Subject Inspection of Social, Personal and Health Education
REPORT

Coláiste Bhríde
Carnew, County Wicklow
Roll number: 70790E

Date of inspection: 8 April 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>7 and 8 April 2011</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Inspection activities undertaken</strong></td>
<td><strong>Observation of teaching and learning during five class periods</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Review of relevant documents</td>
<td>• Examination of students’ work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Discussion with principal and teachers</td>
<td>• Feedback to principal and teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Interaction with students</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

MAIN FINDINGS

- The quality of teaching and learning observed was generally good.
- Lessons were characterised by varied learning experiences, good opportunities for cooperative learning, and in the majority of lessons, opportunities for reflection.
- Whole-school support is good, characterised by appropriate timetabling for SPHE and the allocation of time for RSE in fifth and sixth year, but provision for RSE in senior cycle is not formalised.
- Policy formation and review and subject planning are well advanced.
- The quality of planning is supported with reflective and evaluative processes.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

- As part of the department planning process and through the use of SPHE Guidelines and in-service, greater consideration should be given to embedding the experiential learning cycle in lessons and to practical ways of developing of students’ decision-making skills.
- There is scope for the development of strategies for assessment and reporting in the subjects and establishing consistency of expectations for student written work.
- Participation in initial and continuation training should be addressed through a continuing professional development (CPD) plan to consolidate capacity of teachers deployed to SPHE and RSE.
- Provision should be made for RSE lessons in TY and a developmental senior-cycle RSE programme for TY, fifth and sixth year should be formalised and implemented consistently by teachers who have received training in the use of the TRUST resource.
INTRODUCTION

Coláiste Bhríde is a vocational school under the auspices of Co. Wicklow Vocational Education Committee with an enrolment of 765 students. SPHE is provided on the timetable for one period per week during first, second and third year. RSE is delivered as a component of the SPHE programme for each of these year groups and as a modular component of lessons in Religion during both fifth and sixth year for Leaving Certificate and Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme students. Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) groups complete a two-year course in Social Education and this includes a developmental programme of RSE. The school has an optional Transition Year (TY) with many opportunities for education in the areas of social, personal and health but no distinct programme for SPHE. The board of management of the school was given an opportunity to comment on the findings and recommendations of the inspection; the board chose to accept the report without response.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

• In most lessons, it was clear to students what teachers intended in terms of learning outcomes. In some lessons, teachers shared the intended learning outcomes with students and used them to reinforce learning at key points. This approach merits expansion.

• Teachers structured lessons to incorporate good opportunities for co-operative learning as well as the dissemination of key information through teacher instruction.

• In many lessons, students were enabled to reflect on their own lives, values and personal qualities. Opportunities for students to apply their learning to new contexts were less well applied. There is scope for further development of the four stages of experiential learning: experiencing, processing, generalising and applying. All teachers should give greater application to the planning and structuring of the experiential learning cycle in lessons and to the development of students’ decision-making skills.

• Teachers made good use of the board and used visual resources, including flashcards, websites and other information and communication technology applications to stimulate engagement and sometimes to add pace to lessons.

• In almost all instances, students engaged very well with lesson tasks. They communicated confidently and participated productively. Some consideration needs to be given to strategies for teaching and support for particular year groups, where some lack of engagement was noted.

• In many class groups, students had built up good-quality relevant work, sometimes in portfolios, and student writing sometimes extended to longer pieces such as learning logs. Within the subject department structure, it would be worthwhile discussing and establishing consistency of standards for student written work.

• Assessment, feedback and affirmation are given continuously to students by teachers during classroom interactions. Feedback to parents is given at parent-teacher meetings and on school reports. The development of a bank of suitable comments for these reports, that reflect student achievement of syllabus objectives, is recommended as are other assessment tools in the subject, which can be accessed through the SPHE support service.
SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- Appropriate timetable provision is made for SPHE in junior cycle. Provision for RSE in LCA is good. The time allocated to RSE in fifth and sixth year meets minimum requirements but consistency of implementation should be ensured by formalising the programme. RSE should be provided in TY to meet the requirements of circular 27/2008.

- To ensure balance, teachers and management should formalise the programme for RSE in senior cycle to be implemented by all teachers. The programme should match curriculum guidelines and cover all aspects of RSE, having regard to the school’s characteristic spirit, and set out organisational, curricular and teaching details including a calendar of lessons for each year. This should be appended to the RSE policy.

- The subject department provides teacher support and mentoring. Management supports continuous professional development (CPD) but most teachers have not participated in external training in SPHE or RSE. Participation in initial and continuation training is recommended for all and should be addressed through a CPD plan.

- All senior-cycle RSE teachers should avail of training in the delivery of the resource entitled TRUST and use it in developing the senior-cycle RSE programme.

- Management should continue to build and consolidate teacher capacity in SPHE and RSE and deploy teachers with recent training and long-term interest in the subjects.

- In its mission, policies and practices, the school places strong emphasis on student support. A wide range of initiatives are supportive of student care.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

- Time is made available for subject department planning. Meetings should be scheduled to allow the whole team of SPHE and RSE teachers to attend. Separate senior-cycle RSE team meetings may be useful at times.

- Subject planning is reflective with a view to continually developing SPHE and RSE and enhancing students’ learning experiences. Information gathered from student evaluations is used to review the subject plan annually.

- The subject plan for SPHE provides a detailed guide on all aspects of provision including a common programme of work for each year for which teachers have flexibility with regard to the scheduling of topics. The plan highlights essential elements, such as RSE.

- A good range of resources and reference material has been collated and many of these are disseminated electronically, enabling teachers to utilise ICT facilities in classrooms.

- Valuable lesson plans for each aspect of SPHE have been developed that link topics to available resources and suggested teaching strategies. In developing these over time, the syllabus learning outcomes should be integrated. It is also recommended that the department explore and discuss each resource listed in terms of age-appropriateness.

- A collaborative review of the RSE policy, involving teachers, student council and parents’ association, is well advanced. With reference to circular 23/2010, the policy section relating to guest speakers should be extended; teaching practices before and after visits from external agencies should be agreed and documented to enhance their value to the SPHE and RSE programmes.
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 January 2012