An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

Subject Inspection of Social, Personal and Health Education
REPORT

Presentation College,
Askea, Carlow
Roll number: 61141M

Date of inspection: 24 October 2012

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)

INFORMATION ON THE INSPECTION

Dates of inspection	23 October 2012
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 • Feedback to principal and teachers

MAIN FINDINGS

- Overall, the quality of teaching and learning in the lessons observed was good, with elements of exemplary practice noted in all lessons.
- Students were actively engaged and interested in their lessons, which were characterised by a supportive and productive learning environment.
- The experiential learning process was effectively integrated into all lessons and ensured that learning progressed in a logical and structured manner.
- SPHE, including Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) is appropriately provided for in junior cycle, with exemplary provision in senior cycle.
- SPHE is delivered by a team of interested and committed teachers, but with varying levels of experience of the programme and methodologies.
- The standard of planning and the co-ordination of subject department planning are both excellent.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

- Management should work to consolidate a core team of SPHE teachers and strategically plan to meet their professional development needs.
- The anti-bullying policy should be updated.

INTRODUCTION

Presentation College Carlow is a co-educational secondary school, with a current enrolment of 606 students. The school caters for students of all abilities and who come from a variety of social, economic and cultural backgrounds. The school provides the Junior Certificate, an optional Transition Year (TY) programme, the established Leaving Certificate and the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP).

TEACHING AND LEARNING

- Overall, the quality of learning and teaching in the lessons observed was good, with elements of exemplary practice identified in all lessons.
- Lessons were very well planned and paced, with all resources and materials available to support teaching and learning. This effective preparation ensured that students were fully engaged in the planned learning tasks throughout.
- At the outset, teachers outlined the theme and content of lessons, which were appropriately contextualised and linked to students' previous learning and their experiences. Topics included a focus on bullying, contraception, goal setting and effective communications. The content chosen for each lesson reflected an appropriate balance in students' learning in terms of gaining knowledge, developing skills and fostering attitudes and values. The sharing of the intended learning outcomes with students set clear expectations for their learning.
- A facilitative approach was taken in all lessons, with a clear emphasis on the experiential learning process to support students' progress. In most cases, teachers set active tasks for students early in the lesson. This was very effective in ensuring that the key concepts were reflected upon and discussed by students, which stimulated their interest and further engagement.
- Lessons progressed in a well-structured, logical manner through a variety of appropriate and effective teaching and learning strategies. These included discussion, self-reflection tasks, role play, a walking debate, pair work and small-group work. These interactive methods are in keeping with the discursive nature of the subject and helped to further develop students' social and cognitive skills.
- Questioning was effectively used to engage students and to assess their understanding. Teachers endeavoured to include all students in the lesson through targeted and differentiated questioning. Sufficient time was given for students to formulate their answers and teachers often probed and challenged them to support or rationalise their responses. Consideration should be given to expanding the range of questioning practices, such as think-pair-share, to all lessons as a means of extending the reach of questions posed to all students.
- Resources were appropriately used and succeeded in stimulating discussion, challenging misconceptions and in providing exemplars of the social pressures affecting adolescents. The use of "show-me" boards was effectively used and ensured rapporteurs had a record of their group's deliberations to report to the class during the processing phase of lessons.
- In all cases, teachers ensured that students' learning was consolidated at the end of the lesson. Students' enthusiasm for the subject was good and they demonstrated a good ability to communicate about the topics and themes explored during their lessons.

- There was a friendly and caring atmosphere in all lessons visited and a positive and affirming rapport has been developed between students and their teachers. Classrooms visited were well presented and the display of student-generated SPHE material is commendable as it provides positive affirmation of their efforts and engagement with the subject.

- Students' work is retained in dedicated folders and these are securely retained in teachers' classrooms. It is commendable that home tasks are also assigned on occasion. Most teachers monitor the quality of students' written work. This is an area of student engagement that could be further developed.

- Reporting to parents on students' progress is in line with school procedures and it is good practice that teachers of SPHE are available at parent-teacher meetings.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- There is good whole-school support for SPHE. Appropriate provision is made for SPHE, including RSE, at junior cycle in line with Circular Letter 11/03. Provision for Health Education at senior cycle, which includes the delivery of a comprehensive RSE programme, is exemplary.
- SPHE is currently delivered by a team of nine teachers, with varying levels of experience of the programme and methodologies. There is a need to consolidate a core team of SPHE teachers and, where relevant, expand their experience and expertise to deliver the programme. Support for the future professional needs of the current team should be strategically planned, to ensure the continued expansion of teachers' knowledge and skills, to meet the needs of learners and the school.
- Policies relevant to SPHE, including substance use and RSE are appropriately developed to support the work of the school. The anti-bullying policy is outdated and this should be scheduled for review and updating.
- The availability of broadband, Information and Communications Technology (ICT) facilities and mostly teacher-based classrooms ensures easy access to available resources that support teaching and learning. Classrooms visited were suitable to accommodate a range of interactive methodologies.
- The organisation of initiatives that focus on health and wellbeing, such as anti-bullying, mental health, anti-smoking and the active school week, add greatly to the whole-school approach to SPHE.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

- A key strength of the delivery of SPHE in the school is the high quality of co-ordination and subject department planning.
- The comprehensive SPHE plan is very well presented and contains all elements of the organisation and delivery of the subject. Detailed programmes of work for all year groups have been developed, and include statements of learning outcomes for each topic. The spiral and developmental approach taken to the delivery of the ten modules ensures that the programme adapts to the needs of students as they grow and mature.

- A good range of resources has been collated and these are available to all teachers. The optimisation of the shared network drive will greatly assist the organisation, range and access to relevant resources.
- Very good progress has been made in developing the assessment process for SPHE. The establishment of a common assessment task for each year group is good practice. The SPHE department should continue to develop and expand the assessment process to include a variety of differing approaches that challenge students to apply their knowledge and skills.
- Some exemplary reflective practice was noted, with good examples of programme revision, including student responses to modules. The further development of this approach should be considered, particularly in determining the success of the SPHE programme in meeting the interests and needs of learners.

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 was given an opportunity to comment in writing on the findings and recommendations of the report, and the response of the board will be found in the appendix of this report.

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Appendix

School response to the report

Submitted by the Board of Management

Area 1: Observations on the content of the inspection report

The Board welcomes the Inspection Report and is very happy with the main findings of the report.

In particular the Board is pleased to note that the Inspector found elements of exemplary practice in all lessons observed, that a supportive and productive learning environment was in place, that there was exemplary provision of SPHE/RSE in senior cycle, that the SPHE Team consisted of interested and committed teachers and that the standard of subject planning and the co-ordination of same are excellent.

The Board wishes to clarify the situation of the consideration recommended by the Inspector, in paragraph six of the Teaching and Learning section on page three, in relation to using diverse questioning practices. This teaching methodology is regularly employed by the SPHE teachers. In fact, the think-pair-share method was used in the Second Year lesson on study skills, observed by the Inspector. It was highlighted by the teacher on PowerPoint and put in to practice during a class activity.

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 Board accepts the two main recommendations.

Work towards consolidating a core team of SPHE teachers had already been undertaken in previous years but this work had been disrupted somewhat during the current school year due to timetable difficulties as a result of the DES decision to reduce Guidance provision. Facilitating SPHE in-service for teachers will continue, as has always been the case.

The updating and review of the Anti-Bullying Policy has already begun and has included the formulation of a new Cyber-bullying Policy and Acceptable Use Policy.

The Board wishes to thank the Inspector for all of his hard work, courtesy and advice.