An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

Subject Inspection of
Social, Personal and Health Education

REPORT

Bishopstown Community School
Bishopstown, Cork
Roll number: 91397T

Date of inspection: 6 May 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

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MAIN FINDINGS

- The standard of teaching and learning observed in SPHE and in RSE lessons was high.
- SPHE is well supported by the school.
- The SPHE department collaborates effectively with those involved in the school’s support systems and with other subject departments.
- A comprehensive SPHE department plan has been developed and documented.
- Ongoing, structured self-evaluation is a significant feature of SPHE planning.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

- The student council should be revitalised with a view to reestablishing and restructuring student involvement in school planning and in view of its potential to support SPHE planning.
INTRODUCTION

Bishopstown Community School is a co-educational school with an enrolment of 165 students. This figure represents an increase in enrolment. The school participates in the School Support Programme of Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS), the Department’s action plan for educational inclusion.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

• Teaching and learning in the SPHE lessons observed was of a high standard. Lessons were well structured and included a clear statement of objectives at the outset, in written form in one lesson, and a brief review of learning in all lessons.

• It was clear that considerable collaboration among teachers was an important unifying force in the delivery of lessons that were well planned and coherent. At the time of the inspection, teachers were working on the Relationships and Sexuality module of SPHE with all classes.

• A range of teaching methods was used. These varied in accordance with the lesson content and with students’ level of competence and interest. In one instance, the lesson was delivered in an effective team-teaching environment. In others, students worked in groups when directed to do so. Students responded well to directions in each setting. Positive relationships, which had been established in the course of the school year, were used productively in maintaining order and in facilitating open discussions and responses among students and staff.

• Questions were used skilfully in each lesson. Students’ responses, in both written and oral form, showed clear evidence of learning. The use of ongoing formative assessment was observed in the verbal comments made by teachers and in some written comments in students’ portfolios of work. Where clarification was sought by students, an explanation was provided sensitively. In their responses, teachers displayed a thorough understanding of the lesson context, and knowledge of the subject matter.

• Good use was made of information and communication technology (ICT) to present information and video material that complemented the oral and written work of the lessons. No formal textbooks are used for SPHE. The materials used during lessons were relevant and appropriately stimulating. The language used was well suited to students’ literacy levels and, in the case of new terminology, was clearly explained.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

• The provision for SPHE and RSE is in keeping with Department of Education and Skills guidelines. Resources are provided by management as the need arises. The lengthy experience of some staff, and of the school, in the provision of health and personal education has enabled the accumulation of extensive resources. These have been tabulated in the SPHE plan and are available to staff in the preparation and delivery of lessons.

• Most members of the SPHE department have had appropriate training and experience in the delivery of the subject. It is the policy of the department and of the school that, as far as possible, those who teach SPHE should have had appropriate training. This is good practice. Where, for reasons of expediency, this has proven not to be possible, staff
members have been supported by the SPHE department as part of an interim arrangement.

- The lessons observed were delivered in rooms that were spacious and well decorated with materials, including students’ work, that were relevant to SPHE. These materials provided useful links to previous lessons and, in some cases, to subsequent lessons. Such good practice brings continuity to SPHE and establishes implicit links to other subjects taught in the same classrooms.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

- A comprehensive SPHE department plan has been compiled as a collaborative endeavour by SPHE teachers. The inclusion of evaluative comments and of the short-term plans that have materialised from the evaluative process is very good practice. The plan shows a clear commitment to review and self-evaluation. This is in keeping with the current emphasis on self-evaluation in school planning.

- The SPHE department plan includes a structured programme of visitors to the school that is in keeping with the Department’s recent guidelines on the issue. The plan has evolved from a collaborative process among subject departments, as is good practice. This exemplifies the familiarity of staff with official documents of relevance to SPHE and of use in subject planning. It is suggested that some policy issues that have been considered by the SPHE department and that may have a wider relevance, such as confidentiality, referral and assessment, be considered and advanced in the context of whole-school planning.

- The participation of the guidance department in SPHE is facilitated by the current size of the school’s enrolment. This has enabled a clear linkage of SPHE to the curricular component of the guidance programme, especially in the junior cycle, and it establishes SPHE as an important curricular contributor to the whole-school guidance plan. This, in turn, provides opportunities for the formation of efficient planning links that integrate the aims of SPHE and those of the school’s support and care structures, including home-school-community liaison and chaplaincy, and the development of approaches to student behaviour that are affirmative.

- It was noted during interactions with students that the student council was relatively dormant at the time of this evaluation. It is recommended that, as an important voice in whole school planning, the student council be revitalised with a view to its re-engagement with the planning process.

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 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.

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