

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

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

**Margaret Aylward Community College,
Whitehall, Dublin 9
Roll number: 70321P**

Date of inspection: 12 April 2011



**AN ROINN | DEPARTMENT OF
OIDEACHAIS | EDUCATION
AGUS SCILEANNA | AND SKILLS**

REPORT
ON
THE QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN SPHE (INCLUDING
RELATIONSHIPS AND SEXUALITY EDUCATION)

INFORMATION ON THE INSPECTION

Date(s) of inspection	11 & 12 April 2011
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 five class periods• Examination of students' work• Feedback to principal and teachers

MAIN FINDINGS

- Good quality teaching and learning was evident in the lessons observed.
- All lessons were in line with the programme plan but there was scope to extend the range of methodologies to support experiential learning.
- Students are making good progress in SPHE, with a good focus placed on literacy development.
- School management and staff are strongly committed to providing for students' personal and social development.
- Appropriate provision is made for SPHE but provision of senior cycle Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) needs to be reviewed.
- Whole-school policies relating to SPHE are underdeveloped and school practices to support collaborative subject planning need to be enhanced.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

- Whole-school policies in the areas of substance use, RSE and visiting speakers need to be devised and ratified in line with relevant Department of Educational and Skills' Circulars.
 - Provision of senior cycle RSE should be reviewed in line with Department circular 37/10 *Relationships and Sexuality Education*.
 - A senior cycle RSE programme plan needs to be documented and implemented with all Leaving Certificate students.
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INTRODUCTION

Margaret Aylward Community College is an all-girls school under the auspices of City of Dublin Vocational Educational Committee (CDVEC). The school participates in a range of DEIS (Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools) activities to assist in addressing the needs of students who experience educational disadvantage.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

- All lessons had a clear focus with very good attention being paid to literacy development. Links were well established with previous learning. In some lessons learning outcomes were shared with students. It is recommended that learning outcomes are shared in all lessons and revisited during the closing stages to assess and affirm students' progress.
- In some instances active learning was facilitated using small group activities. This is very good practice. Learning was optimised in instances where the information was adequately processed to critically appraise the points raised.
- Good use was made of worksheets to prompt student reflection. However, there was scope to use information and communications technology (ICT) or other visual resources to enhance understanding and avoid an over-reliance on text-based resources.
- Teachers displayed a commendable concern for the students in their care. Best practice in classroom management was in instances where the ground rules for SPHE were consistently enforced. Absenteeism inhibited student progress and punctuality issues impeded learning in some lessons. The effectiveness of whole-school strategies in these areas needs to be monitored.
- Students made good progress in all of the lessons observed. Some good practice was evident in the maintenance of students' written work. This practice needs to be standardised and an agreed system of folders introduced to encourage students to store information from SPHE from first year to third year, as topics are re-visited in each year of the programme.
- Formative assessment of students' progress, as observed, tended to be informal through the use of questioning or the monitoring of in-class activities. Further formative assessment strategies need to be incorporated into lessons. Commendably students complete SPHE learning statements as part of the Junior Certificate School Programme (JCSP). These statements should also be included in students' SPHE copybooks to enhance self-evaluation.
- Student copybooks contained a good range of reflective activities but there needs to be enhanced monitoring of this work to support learning. It is recommended that assessment criteria be devised for the key pieces of work completed in each term. These criteria can inform the feedback provided to students and parents.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- Appropriate timetabled provision is made for junior cycle SPHE.
- Appropriate provision is made for senior cycle RSE in the case of students participating in the Transition Year (TY) programme and the Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA).

However, provision of senior cycle RSE for students taking the established Leaving Certificate is inadequate. It is recommended that RSE provision be reviewed and a RSE programme plan be devised to ensure that all senior cycle students are provided with a curriculum programme containing the complete range of RSE themes as outlined in Department guidelines. A RSE policy should also be devised in accordance with Circular Letter 37/10.

- The core teaching team displays a commendable level of enthusiasm for and commitment to SPHE. Management makes a conscious effort to ensure that teachers remain with their class group for the three years of the programme. This is good practice. Senior management needs to identify additional staff to deliver senior cycle RSE.
- While there has been some level of past engagement with relevant continuing professional development (CPD) some gaps are apparent. An analysis of CPD needs should be undertaken and an action plan implemented to facilitate the incremental upskilling of SPHE and RSE teachers.
- The whole-school substance use policy is a generic document devised at CDVEC level some time ago. It is recommended that this useful document be customised and incorporated into a substance use policy that is in line with Department guidelines and reflects current school practice. This mandatory policy should be ratified by the board as a matter of urgency.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

- While there is a very good level of informal collaboration among the SPHE team there is no formal subject co-ordinator for SPHE. It is recommended that a co-ordinator be appointed and the duties agreed with senior management. There is sufficient capacity and expertise to rotate the position among the teachers of SPHE.
- Formal meeting time is provided at least twice a year. Additional meetings can be facilitated by scheduling dedicated SPHE meetings as part of the calendar of subject meetings. Record-keeping practices need to be consistent to facilitate effective reflective practice.
- The revised junior cycle SPHE programme plan is illustrative of very good practice. Some very good reflective practice was noted on individual teacher copies of the plan. It is recommended that all teachers use the common plan as a working document and note the teaching and assessment strategies, and the resources that proved most effective. This information should then be used to enhance assessment practices and to broaden the range of teaching strategies as recommended earlier in the report. A mechanism whereby students can formally input into a review of the programme should also be considered.
- A broad range of learning experiences is provided through the TY *Babies Project*. A culture of self-evaluation and reflective practice informs the ongoing development of this programme.
- An interesting range of whole-school activities support students' social and personal development. These activities should be incorporated into the SPHE and RSE programme plans to ensure that the topics covered in lessons before and after these activities supports student learning. A whole-school policy on the use of visiting speakers should be devised in line with Circular Letter 0023/2010.

- A good range of easily-accessible resources is available for SPHE. School management is very supportive of any requests made to update materials.
 - Good quality planning was evident for all lessons. At times there was an over-emphasis on teacher-led activities. It is recommended therefore that a broader range of teaching strategies be used to facilitate the active engagement of all students and to support the varying student learning styles.
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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 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.