An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

Subject Inspection of Social, Personal & Health Education
REPORT

St Enda's Community School
Kilmallock Road, Limerick
Roll number: 91446G

Date of inspection: 19 January 2011

REPORT
ON
THE QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN SPHE

SUBJECT INSPECTION REPORT

This report has been written following a subject inspection in St Enda's Community School, conducted as part of a whole-school evaluation. It presents the findings of an evaluation of the quality of teaching and learning in Social, Personal & Health Education (SPHE), including Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE), 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, and examined students' work. The inspector reviewed planning documentation and teachers' written preparation. Following the evaluation visit, the inspector provided oral feedback on the outcomes of the evaluation to the principal, deputy principal and teachers.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

SPHE is provided for all junior cycle students in accordance with the requirements of Circular M11/03, with SPHE timetabled as a discrete, stand-alone subject in first, second and third year. The current arrangement in first year, where SPHE is concurrently timetabled for the two class groups, sees teachers rotate between classes on a weekly basis. As discussed and agreed during the inspection, and with the aim of providing for greater continuity in students' learning, it is suggested that the rotational aspect of this provision be reviewed. It was indicated by students in receipt of learning support or resource hours that they may be withdrawn from SPHE. This practice is strongly discouraged.

Appropriate provision is made for RSE in both junior and senior cycle. A single teacher is responsible for the provision of RSE in senior cycle. In the focus-group interview with students, it was indicated that provision for RSE in senior cycle is very comprehensive. This is a very positive finding.

It is good to note that a draft SPHE/RSE policy has been developed. This draft should now be moved through whole-school consultation to ratification by the board. Consideration might be given to appending to the policy a copy of the RSE information letter issued to parents, as well as a copy of the senior cycle RSE programme. The policy, very commendably, addresses the role of visiting speakers in the delivery of RSE. Consideration might also be given to the development of a separate policy on visiting speakers. All concerned are directed to Circular 0023/2010 for guidance in relation to this task. The *SPHE Handbook* provides a template that may prove valuable.

A number of other draft policies seen to support the school's general provision for students' social, personal and health education have been developed. These include a draft substance use policy and a draft anti-bullying policy. These policies should also be moved through whole-

school consultation to ratification by the board. In advance of the finalisation of the school's draft anti-bullying policy, all concerned are directed to the website of the Department of Education and Skills, which provides a relevant set of guidelines, a policy template and a sample policy.

The two teachers that have been deployed to teach SPHE in St Enda's indicate that they are both interested in, and happy to teach, the subject. The involvement of the school's guidance counsellor in the delivery of the programme is a particularly positive finding. It is suggested that scope exists for even further involvement of this or another staff member.

Management has facilitated some continuing professional development (CPD) in the area of SPHE. It is recommended that the development of a more systematic and incremental approach to CPD be explored. To this end, it is suggested that an audit of teachers' needs be carried out. The SPHE Support Service's programme of in-service, which can be accessed at www.sphe.ie , might inform this process. The outcomes of the audit should be used to determine the team's CPD needs in the short, medium, and long term.

Efforts are made by management to timetable SPHE for morning classes. This very considered timetabling practice is commended and fully encouraged. Furthermore, in timetabling both teachers and class groups, management seeks to provide for continuity of teachers from first year to second year and again from second year to third year. This is very good practice. It was also positive to note that in almost all instances the SPHE teacher for a particular class group teaches the class group for another subject. The merits of concurrently timetabling SPHE in second and third year, as is already provided for in first year, were explored with both management and staff during the inspection. It would be most beneficial to teachers and students alike if this could be facilitated in the future.

Caution needs to be exercised in relation to the delivery of the Junior Achievement programme during scheduled SPHE classes. While it is acknowledged that there is some overlap in content, this should not be delivered in lieu of SPHE modules.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

Formal planning in SPHE is not as far advanced as it should be. While not excusable, there are context factors that may explain this. Until recently the SPHE department in the school consisted of just one teacher, who was required, therefore, to assume the role of subject co-ordinator. However, this teacher also acts as co-ordinator in three other subject areas. Significantly too, formal planning time is only provided at the start of each school year, a practice that is contributing to the lack of formal planning outcomes such as, for example, the preparation of a subject plan. The greater timetabling of a second teacher for SPHE, leading therefore to the establishment of a stable, two-teacher department, would help to address this finding, in that co-ordination, and the associated planning responsibilities, could then be shared. Furthermore, it is suggested that the provision of more formal planning time over the course of each school year would also assist in moving planning forward. This time would also provide a valuable space for the sharing of practices that teachers have found effective.

Programmes of work have been drafted. These identify the modules and the related topics that are delivered on a term-by-term basis. In the next review of these programmes of work, care should be taken to ensure that all ten modules, as identified in the syllabus, are provided for. A very good quality programme plan also identifies the desired learning outcomes for each module. In this

regard, the syllabus is an essential resource, as it clearly documents the aims and outcomes for each module. The integration of visiting speakers or relevant whole-school events into programmes of work is also recommended, as these occasions should inform the delivery of modules and topics.

In time, and in light of the suggestion made previously in relation to the expansion of the SPHE department, programmes of work could be further developed to include the identification of the resources, methodologies and assessment modes that are utilised in the delivery of each module in each year group. To support the development of such programmes, teachers are encouraged to continue maintaining individual records of completed work.

A good range and number of resources has been collated. These have been well organised and carefully catalogued and are stored centrally. In addition, the school's Junior Certificate School Programme (JCSP) demonstration library houses a stock of relevant publications. This includes sets of books that can be used with class groups, as well as a series of publications that is organised by theme.

The quality of teachers' individual planning for lessons observed as part of the SPHE subject inspection was very good, with some excellent planning evident.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

The overall quality of teaching and learning in SPHE in St Enda's Community School is good, with some excellent practice observed. Where the latter was apparent, the teacher's experience and confidence, together with a clear appreciation for, and understanding of, SPHE were strong contributory factors.

Classroom management was generally very good, and a very positive classroom atmosphere prevailed in some lessons. Where this was the case, the teacher demonstrated firmness, but also a high degree of understanding and an obvious fairness. In addition, it was clear that efforts were being made to foster and maintain an atmosphere of respect and trust and these were facilitated through honest engagement with students. Students responded well to assigned tasks and were affirmed in undertaking them. Where classroom management demonstrated some scope for development, students were not so good at listening to the teacher and to each other. The ground rules, which are agreed and drawn up by students at the start of the year, would provide a good basis for challenging and addressing inappropriate student behaviour, such as inattentiveness and talking out of turn. Ground rules should be openly displayed and, as required, should be referred to over the course of lessons.

Lessons were purposeful and relevant, and the general lesson intention was shared with students at the outset. In some cases, the intended learning outcomes were also shared with students. The sharing of this additional information is encouraged in all lessons. A good selection of resources was prepared for use in the delivery of lesson content, with excellent provision for the visual learner. Resources were also well utilised.

An icebreaker activity was introduced to begin one lesson. This is commended. The chosen activity demonstrated a direct relevance to the topic under exploration, thereby setting the scene for what was to follow. Students fully participated in the activity and clearly enjoyed completing

the task they were set. While the completion of the activity was valuable in itself, a greater linking of students' experience of the activity to the remaining lesson content was recommended.

In all lessons, teachers sought to provide for a very good level of student participation. Students responded more favourably to activities that promoted thinking and discussion versus listening and writing. Student-centred strategies such as, for example, brainstorming, games, group tasks, pair work, and worksheet completion, were more positively received than the more traditional didactic strategies of 'chalk and talk' and note-taking. This should be borne in mind in future. To this end, it is important that teachers recognise that in SPHE lessons, given the appropriate opportunities, students can learn as much from each other as from their teacher.

Activities were carefully planned and well organised, and where classroom management was very good, activities were also well managed. Clear instructions were issued to students and students understood what was required of them. This was often supported by the use of handouts, worksheets and projected images. Activities were time-bound. Students were required to take responsibility for the assigned task. The teachers closely monitored students' participation and, as required, guidance was offered and provided. Students' activities were also well processed.

The experiential method, recognised as the most appropriate method for use in SPHE lessons, was in evidence in some lessons. This approach to the planning and delivery of SPHE lessons is further encouraged. The revised, *Healthy Living and Healthy Times - Teachers Lesson Plans Booklet*, which has been produced by the Health Promotion Service of the Health Service Executive (HSE) West, illustrates how this method can be very effectively and very easily applied in the delivery of SPHE lessons. As appropriate, teachers are directed to this resource.

Question and answer sessions were well utilised to develop lesson content, and sought to involve students in lessons and to check students' understanding and learning. In one lesson, students tended to chorus answer. This tendency should be discouraged. Students' responses to questions indicated learning. Lesson summaries were provided in all lessons. This practice is commended.

ASSESSMENT

The assessment of students' progress and achievement in SPHE is an area that is in need of further development. The SPHE department is encouraged, therefore, to look at developing an assessment toolkit. The starting point for this work should be the outcomes that are offered at the end of each module and as outlined in the syllabus. A number of options exist, for example: classroom activities, home-tasks, self-assessment, peer-assessment and portfolio assessment. The SPHE *Guidelines for Teachers* and the *SPHE Handbook* deal with assessment quite extensively, and templates are provided for reproduction and use with students. Teachers are encouraged to look at introducing portfolio assessment. The *Guidelines for Teachers* provide a model on which the department's work in relation to portfolio assessment could be based.

The use of lesson reviews is encouraged. Reflection exercises could be provided to students as modules conclude. Both would inform teachers' judgements in relation to students' learning in SPHE. Teachers are encouraged to use a variety of approaches to such activities, as students tend to tire of review and reflection exercises when the approach to it becomes predictable and repetitive. In addition, these exercises could be used to gather feedback from students in relation to what went well and what did not go so well in each lesson. The outcomes of this can be used to inform future lesson planning and delivery. To this end, templates are provided in both the

Guidelines for Teachers, as well as in the *SPHE Handbook*. Teachers are strongly encouraged to file summaries of students' evaluations.

The inclusion of SPHE on the school's report template is strongly advocated. Teachers are advised to look at preparing a bank of suitable terms that might be used when describing students' progress and achievement in SPHE. The five key aims of SPHE, as detailed on page four of the syllabus, provide a good reference point for the focus and wording of these comments. As part of the department's exploration of assessment, some consideration could also be given to how the school might reward or acknowledge students' completion of each year's study.

SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The following are the main strengths identified in the evaluation:

- SPHE is provided for all junior cycle students and appropriate provision is made for RSE in both junior and senior cycle.
- A draft SPHE/RSE policy has been developed.
- Deployment patterns and timetabling in relation to SPHE are generally satisfactory, with some areas for development identified.
- Management has facilitated some training in the area of SPHE.
- A good range and number of teaching resources has been collated and catalogued, and the school's JCSP demonstration library houses a stock of related publications.
- Some excellent practice was observed in relation to planning and preparation for teaching, and also in the delivery of lessons.

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

- All draft policies related to SPHE should be moved through consultation with the stakeholders to ratification by the board.
- The establishment of a two-teacher SPHE department, together with the provision of more formal planning time, would greatly support all concerned in the task of subject department planning.
- The development of a more systematic and incremental approach to teachers' CPD in SPHE should be explored.
- The SPHE department should look at developing an assessment toolkit, and provision should also be made for SPHE on the school's report template.

Post-evaluation meetings were held with the principal, deputy principal and the teachers of SPHE at the conclusion of the evaluation when the draft findings and recommendations of the evaluation were presented and discussed.

Published January 2012