An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

Subject Inspection of Social, Personal and Health Education REPORT

Creagh College
Gorey, County Wexford
Roll number: 76127D

Date of inspection: 28 September 2015

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) INCLUDING RELATIONSHIPS AND SEXUALITY EDUCATION (RSE)

INFORMATION ON THE INSPECTION

Date of inspection	25 & 28 September 2015
Inspection activities undertaken • Review of relevant documents • Discussion with principal and teaching staff • Interaction with students	• Observation of teaching and learning during five lessons • Examination of students' work • Feedback to principal, deputy principal and teaching staff

MAIN FINDINGS

- Overall, teaching and learning were of a good quality, and some very good practice was observed.
- Teachers used active and collaborative learning methodologies, mostly to very good effect.
- The atmosphere for learning was very positive and affirming.
- Whole school provision and support for SPHE and RSE were very good.
- The quality of subject planning, teacher collaboration and professional development was very good.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

- All teachers should ensure that learning in lessons is appropriately developmental and well-structured, and they should use the displayed learning outcomes both to consolidate learning at key points and to support students' evaluation of their learning.
- Teachers should give more time and emphasis to the assessment process and further develop reporting on progress to learners and parents in SPHE and RSE.

INTRODUCTION

Creagh College is a co-educational post-primary school with an enrolment of 495 students under the auspices of Waterford and Wexford Education and Training Board. It provides the Junior Certificate, an optional Transition Year (TY) programme and the established Leaving Certificate. The school is in its fifth year of operation and has students in first year to fifth year.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

- Overall, teaching and learning were of a good quality. Very good practice was evident in some lessons observed. In a few instances, the lesson was inadequately structured.
- In most lessons, teachers set out the aims clearly at the start. In the best lessons, students' attention was frequently drawn to the intended learning outcomes and teachers' used these opportunities to focus the students on the work in hand and to engage them in self-evaluation of their own progress. This excellent practice is recommended for all lessons. All teachers should ensure that learning outcomes are appropriately developmental in terms of previous work and use them to both consolidate learning at key points and to support students' evaluation of their learning.
- Best practice was also observed when the lessons were very carefully structured. In the best lessons, this involved stimulus activity, group work, highly-focused discussion, ongoing student note-making and the consolidation of learning before proceeding to the next task. Such structure should be extended.
- Teachers used active and collaborative learning methodologies and successfully motivated students' engagement. Group work was used frequently in the lessons observed, and mostly to very good effect. Teachers also used the whiteboard to very good effect building an overview of the topic and the learning achieved. Judicious use of well-selected information and communications technology also stimulated learning.
- In the best lessons, very good use of the 'think, pair, share' technique enabled students to learn from each other and the teacher's management of the activity ensured considerable productivity. In some instances, students were given the opportunity to collate the shared points on the board while the teacher led the plenary. Other good practices that supported the efficacy of group work included well-selected resources and the setting of high expectations for students' contributions. In a few instances, the tasks given should have been more challenging since a similar task had been conducted in previous years.
- Some teachers used worksheets or written tasks that provided students with the opportunity to 'generalise' and to 'apply' their learning in the lesson. All teachers should adopt this approach.
- Assessment was generally conducted through ongoing teacher evaluation of students' participation and application. Students maintain folders and a copy containing work spanning the years. These included some homework. Learning logs are frequently used at the end of lessons to engage students in reflection on their learning. There were some instances of exemplary teacher feedback and affirmation that had a notable effect on achievement at an individual level as well as moving the whole-class forward in their learning.
- There is potential to give more time to assessment in lessons. This could be achieved by linking the reflection exercise with the intended learning outcomes so that students are more discerning in evaluation of individual development of knowledge, skills and values.

- The learning atmosphere was very positive and affirming. Overall, there was very good classroom management. Students were motivated by the topics and made valuable contributions to their lessons, demonstrating good oral literacy. The clear establishment of ground rules ensured students showed high levels of respect towards each other and were confident in discussing social issues with their peers.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- The quality of subject provision and whole-school support was very good. Timetabling arrangements are effective and facilitating of developmental programmes in each area.
- SPHE is provided as a core subject for one lesson per week in first, second and third year. RSE is an integral part of junior cycle SPHE and, within senior cycle, RSE is provided in as a component of a course in Personal Development in TY and in modules within Guidance lessons in fifth year and sixth year.
- Guest speakers are sometimes invited to support the programmes. Teachers and management demonstrated awareness of the Department's guidelines on the use of guest speakers and it was reported that class teachers co-facilitate in these instances.
- SPHE and RSE are of high importance to management and teachers. Together with ensuring the delivery of a comprehensive curricular programme in the subjects, the school utilises the subjects as the contexts for education in substance use, health, relationships and sexuality. The subjects augment the school's student support structures, transition into the school and extra-curricular activities in related areas.
- Commendably, whole-school developments have taken place in planning for Wellbeing as an area of learning in Junior Cycle reform and working towards Health Promoting School status.
- Teachers' deployed to SPHE and RSE demonstrated high awareness, engagement and commitment to a breadth of professional development opportunities in the subjects. School management is highly conscious of this investment and recognises the importance of maintaining continuity in staff deployment and staff development.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

- High quality planning was evident in lesson planning, the use of resources, the work of the subject department, the curricular plans and the policies on RSE and substance use.
- Collectively, teachers work very well together and focus on what is working well and areas for development.
- Highly-developed curricular plans that link intended learning outcomes with appropriate teaching and learning methodologies demonstrate that considerable thought has gone into designing a programme that is developmental from year to year. It is very important that teachers make full use of this in individual lesson planning.
- Teachers have access to a very good range of suitable resources. Room layouts facilitated collaborative learning and teacher circulation. The learning environments were enhanced with good-quality SPHE and RSE posters and there were prominent notices about further information in areas of social, personal and health-related importance.

- Teachers have designed some very creative summative assessment tests for SPHE that enable students to demonstrate their understanding and skills in a range of areas. The outcomes of these assessments combined with ongoing classroom assessment informs grading for parent-teacher meetings and school reports.
- There is scope, however, to further develop the type and range of reporting in SPHE and RSE and to link summative comments with the aims and learning outcomes of both programmes. Furthermore, it is necessary to develop a common understanding about the quality of student learning in SPHE and RSE. It is recommended that a bank of suitable descriptors that describe levels of achievement in the subjects be developed.

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

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