

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

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

REPORT

**Saint Brendan's College
Belmullet, County Mayo
Roll number: 72050U**

Date of inspection: 4 March 2015



**A N R O I N N | D E P A R T M E N T O F
O I D E A C H A I S | E D U C A T I O N
A G U S S C I L E A N N A | A N D S K I L L S**

**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

Dates of inspection	3 and 4 March 2015
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 six class periods• Examination of students' work• Feedback to principal, deputy principal and teachers

MAIN FINDINGS

- The planning and delivery of SPHE has been successfully supported by a number of positive factors such as, a positive profile and whole-school support for SPHE, the effective leadership provided by the principal, the commitment and flexibility of the co-ordinator and SPHE teachers, and their involvement in ongoing training.
- The quality of teaching and learning was very good in the majority of lessons observed with many examples of exemplary practice noted with regard to the use of active learning methodologies.
- Students were very engaged in their learning and demonstrated very good knowledge and understanding of topics appropriate to their level of ability.
- The atmosphere in lessons was positive, conducive to learning, and marked by very good interpersonal relations between teachers and students.
- Practices in relation to assessment in SPHE are progressing well, with scope to formalise these.
- A good start has been made regarding subject planning for SPHE, with some scope for development.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

- The area of assessment needs some further development with the existing SPHE assessment policy requiring attention specifically.
 - There is a need to expand the SPHE schemes of work and to use action planning to set and achieve priority targets.
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INTRODUCTION

St Brendan's College is a co-educational school under the auspices of Mayo, Sligo, and Leitrim Education Training Board (ETB). The school is one of two providers of post-primary education in Belmullet and has a current enrolment of 333 students. A broad curriculum is provided including an optional Transition Year (TY). The school participates in Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS), the Department's action plan for educational inclusion.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

- The quality of teaching and learning in SPHE was very good in the majority of lessons observed with exemplary practice noted in a significant number. Most teachers linked with students' prior knowledge effectively and built on this during the lesson.
- Lessons were well structured and sequenced, and delivered at a pace that allowed students time to engage with the key concepts of the lesson. The good practice of sharing learning outcomes with the class at the outset and returning to them at lesson closure was evident.
- A commendable range of active learning methodologies such as brainstorming, reflection, discussion, pair work and group work engaged students effectively in all lessons. However, some further refinement of the skills associated with group work is necessary.
- Individual lesson planning and preparation was very good. The choice and use of teaching resources were very effective. Information and communication technology (ICT) was utilised well in almost all lessons.
- There was very good use of targeted questioning to test student knowledge, to elicit information from students and to challenge them to reflect on the topic. Some very good use of higher-order questioning was evident, however, there was scope to further develop this in some instances.
- Students were very conscientious and engaged well in their learning. Teachers consistently welcomed students' contributions and affirmed their responses well. This contributed to a supportive and caring atmosphere, characterised by positive student-teacher rapport.
- Students demonstrated very good knowledge and understanding of the topics under study, commensurate with their ability. Students' copybooks and folders indicated a clear record of work completed. There is, however, scope for the provision of formative feedback on students' work in SPHE.
- Good attention was paid to literacy and subject-specific terminology was reinforced well, in the majority of lessons. However, in some instances, there was scope to further develop students' oral literacy skills.
- The ongoing assessment of student progress in SPHE was integrated into lesson delivery. In order to enhance current practices, the SPHE team should further explore the area of assessment in SPHE. In particular, the team should collectively agree and implement a small number of summative assessment tasks to determine students' engagement and learning in SPHE. This would provide a useful evidence base for reporting on students' progress. Strategies to facilitate student engagement in self-assessment and peer-assessment should be further developed.

- The SPHE assessment policy should be further expanded to reflect the good practices and procedures observed as well as to include the proposed summative assessment tasks. Teachers should also agree and implement a set of criteria to be used for assessing students' progress in SPHE.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- There is very good whole-school support for SPHE which is an integral component of the school's pastoral care provision. An integrated system of supports for students is well established with the collaboration of, for example, the pastoral care team, the guidance counsellor, the year heads, class tutors and the SPHE team.
- Initiatives, such as the student mentoring programme, a positive mental health week, anti-bullying week, friendship week, as well as a range of guest speakers supplement the SPHE programme well. The school's comprehensive policy on visiting guest speakers supports these initiatives effectively.
- In junior cycle, appropriate timetable provision is made for SPHE, including RSE. A well-developed RSE programme is delivered in the context of Religious Education at senior cycle. There is great support in the school for cross-curricular and co-curricular SPHE activities.
- In line with best practice, a core team is involved in SPHE delivery and teachers display a high level of commitment. Many teachers have considerable experience in teaching SPHE. The role of SPHE co-ordinator is well established and is currently undertaken on a voluntary rotating basis. Teacher continuity from first to third year is a priority and this supports planning and the implementation of a full SPHE programme. However, teachers should ensure that they address all SPHE modules.
- Many SPHE teachers have availed of relevant in-service courses. Management is committed to ensuring that teachers continue to avail of SPHE and RSE training for both junior and senior cycle as necessary. A record of SPHE-related training undertaken is maintained.
- Partnership with parents is a key priority for the school and students and their parents are advised regularly on their progress in the subject.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

- Subject planning for SPHE is ongoing. At the time of the evaluation outline schemes of work including timeframes for delivery as well as learning outcomes had been developed for SPHE and senior-cycle RSE. These should be further developed to include more specific information with regard to linking the learning outcomes to be attained to the corresponding methodologies, as well as including proposed resources and agreed assessment modes. Plans should also include a review section for comments on the achievement of the learning outcomes to facilitate regular review.
- A range of SPHE related policies such as, RSE, substance use and anti-bullying, support the implementation of the SPHE programme well. It is laudable that the ongoing review of such policies includes consultation with the whole-school community. The pastoral care policy should be further developed to reflect the good practices evident.

- There was evidence of ongoing self-evaluation in relation to SPHE, mainly from end-of year teacher reviews. Students also undertake end-of-module reviews. In order to promote greater self-evaluation, provision should be made for more formal review of SPHE provision, to include the views of students and parents. The team should then develop and implement action plans, based on target setting, with clear time-bound steps to achieve them.
- There is very good collaboration between the SPHE teachers and learning-support personnel to facilitate a focused approach to supporting students with additional educational needs.

The draft findings and recommendations arising out of this evaluation were discussed with the principal, deputy principal and subject teachers at the conclusion of the evaluation. The board of management of the school was given an opportunity to comment on the findings and recommendations of the report; the board chose to accept the report without response.