

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

**Subject Inspection of Social Personal and Health
Education
REPORT**

**Mercy Secondary School, Goldenbridge
Inchicore, Dublin 8.
Roll number: 60872A**

Date of inspection: 13 March 2013



**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 (SPHE) AND RELATIONSHIPS AND SEXUALITY
EDUCATION (RSE)

INFORMATION ON THE INSPECTION

Dates of inspection	11 and 13 March 2013
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 three class periods• Examination of students' work• Feedback to principal and teachers

MAIN FINDINGS

- The quality of teaching and learning was very good, with some examples of excellent practice noted.
- The experiential learning cycle was evident in all lessons, with a very good variety of teaching strategies used to facilitate students' learning.
- Students were actively engaged and participated confidently in lessons. The lesson activities supported their personal reflection and the ongoing development of their personal and social skills.
- There is very good provision for the school's SPHE programme which incorporates RSE and is provided for all students in each year of junior and senior cycle.
- Significant work has been undertaken in the development of the SPHE/RSE subject plan however, there is no provision for meetings of the subject department at present.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

- A planned systematic approach should be adopted to continuing professional development (CPD) for teachers.
- To facilitate the ongoing development of SPHE, time should be made available for the SPHE teachers to meet at regular intervals as a team.
- An assessment policy for SPHE (incorporating RSE) should be developed and implemented, in line with the whole school assessment policy currently being developed.

INTRODUCTION

Mercy Secondary School, Inchicore, has an enrolment of 173 girls. It offers a range of programmes including the Junior Certificate, the Junior Certificate School Programme (JCSP), a compulsory Transition Year (TY) programme, the established Leaving Certificate, the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP), and Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA). It participates in the Delivering Equality of Opportunity in our Schools (DEIS) initiative.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

- The quality of teaching and learning was very good in all the junior cycle SPHE lessons observed, with examples of excellent practice being noted throughout.
- Lessons were well prepared, and well structured with the experiential learning cycle was evident throughout. A very good range of teaching strategies was used including brainstorming, co-operative learning, class discussion, personal reflection and the creative use of information and communication technology (ICT). These strategies led to all lessons being student-centred, drawing on students' own experiences and contributions.
- Learning outcomes were clearly articulated at the beginning and revisited at the end of most lessons, which enabled good assessment of learning. Lessons were clearly linked to previous learning and contextualisation of the lesson topics was appropriate and effective.
- All lessons were dynamic and well-paced, and content was pitched at an age appropriate level for students. An atmosphere of trust and respect between teachers and students was established. This facilitated a positive supportive learning environment, promoted student engagement and challenged them to think and reflect. Agreed ground rules were clearly visible and these were respected by the students.
- Very good questioning throughout all lessons facilitated class discussion, student reflection and the development of students' communication skills. There were good levels of stimulation and affirmation of student effort. The participation and inclusion of all students was sensitively managed with good differentiation strategies being used.
- A good range of resources including teacher generated resources and ICT were used to stimulate and support the engagement of students with the lesson content.
- Strategies to address literacy and numeracy are referred to in many of the schemes of work and were used during the lessons observed.
- Students were actively engaged in their learning and participated confidently in lessons. Lesson activities supported their personal reflection and the ongoing development of their personal and social skills. They demonstrated good capacities for co-operative learning including respect for each other and good listening and speaking skills. It is recommended that increased opportunities are provided for student-led activities.
- Greater use of formative developmental comment in response to oral and written work is recommended. Home tasks are given which is good practice as it enables continuity to be maintained between lessons. Good progress was evident in students' written work, in first year however, there was less emphasis on the recording of learning and the maintenance of student portfolios in second and third year. The written recording of learning should be facilitated through the introduction of reflection journals for all year groups. Opportunities for student evaluation of learning should be provided at appropriate times,

for example, at end of a module. A system for tracking and recording student progress should be further developed and implemented.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- There is very good subject provision for SPHE which is timetabled for one period per week for each year of junior cycle. RSE is delivered as part of SPHE in line with curricular guidelines in each year of senior cycle including TY, which is very good practice.
- Additional enhanced support in SPHE/RSE is provided for those students with special education needs as needed, which is commended. It is important that this is fully documented in the subject plan.
- Overall, there is good whole school support for SPHE. Teacher deployment is appropriate with very good levels of motivation and self-reflection being evident among the SPHE teachers.
- Management is very supportive of CPD for teachers. It is recommended that a planned systematic approach to CPD for teachers be implemented. Consideration should be given to the provision of whole school in-service on bullying and on SPHE and student welfare.
- A stand alone whole school policy should be developed in relation to visiting speakers to the school and the use of outside agencies, taking account of Circular M23/2010, *SPHE and RSE Best Practice Guidelines for Post-Primary Schools*.
- The development of a whole school assessment policy has been prioritised and it is recommended that an assessment policy for SPHE/RSE is developed and implemented in line with this.
- A good range of whole school co-curricular activities supports and reinforces students' learning in SPHE.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

- Significant work has been undertaken in the development of the SPHE subject plan. To enable opportunities for sharing practice and resources, including ICT, and to facilitate the ongoing development of the SPHE plan, time should be made available for the SPHE teachers to meet at regular intervals as a team. In this context, the role of coordinator should be re-examined, clearly defined and consideration be given to rotating the role on a regular basis.
- The subject plan includes a long term plan and schemes of work for each year. Very good practice was seen in the integrated framework used for schemes of work for third and sixth-year students. This scheme was clearly set out and aligned lesson content with teaching methodologies, cross curricular links, resources, assessment and literacy and numeracy strategies as well as identifying key learning outcomes to be achieved for each term. A common template should be agreed and adopted for use by the subject department for all schemes of work. The nature of the cross-curricular links with other subjects should be made explicit, clearly identifying the actual link. It is recommended that action planning is used to progress the department's priorities.

- A wide range of suitable resources is available to support the SPHE and RSE programmes provided. The provision of ICT resources including presentations and video clips in a shared subject department electronic folder is recommended.

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; a response was not received from the board.