Subject Inspection of Social, Personal and Health Education

REPORT

Árd Scoil na mBráithre
Clonmel, County Tipperary
Roll number: 65320J

Date of inspection: 05 April 2011
REPORT ON THE QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN SOCIAL, PERSONAL AND HEALTH EDUCATION (SPHE)

INFORMATION ON THE INSPECTION

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MAIN FINDINGS

- The quality of teaching and learning was good.
- Students were actively engaged and interested in their lessons, which were characterised by a supportive and productive learning environment.
- A high level of support is provided by the school to students’ personal development through the pastoral care, guidance and whole-school initiatives.
- SPHE is appropriately provided for all students. There is exemplary support for the social and personal development of students attending the Autistic Spectrum Disorders (ASD) unit.
- Management has been proactive in developing the professional capacity of teachers to deliver the SPHE programme.
- Teachers have developed their own comprehensive programmes of work for each of their class groups. A common subject plan has not been developed.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

- The SPHE department should revisit and expand the use of the experiential approach to support students’ learning.
- A common subject plan should be developed to document all elements of the work being undertaken by the SPHE department in the organisation and delivery of the subject.
- A common approach to the assessment process should be developed and implemented.
- All elements of the school’s Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) programme for each year group should be documented.
INTRODUCTION

Árd Scoil na mBráithre is a voluntary secondary school for boys with 687 students. The school provides the Junior Certificate, an optional Transition Year (TY) programme, the established Leaving Certificate and the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP). A dedicated unit is also provided to cater for students with autism. The board of management was given an opportunity to comment in writing on the findings and recommendations of the evaluation, and the response of the board will be found in the appendix to this report.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

- The quality of teaching and learning in the lessons observed was good.
- Lesson topics were effectively introduced by teachers at the outset. In many cases the topic was linked to students’ previous learning and personal experiences. This was achieved through brainstorming activities and developing spider diagrams on the board, which helped students to visualise related elements. The key learning outcomes were explicitly identified as part of the introduction phase in some lessons. This practice should be extended where appropriate.
- Students responded well to the tasks set and to questions posed by their teachers. Questioning was effectively used to engage students and to differentiate for ability levels. Active learning tasks were set in many lessons and resulted in high levels of discussion and engagement amongst students. Sometimes, students’ learning would have benefited from engaging in these tasks earlier in the lesson. Reducing whole-class questioning and reserving this approach until the latter stages of lessons will ensure more time for student activity. Teachers should revisit and discuss the use of the experiential learning cycle and share their practice of using this approach to supporting students’ learning.
- A very good range of suitable and stimulating resources was used in the lessons observed. The use of video extracts, case studies and worksheets helped to inform students’ discussions and to support their understanding of the various topics.
- Classroom management was good in all lessons and teachers have a positive and affirming rapport with their students. Where behaviour was challenging the teacher responded professionally and in a supportive manner to ensure students remained focused and on task throughout.
- Good practice was observed in some lessons where students keep a folder and copybook to record elements of their work. An agreed system of retaining elements of class work should be considered by the SPHE department, as some students were prone to forgetting textbooks and copybooks, while some completed worksheets were neglected after class.
- A comment on students’ progress in SPHE is included on the school reports to parents. A more comprehensive and consistent approach to the assessment of students’ learning is an area for further development.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- The subject is appropriately timetabled in accordance with Circular Letter M11/03. Exemplary provision is made to support the social and personal development of students from the ASD unit, including their inclusion into mainstream SPHE classes. The provision of a weekly Education for Living class for senior cycle students is laudable, as some of the short modules continue to build on elements of students’ junior cycle SPHE programme.
Senior students indicated that they valued their junior cycle SPHE programme. Students stated that elements of RSE are delivered through both the religious education and the Education for Living programmes at senior cycle, but there is a need for a more comprehensive programme and a coherent approach to its delivery. All elements related to the provision, organisation, content and delivery of RSE should be appropriately documented.

The deployment of a team of teachers with the knowledge, skills and interest to teach the subject is good practice. Management has supported teachers’ engagement in continuing professional development (CPD) and this has resulted in the school having ample professional capacity to support the delivery of the SPHE and RSE programmes.

Policies relevant to SPHE, including anti-bullying, substance use and RSE are appropriately developed to support the work of the school.

The roles of guest speakers and the procedures for their inclusion, to complement the SPHE and RSE programmes, are in keeping with good practice. The school should formally document these procedures as outlined in Circular Letter 0023/10.

The availability of broadband, ICT facilities and teacher-based classrooms ensures easy access to all available resources to engage and support students’ learning. Classrooms visited were suitable to accommodate a range of interactive methodologies.

Initiatives such as the peer ministry programme and the involvement of TY students in producing plays on bullying and mental health add greatly to the whole-school approach to developing a respectful and inclusive community.

Planning and preparation

Planning for the organisation and delivery of the programmes of work is undertaken by individual teachers. This is thorough and well organised. A focused and comprehensively planned programme is provided to support the social and personal development of each student attending the ASD unit.

The work of the SPHE department has not yet been formally documented. Many elements of good planning are in existence including the purchasing of resources and the organisation of visitors to speak on selected topics. Teachers use the planning framework from the SPHE co-ordinators handbook and a selected textbook to guide their delivery of the programme.

There is a need for a more cohesive approach to subject department planning to ensure a consistent approach to the organisation and delivery of SPHE. The department should now focus on developing a comprehensive subject plan to document all elements of the organisation and delivery of the programme. The RSE programme for all year groups should be also be documented and included in the SPHE plan.

A good range of resources is available to support the delivery of the programme and are centrally stored. Consideration should be given to developing a shared electronic folder on the teachers’ network drive to collate the resources already developed for each topic and module, including elements from the extensive resources available in the ASD unit.

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

Published November 2011
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 welcomes the acknowledgement of the Inspector that the organisation and delivery of programmes of work by staff is thorough and well organised and also the recognition of the commitment of staff to the provision of a caring and supportive learning environment for all students.

The Board of Management acknowledges the involvement and dedication of the SPHE teachers in co-curricular and extra-curricular activities and welcomes the recognition in the report that such activities add greatly to the whole school approach to developing a respectful and inclusive community.

The Board welcomes the finding that active learning strategies were evident in many lessons and that a very good range of suitable and stimulating resources were used in the lessons observed.

Finally, the Board consider the recommendations as a means of building on our strengths and an opportunity to address areas for further development.

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

An initial first step has been to purchase the NEHB resources as recommended by the Inspector.