An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

Subject Inspection of
Social, Personal and Health Education
REPORT

Carrick-on-Shannon Community School
Carrick-on-Shannon, County Leitrim
Roll number: 91496V

Date of inspection: 3 March 2011

AN ROINN OIDEACHAIS AGUS SCILEANNA | DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND SKILLS

REPORT
ON
THE QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN SOCIAL, PERSONAL AND HEALTH EDUCATION (SPHE)

SUBJECT INSPECTION REPORT

This report has been written following a subject inspection in Carrick-on-Shannon Community School. It presents the findings of an evaluation of the quality of teaching and learning in Social, Personal and Health Education (including Relationships and Sexuality Education in senior cycle) 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; a response was not received from the board.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

In Carrick-on-Shannon Community School, SPHE is provided to all first-year and second-year students as a curriculum subject. SPHE is not taught in third year and, in this regard, the school is not compliant with circular letter M11/03 which stipulates that all second-level schools must timetable SPHE as part of the Junior Cycle core curriculum with a recommended time allocation of one class period per week. The school has not made full provision for SPHE for a number of years and, due to inaccurate school documentation at the time, this shortcoming did not come to light during a whole-school evaluation conducted in the school in January 2009. The less than satisfactory provision for third-year students currently is a serious issue and the school must address this as a matter of urgency.

Currently, the SPHE department comprises a core team of six teachers. Commendably, most of these teachers are delivering SPHE to more than one class group. It is good to note that all teachers were consulted prior to being allocated to SPHE. All teachers met with during the evaluation were clearly committed and dedicated to this subject. Management is supportive of teachers' continuing professional development and there has been a good level of engagement with the SPHE support service to enhance the professional competencies of SPHE teachers. The SPHE department should ensure that a record of all such training activities is kept and documented as part of the SPHE plan.

In the first year of the Leaving Certificate, students are provided with a Health Education programme and this is very good. However, no agreed common course of work has been developed by the SPHE department for these students. Instead, each teacher plans independently for his or her own class group. It is very good that teachers are flexible and plan to suit the needs of students in their care. However, it is very important that an agreed common programme of

work is developed so that there is some consistency of delivery across all class groups. This is recommended.

In this school, aspects of RSE are provided to senior cycle students but the extent of this provision was difficult to determine at the time of the evaluation. The school reports that some elements of RSE are being delivered in Religious Education lessons. Other components are delivered by external speakers such as 'Love for Life'. Some talks are organised independently by the school chaplain while others are organised by the school guidance counsellor. This work is undertaken without any formal collaboration with the SPHE department. This needs to be addressed through formal consultation and communication between these departments. Furthermore, the school should ensure that provision for RSE covers all of the themes as recommended in the *Interim Curriculum and Guidelines for Post-primary Schools* and documented as part of planning for SPHE and RSE. The school reports that it is clear about its procedures regarding visiting speakers. However, these procedures should now be formulated into a policy for future reference. In line with good practice, parents are informed prior to the delivery of the RSE programme.

All teachers are timetabled to teach SPHE in rooms which facilitate the inclusion in lessons of the learning methodologies advocated in the syllabus for the successful delivery of the subject. Very good efforts have been made by many SPHE teachers to ensure that there are appropriate displays of SPHE materials in their classrooms. These are very useful for maximising the potential of the students' immediate learning environment to stimulate and retain their interest in issues and topics relevant to the subject.

The school is clearly committed to the promotion of SPHE in a whole-school context. Many systems which support the work of the SPHE teachers are in place. These include the year head and tutor system and the mentoring system between senior students and first-year students. The school has also provided courses to staff and this has included inputs on 'Positive Behaviour in School' by the National Behaviour Support Service. This support for staff is very good.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

The systems that are in place in this school are supportive of collaborative planning. Time is made available for all subject departments including SPHE to meet. Records have been kept of all such meetings. In addition, there is much informal contact between the teachers. It is very clear that SPHE is a core element of the pastoral care structure in this school. Most of the key policies relevant to or supportive of SPHE have been developed. However, despite a recommendation made in the whole school evaluation report, the RSE policy is still in draft form. It is recommended that the RSE policy should now be updated and ratified. In so doing, the school should ensure that it accurately describes RSE provision in this school. Materials are available at www.education.gov.ie which will support this work.

Planning and co-ordination of SPHE in this school is good. Co-ordination of the SPHE department is undertaken by one teacher who has fulfilled this role for a number of years in a voluntary capacity. In order to build capacity and expertise and to distribute the workload between all SPHE teachers, it is recommended that this position be rotated as appropriate. Materials have been made available to teachers by the co-ordinator which supports the teaching and learning of SPHE. These are stored centrally and can be accessed by all members of the SPHE department. In addition, individual teachers have also compiled or designed their own

materials and this is very good. Some of these materials have been added to the centrally-stored resources, and have been audited and catalogued into different year groups and this is good.

Planning documentation was presented on the day of the evaluation and it contained information about the organisation of the department and all relevant planning materials for the SPHE programme. The SPHE programme for each junior cycle year group consists of all ten modules as recommended in the syllabus designed by the National Council of Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA). Modules are presented in a spiral and developmental way. Timetabled provision for the delivery of the curriculum to third year students should now be arranged to ensure coverage of all ten modules, as outlined in the subject department plan.

All teachers presented individual planning documentation. These contained schemes of work which recorded a list of topics and in some cases, included an estimated weekly timeframe for their completion. Very good practice was observed when this documentation included more detailed information regarding resources being used and self-evaluation by the teacher. This is very good work and should be adopted by all members of the team. This could be supported by the development of a template to aid each teacher in the evaluation of each lesson.

In the lessons observed, individual preparation was very good. This was evident through, for example, the provision of handouts and worksheets which were seamlessly integrated into lessons at appropriate stages. These materials were most successful when they contained an appropriate amount of content and suited the ability of the class group. Information and communication technology (ICT) was used effectively in those lessons observed. Some classes have developed a class contract and this good practice should now extend to all class groups.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

Five lessons were observed during the course of the evaluation, four in junior cycle and one in senior cycle. Overall, the quality of teaching in all of these lessons was very good. Most teachers engaged in effective individual planning and preparation for their lessons. Good practice was observed where the aims and objectives were shared with the students for their consideration as part of the learning process and returned to at the end of the lesson. Good routines were established which included monitoring attendance at the start of each lesson.

Students were provided with ample opportunities to engage actively with their own learning. Strategies included questioning, discussions, reflective tasks, group and pair work. Best practice was observed when appropriate time was allocated to feedback from pair and group work activites. Questions were varied and provided students with ample opportunities to think critically. All teachers made very good efforts to ensure that questions were distributed to a wide range of students and this facilitated a high level of student participation.

Most lessons evaluated were well organised, characterised by smooth transitions from one stage to the next and they contained a variety of learning activities. In most cases, there was very good balance between the level of teacher and student input. This is good practice as it ensured that lessons were not led by the teacher.

There was a friendly atmosphere in most of the classes visited and a positive rapport had been developed between teachers and their students. In all cases, instructions were clear and precise. Students' participation in the classroom activities was closely monitored by the teacher in all lessons and help and assistance were afforded when necessary. Students' efforts and contributions

were respected and appropriately affirmed in the majority of lessons observed. Discipline was very good and all discussions remained focussed on the topic-at-hand.

The quality of learning was very good in the classes visited. This was evidenced by the quality of the discussions which took place during lessons, written work, feedback from group work activities and the responses to questions. In most cases, the level of written work in copies and folders was appropriate for the time of year.

ASSESSMENT

The SPHE department uses a range of assessment modes to determine students' progress. These include teachers' observations of students' engagement in pair work, group work, class discussions, questioning, completion of worksheets and responses to tasks. The SPHE teachers should formalise this work into an agreed policy which will guide teaching and learning into the future. Reference should be made to *Social, Personal & Health Education: Guidelines for Teachers pp.60-68*. For instance, links should be made to the topic and desired learning outcomes of each module and to the manner in which these will be assessed.

In almost all lessons, students were required to evaluate their learning either verbally or in a written assignment. This is worthy of praise. The development of a template to support the process of student reflection and self-evaluation is now recommended.

In all lessons, students were provided with resources by the teacher. This took the form of handouts or worksheets. In most classes, a system is in place for students to store and file personal materials such as these in a folder which is retained by the teacher and distributed to students at the beginning of lessons. This is good practice and one which should be extended to all classes. Communication with parents is maintained through the school journal, school reports and annual parent-teacher meetings as appropriate.

SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The following are the main strengths identified in the evaluation:

- A core team of six teachers has been developed and in most cases, these teachers are delivering SPHE to more than one class group.
- All teachers met with during the evaluation were clearly committed and dedicated to this subject and management is supportive of teachers' continuing professional development.
- Individual planning documentation was presented by all teachers.
- Overall, the quality of teaching in all of the lessons observed was very good and students were provided with ample opportunities to engage actively with their own learning.
- Students' participation in the classroom activities was closely monitored by the teacher in all lessons and help and assistance were afforded when necessary.

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

- The school must ensure that it is fully compliant with the requirements of circular letter M11/03 and provide SPHE to all junior cycle students.

- The school should make certain that provision for RSE covers all of the themes as recommended in the *Interim Curriculum and Guidelines for Post-primary Schools* and that any planning for visiting speakers relevant to SPHE and RSE is organised with the SPHE department.
- The RSE policy should now be updated and ratified.
- The SPHE teachers should formalise assessment practices into an agreed policy which will guide teaching and learning into the future.

A post-evaluation meeting was 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.

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