

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

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

Ardgillan Community College
Balbriggan, County Dublin
Roll number: 76129H

Date of inspection: 29 February 2012



A N R O I N N | D E P A R T M E N T O F
O I D E A C H A I S | E D U C A T I O N
A G U S S C I L E A N N A | A N D S K I L L S

**REPORT
ON
THE QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN
SOCIAL, PERSONAL AND HEALTH EDUCATION**

INFORMATION ON THE INSPECTION

Dates of inspection	28 and 29 February
Inspection activities undertaken <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Review of relevant documents• Discussion with principal and teachers• Interaction with students	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Observation of teaching and learning during six class periods• Examination of students' work• Feedback to principal and teachers

MAIN FINDINGS

- The quality of teaching and learning ranged between good and very good. The experiential learning cycle was expertly integrated into lessons.
- Many effective teaching and learning strategies were integrated into lessons but there is scope to increase the use of differentiated strategies.
- The quantity and quality of students' written work varied considerably: some teachers are monitoring this work.
- The school pays much attention to the welfare of students and many initiatives which complement the work of the SPHE teachers are in place.
- The SPHE team, comprising thirteen teachers, is very large: consequently, meetings of the entire team do not regularly occur.
- The quality of planning and preparation for the lessons observed was very good.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

- All teachers should ensure that students' written work is regularly monitored.
- In order to more easily facilitate planning, a core planning team should now be developed.

INTRODUCTION

Ardgillan Community College, under the auspices of County Dublin Vocational Education Committee, caters for 216 male and 75 female students. This school was opened in 2009. It currently offers the Junior Certificate programme. From September 2012, it will provide the Transition Year programme and, thereafter, the Leaving Certificate programme.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

- The quality of teaching and learning ranged between good and very good, with very effective facilitation of experiential learning observed.
- Lessons were well structured and paced and the content was appropriate to students' needs and interests.
- The good practice of sharing the learning outcomes with students at the beginning of the lesson was observed. However, these should always be reviewed at the end of the lesson to check students' learning.
- A variety of effective teaching and learning methodologies was used, such as brainstorming, discussion, pair work, group work and the use of a walking debate. Some further refinement of the skills associated with group work is necessary. There was also scope to improve the quality of students' learning through the increased use of differentiated strategies.
- Very good practice was observed when the teacher acted as a facilitator of learning and where students were encouraged to consider and critically evaluate issues during activity-based learning. This practice allows students to develop attitudes as well as expand their knowledge.
- Overall, questions were addressed to the widest possible number of students and required them to develop their answers, thus facilitating the development of higher-order thinking skills.
- A wide range of relevant teaching resources, including teacher-generated materials, was utilised well in lessons. Information and communication technology (ICT) was used in most lessons, predominantly to display learning outcomes. In some lessons, students were given the opportunity to engage with ICT as an interactive learning tool and this is very good.
- Classroom management was very effective and there was a good rapport between teachers and students. Some class groups have agreed and developed a class contract which is on display. This good practice should be more widely used.
- Displays of charts, posters and particularly students' work created stimulating and attractive learning environments and over time, this should be observed by all teachers.
- Elements of assessment were incorporated into lessons mainly through questioning and through the completion of some activities. The process of assessment should be further developed to ensure that there is an agreed and consistent approach to determine students' engagement and learning.
- The SPHE department has developed a template for students' use in evaluating their learning. When implemented, it is important that consistent use is made of this valuable

tool which, if used appropriately, will further develop the skills of reflection among students.

- The quantity and quality of students' written work varied considerably. This work is monitored by some teachers. All teachers should adopt this practice.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- There is very good whole-school support for SPHE. The school is proactive in promoting students' wellbeing and initiatives such as 'Random Acts of Kindness' week and 'Healthy Living' week support students well. In addition, weekly award ceremonies are held which celebrate achievement in a variety of areas, including behaviour.
- Time allocation for SPHE is appropriate and the SPHE programme, including RSE, is provided for all junior cycle students in line with the requirements of Circular Letter M11/03. Planning for the provision of RSE in senior cycle has already been initiated and this is very good.
- The SPHE department has made a very good start regarding the creation or acquisition of resources. These materials should now be catalogued so that all teachers can access them more easily.
- The SPHE teaching team comprises thirteen teachers who are also tutors to their class groups. All have a high level of awareness of their students' learning, social and personal needs.
- As the school expands, this tutor system should be kept under review and the school should examine the feasibility of developing a core team. In the interim, a core planning team should be developed.
- Some teachers have accessed training provided by the SPHE support service and over time, the school reports that all teachers will avail of this support. This is to be encouraged.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

- The school supports collaborative planning and provides time for subject departments to meet. However, very few meetings of the full SPHE team have taken place. Instead, regular meetings of the year head and the corresponding team of tutors take place where, on occasion, discussions about teaching and learning of SPHE have occurred.
- The quality of planning for programme organisation is very good. The SPHE plan contains all the organisational arrangements for the subject along with long-term curriculum plans. The plan should also document attendance at all CPD events.
- The SPHE department is co-ordinated by one teacher in a voluntary capacity. Meticulous attention has been paid to this work.
- Currently, the SPHE plan is devised by the co-ordinator and this commitment is highly commended. However, a departmental approach should be taken to the process so that more members of the team are involved in planning at the initial stages.

- The quality of planning and preparation for the lessons observed was very good. Some lessons were enhanced by cross-curricular links.
- Over time, the SPHE department needs to explore and document all strategies for supporting students' needs regarding literacy and numeracy.

The draft findings and recommendations arising out of this evaluation were discussed with the principal, deputy principal and subject teachers at the conclusion of the evaluation. The board of management of the school was given an opportunity to comment on the findings and recommendations of the report; the board chose to accept the report without response.