school and most classrooms are now ICT enabled. ICT was used to support teaching and learning in many of the lessons observed.

The range of co-curricular activities organised in the school including the annual friendship week and the healthy eating week further support the positive values and attitudes promoted in SPHE.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

Subject planning for SPHE in Dominican College is of a very high standard. The position of subject co-ordinator is voluntary and rotated. Teachers meet each term for planning purposes and minutes are kept of all meetings.

All the policies relevant to SPHE are in place and are reviewed biennially. Good protocols are also in place for visiting speakers. It is recommended that these be developed into a whole-school policy on visiting speakers.

The SPHE planning folder outlines the school's mission statement and its organisation and operating context. Additional information contained in the folder includes the minutes of meetings, correspondence, samples of evaluations following guest speakers, professional development information and samples of report cards.

Good quality plans have been developed for each year group, articulated in terms of the aims and learning outcomes for each module. Planning also takes into account the manner in which the incremental nature of the work, which is central to the SPHE programme, should be managed. This is very good practice.

The long-term plan has also been subdivided into shorter-term blocks of work and the lesson content to be covered in each of these blocks is outlined. There was also evidence of teachers engaging in the evaluation of their own work, a practice which is commended.

All individual lessons observed were carefully planned and prepared. There was also advance readiness of technical equipment which facilitated good lesson structure and pace.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

Evaluation activities involved the observation of three SPHE lessons, one of which involved the delivery of the RSE module. Interaction between the inspector and a review of students' folders and copies were also facilitated. Third-year students completed a questionnaire and a focused interview with a group of senior cycle students was also facilitated. The quality of teaching and learning was good or very good.

The modules studied included topics on friendship, peer pressure and Relationships and Sexuality Education. All teachers began by outlining the lesson plan. In one instance, a clear explanation was given to the students as to the purpose of studying the particular topic and this engaged them from the outset. It is recommended that all teachers share the lesson plan in terms of the proposed learning outcome in order to actively involve the students in their own learning. Good practice was also noted in all lessons where the lesson topic was clearly linked to previous learning.

A range of methodologies was observed. Question and answer sessions were effectively used in all lessons to elicit information and opinions, to clarify issues and to engage students. There was one instance, however, where a small number of students tended to answer all the time, resulting in others disengaging from the work of the lesson. In such instances, teachers should direct more questions specifically at the quieter or less participative students.

ICT was effectively used in many lessons. DVD clips and PowerPoint presentations served to provide factual information in a clear and coherent manner, to summarise in some instances and to visually support learning. Consideration should be given to expanding the use of ICT to include student presentations, which will in turn develop their self-presentational skills.

Student tasks were assigned in some lessons. In one instance, the tasks were strongly interactive in nature and engaged the students in active and experiential learning. It is recommended that this very good practice be extended to all lessons.

Most lessons incorporated a variety of methodologies and maintained a good balance between teacher instruction and student activity. Where, on occasion, the burden of the work was observed to remain with the teacher, more varied methodologies such as a DVD clip, role play or a group task would have been preferable in order to enhance the work of the lesson. This approach would respond better to the personal and experiential nature of the SPHE programme.

Students were well behaved throughout and most engaged with the lesson. Some of their responses indicated a clear understanding of the work in hand and demonstrated their willingness to express views on the topics in question. The positive learning environment also facilitated student comfort in asking questions of a more sensitive nature and in sharing some of their experiences.

ASSESSMENT

There is currently no formal assessment policy for SPHE or RSE. Progress is assessed primarily on the basis of students' participation in lessons. All students have SPHE copybooks or folders in which they keep worksheets and photocopies distributed. While students do not generally receive written homework, there was one lesson where they were asked to discuss what they had completed in class with their parents. This is good practice in helping students to consolidate their learning. Given the nature of SPHE and the difficulties in assigning traditional homework tasks, the members of the SPHE and RSE departments should work together to devise an agreed assessment policy which will help them evaluate whether or not the desired learning outcomes have been achieved. A formalised assessment policy will also facilitate better recording of student progress. Initiatives such as the use of a personal reflection log are recommended for consideration. A comment on SPHE is included in school reports and this is good practice.

SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The following are the main strengths identified in the evaluation:

- School management demonstrates strong commitment to the students' social and personal development.
- There was evidence to indicate that RSE is being delivered to a good standard at senior cycle.
- High quality subject planning is in place for SPHE.
- There was good use of ICT to support teaching and learning.
- A variety of methodologies was observed and some were used to very good effect to promote active and experiential learning.
- A good balance was maintained between teacher instruction and student engagement in most of the lessons observed.

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

- The use of active methodologies promoting personal engagement with the subject should be extended to all lessons.
- Teachers should devise an assessment policy to facilitate the recording of student progress and to evaluate whether or not the desired learning outcomes have been achieved.

Post-evaluation meetings were held with the teachers of SPHE and with the principal at the conclusion of the evaluation when the draft findings and recommendations of the evaluation were presented and discussed.

Appendix

School response to the report

Submitted by the Board of Management

Area 1: Observations on the content of the inspection report

The Board of Management were pleased with the very positive report and commend all those involved. The Board wishes to thank the inspector involved for care and courtesy shown during inspection.

Area 2: Follow-up actions planned or undertaken since the completion of the inspection activity to implement the findings and recommendations of the inspection

The Board, as always, supports the implementation of recommendations from inspections and will monitor same into the future.