

**An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna**

**Department of Education and Skills**

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

**Loreto Secondary School,  
Letterkenny, County Donegal  
Roll number: 62840U**

**Date of inspection: 6 April 2011**



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

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**INFORMATION ON THE INSPECTION**

<b>Date(s) of inspection</b>	5 & 6 April 2011
<b>Inspection activities undertaken</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Review of relevant documents</li><li>• Discussion with principal and teachers</li><li>• Interaction with students</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Observation of teaching and learning during seven class periods</li><li>• Examination of students' work</li><li>• Feedback to principal and teachers</li></ul>

**MAIN FINDINGS**

- Good quality teaching and learning was evident in all of the lessons observed, with exceptionally good practice noted in a number of lessons.
- A positive and affirming learning environment was noted in all classrooms.
- Students are provided with a broad SPHE programme; however, formal assessment procedures need to be enhanced.
- School management and staff are strongly committed to providing for students' personal and social development.
- There is very good student access to SPHE, though the provision of Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) for some senior cycle students needs review.
- Subject planning is well established with some very good reflective practice noted among the teaching team.

**MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS**

- A common assessment policy that would monitor and acknowledge students' progress in SPHE should be developed and implemented.
  - A whole-school RSE policy in line with Department of Education and Skills Circular Letter 0037/2010 *Relationships and Sexuality Education* should be developed and ratified.
  - Provision for senior cycle RSE should be reviewed to ensure that all senior cycle students have access to a broad and balanced RSE programme in line with Department guidelines.
  - The breadth of the third year SPHE programme should be reviewed in line with the *Junior Cycle SPHE Curriculum Framework* published by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA).
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## **INTRODUCTION**

Loreto Secondary School is an all-girls secondary school with a current enrolment of 938 students. SPHE is a core subject in junior cycle. In senior cycle, SPHE is provided for fifth-year students who are not taking the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP). Some elements of the senior cycle RSE programme are also provided through Religious Education.

## **TEACHING AND LEARNING**

- In all of the lessons observed, there was a high standard of teaching. Very high quality teaching was noted in lessons where the range of strategies chosen facilitated experiential learning with an appropriate focus and balance between knowledge acquisition and skills development among students. Care should be taken to ensure that the SPHE curriculum framework, rather than a textbook, informs the focus of lessons.
- Learning outcomes were shared with students in some lessons. This should be standard practice at the start of all lessons. It is recommended that learning outcomes be revisited during the closing stages of lessons to assess and affirm students' progress.
- In almost all lessons there was a very good balance between teacher-led and student-led activity. Some excellent practice was noted in the use of ice-breaker activities. Active learning was effectively facilitated in a number of lessons through the incorporation of group work, circle time or walking debates. Students displayed a commendable ability to work in collaboration with their peers. Some very good use was made of additional resources and higher-order questioning strategies to deepen students' understanding.
- In all lessons good attention was paid to the ground rules for SPHE lessons. Teachers encouraged and affirmed students' contributions. In a RSE lesson the inclusion of a "secret question box" provided additional opportunities to clarify information in a supportive manner.
- Interaction with students indicated that they are provided with a wide range of learning experiences in SPHE. Some very good work was evident in student copybooks reviewed but the standard and range of written work undertaken varied between classes. The variety of written work undertaken in SPHE should be reviewed. The system of class folders or files used should be also standardised so that all students store and file information from first year through to third year.
- Assessment of students' progress, as observed, tended to be informal through the use of in-class questioning or the monitoring of in-class activities. There needs to be more formal monitoring of students' written work and project work to fully realise its assessment potential. It is recommended that the teaching team agrees a formal assessment policy for SPHE. Particular attention should be given to devising assessment criteria that would form the basis of written feedback on the project work already incorporated into the programme.
- Some notable attention was paid to enhancing literacy skills. Students were encouraged to use the correct terminology during discussions. Flash cards, illustrations and word games were effectively used to emphasise relevant key words.

## **SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT**

- A committed whole-school approach to SPHE is evidenced by the school's participation in projects like the *Healthy Schools Scheme* and by its promotion of positive mental health.
- Appropriate provision is made for junior cycle SPHE. Very good links are established between the SPHE team and class tutors to reinforce SPHE-related issues.
- Provision for senior cycle RSE is not consistent as it is dependent on the programmes and subjects taken by students. The timetabling of fifth-year SPHE facilitates the provision of a broad RSE programme for students not taking the LCVP. However, provision for RSE, in the case of all other senior cycle students should be reviewed to ensure the consistent delivery of a broad RSE programme for all senior cycle students.
- Good deployment practice is evident in assigning teachers to SPHE. Teachers display high levels of enthusiasm for and commitment to SPHE. Very good levels of past engagement with relevant continuing professional development (CPD) have impacted positively on the quality of programme delivery. It is recommended that an analysis of teachers' CPD needs be carried out with a view to future planning.
- A very good range of easily-accessible resources are available for SPHE and RSE. School management is very supportive of any requests made to update materials.
- Whole-school policies in substance use and anti-bullying are in place. There is a need to update the draft RSE policy reviewed during the inspection. Arrangements should be made to develop and ratify a RSE policy in accordance with the guidelines issued in Circular Letter 37/10. All SPHE-related policies should be periodically reviewed as part of school planning procedures.

## **PLANNING AND PREPARATION**

- Subject department planning is well established. The SPHE co-ordinator actively leads ongoing programme development.
- Programme plans have evolved over time, with good quality planning evident for first, second and fifth year students. There is some variation in the implementation of programme plans. This should be addressed to ensure that all classes in each year group are exposed to the same breadth of learning experiences. It is recommended that the breadth of the third-year plan be reviewed to bring it fully into line with the SPHE curriculum framework.
- Planning for the RSE modules is underdeveloped. The topics, including the learning outcomes, covered from first year through to sixth year should be reviewed. The revised plan should support incremental learning and include the complete range of topics as recommended in Department guidelines.
- Excellent reflective practice was noted in some individual teachers' planning folders. This information, along with relevant data collated from students' end-of-topic review forms, should inform the further development of the programme plans.
- School procedures for the use of guest speakers are indicative of good practice. These procedures should be formalised into a policy on visiting speakers in line with Circular Letter 23/10.

- Parents are informed on students' progress in SPHE at parent-teacher meetings. Consideration should be given to using the twice-yearly school report to acknowledge progress. Notification procedures in relation to senior cycle RSE should also be reviewed.

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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.

# **Appendix**

**SCHOOL RESPONSE TO THE REPORT**

**Submitted by the Board of Management**

## **Area 1: Observations on the content of the inspection report**

The Board of Management welcomes this report which commends many of the very good practices in the provision, planning and delivery of SPHE in the school. The recommendations are realistic and will provide a framework for building on the many good practices already in place and thus support the further development of the SPHE and RSE programmes.

In particular, the board is pleased to note the commendation of the work observed during many of the lessons such as the:

- sharing of learning outcomes
- high quality teaching and learning
- use of strategies that facilitated experiential and active learning
- attention paid to enhancing literacy skills.

The board acknowledges the commitment and enthusiasm of the SPHE team of teachers in terms of the work that they do to ensure that students experience high quality SPHE lessons. The board also recognises the dedication of the many teachers and students who are involved in organising the broad range of co-curricular and extracurricular SPHE related activities, at a whole-school level, that support and enhance the work in the classrooms.

## **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 teachers of SPHE are very committed and keen to develop SPHE in the school in line with the recommendations outlined in the report.

Following a meeting of the team to discuss the inspection report, the following follow-up actions were agreed:

- The teachers will review the current programme, with a particular focus on expanding the third year programme, using the SPHE Curriculum Framework as the guide.
- The use of learning outcomes linked to assessment strategies in lessons, and for the SPHE programme as a whole, will be explored as part of planning a common assessment policy for SPHE.
- The RSE policy will be developed in line with CL 0037/2010.
- The NCCA draft curriculum framework for senior cycle SPHE is being used to further develop the senior cycle programme.
- Management will review the timetabling arrangements to ensure that all senior cycle students have access to the full RSE programme in the future.