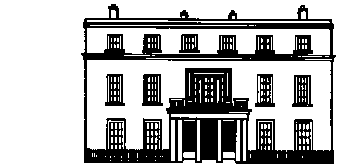
An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

Subject Inspection of Social Personal and Health Education (SPHE)
REPORT

Christian Brothers' College
Monkstown, County Dublin
Roll number: 60180R

Date of inspection: 17 May 2011



REPORT
ON
THE QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN SPHE

INFORMATION ON THE INSPECTION

Date(s) of inspection	12 and 17 May 2011
Inspection activities undertaken • Review of relevant documents • Discussion with principal and teachers • Interaction with students • Observation of teaching and learning during five class periods	• Examination of students' work • Conduct of structured interview with group of senior cycle students • Administration of questionnaire to two groups of third-year students • Feedback to principal and teachers

MAIN FINDINGS

- Good quality teaching and learning was observed in all lessons with many examples of very good practice.
- Active learning was most evident in lessons where a variety of methodologies was used.
- Most students engaged well with the work in the lessons observed.
- There is very good provision and support for SPHE and RSE throughout the school in the allocation of time and the organisation of whole-school initiatives to support the effective delivery of the programmes.
- Subject planning is well advanced with a clear focus on the development of learning outcomes for each year group.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

- A variety of methodologies should be used in every lesson to ensure a good balance between teacher instruction and student activity and to encourage all students to actively contribute to the work of the lesson.
- Teachers should consider a range of strategies to encourage students to engage more personally with their learning.
- Greater use should be made of ICT to support teaching and learning
- An agreed assessment policy should be devised for the purpose of evaluating student learning and to support better recording of students' progress.

INTRODUCTION

Christian Brothers' College is a voluntary secondary school with 525 male students. It is a fee-paying school serving an urban population in South County Dublin. Classes are mixed ability for SPHE. 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

- All lessons were well structured and paced and the content responded to the requirements of the curriculum. All teachers began by outlining the lesson plan to their students. Very good practice was noted where the learning outcome was written up on the board and the context explained to students. All teachers should communicate their lesson plan in terms of the proposed learning outcome for the lesson.
- Question and answer sessions initiated good responses and discussion from students in all of the lessons observed. In some instances, however, the same students tended to dominate the interactions. The practice of targeting individual students in question and answer sessions is recommended to ensure that all students are enabled to contribute. Where ICT was used, it enhanced lesson delivery and this good practice should be extended to all lessons.
- Methodologies aimed at providing a good balance between teacher instruction and active student engagement included brainstorming, discussion, individual and group tasks. A variety of these activities was used in some lessons, whereas in other instances, question and answer sessions was the dominant methodology used to engage the students. A number of different methodologies should be used in every lesson to support optimal participation from all students and particularly when dealing with sensitive issues. Furthermore, when assigning such tasks, teachers should encourage students to engage more personally with their learning through greater use of 'I' statements.
- There was good classroom management throughout and evidence of a positive rapport between teachers and students. Evidence accrued from the interactions between teachers and students indicated good student engagement and learning in most lessons.
- Some students had SPHE copies for recording their work, some had folders and others used the textbooks to record their work. However, a review of these documents revealed very little evidence of written work completed in class or at home. Furthermore, while progress in SPHE is included in school reports, senior-cycle students reported during the focused interview held that the comments always tended to be the same and bore little reference to students learning outcomes. All members of the SPHE and RSE departments should devise agreed assessment practices as part of subject department planning. This will help them evaluate whether or not the intended learning outcomes have been achieved and will facilitate the formal recording of student progress. Initiatives such as the use of a personal reflection log are recommended for consideration.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- There is good whole school commitment to the social and personal development of students with the allocation of SPHE from first year through to fifth year. Whole-school

support for SPHE related in-service also facilitates the effective delivery of these programmes.

- The RSE programme is delivered through SPHE and as part of the Religious Education curriculum in sixth year. To further support the delivery of RSE, all teachers involved should avail of the 'Trust' in-service training programme.
- It is recommended that the students' charter be posted up in a prominent place in classrooms and that students should be appropriately reminded of the rules they themselves drew up. Where students are not in a teacher-based room it is suggested that they have their charter written on the cover of their books or copies.
- There is good access to a variety of resources. More varied resources should be used in lessons where current practice is to rely solely on the textbook. There is limited access to ICT at present and this is acknowledged. ICT was accessed and effectively used in some lessons. However, there were other lessons which would have benefited from the use of ICT. In these instances teachers should make greater efforts to access ICT to support the work of the lesson.
- Activities such as the anti-bullying week with its range of whole school activities complements the SPHE programme while the use of guest speakers for both students and their parents supports the delivery of the RSE programme.
- All the whole-school policies relevant to SPHE and RSE are in place.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

- The co-ordination of SPHE is currently a post of responsibility. Given the advanced stage of subject planning, consideration should now be given to changing the post of subject co-ordinator to a voluntary position to be rotated among all teachers of SPHE. This will ensure collective ownership of subject organisation and planning.
- Considerable work has been completed in establishing and coordinating SPHE as a subject and a department. The SPHE planning folder is a very comprehensive document containing syllabus guidelines, minutes of meetings and long-term plans for each year group. Very good practice was noted in framing the plan in terms of the learning outcomes to be achieved and indicating the resources available for each topic. To further build on this good work, teachers in each year group should work together to establish the timing and order in which the RSE modules will be completed and to share best practice in the teaching of all other modules.
- The practice of asking senior cycle students to identify priorities for inclusion in their SPHE programme affords students the opportunity to engage more actively with their own learning and this is commended.
- The evaluation and review of the anti-bullying week supports effective school self-evaluation in addition to ongoing improvements in the initiative. The proposed mediation panel involving students in a peer-led anti-bullying initiative should provide interesting opportunities to extend student support systems within a structured context.

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

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Appendix

School response to the report

Submitted by the Board of Management

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

The post of responsibility given to SPHE is now to be changed to a voluntary position. The SPHE department within the school are undertaking to implement the key recommendations within the report.