

**An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills**

**Subject Inspection in Social Personal and Health Education
(SPHE)**

REPORT

Ainm na scoile / School name	St. Mary's C.B.S.
Seoladh na scoile / School address	Borris Road Portlaoise Co. Laois
Uimhir rolla / Roll number	63430G

Date of Inspection: 04-10-2017



WHAT IS A SUBJECT INSPECTION?

Subject Inspections report on the quality of work in individual curriculum areas within a school. They affirm good practice and make recommendations, where appropriate, to aid the further development of the subject in the school.

HOW TO READ THIS REPORT

During this inspection, the inspector evaluated learning and teaching in Social Personal and Health Education (SPHE) under the following headings:

1. Teaching, learning and assessment
2. Subject provision and whole-school support
3. Planning and preparation

Inspectors describe the quality of each of these areas using the Inspectorate's quality continuum which is shown on the final page of this report. The quality continuum provides examples of the language used by inspectors when evaluating and describing the quality of the school's provision in each area.

SUBJECT INSPECTION

INSPECTION ACTIVITIES

Dates of inspection	03 & 04-10-2017
Inspection activities undertaken <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Review of relevant documents• Discussion with principal and key staff• 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

School context

St Mary's CBS is an all boys' Catholic voluntary secondary school, under the trusteeship of the Edmund Rice Schools Trust (ERST). The school provides the Junior Certificate, an optional Transition Year (TY) programme, the established Leaving Certificate, and the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme. At the time of the evaluation the school had an enrolment of 864 boys.

SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

Findings

- The quality of teaching and learning in the majority of lessons observed was good or very good, with scope for development in a few lessons.
- Active and collaborative student learning was facilitated in all lessons.
- Assessment was good in most lessons.
- Whole-school support for SPHE is very good, and much attention is paid to the welfare of students.
- The SPHE team, comprising eighteen teachers who act as tutors to the groups they teach, is very large.
- The standard of planning and the co-ordination of the SPHE department are both very good, however teachers relied on the textbook in the planning of some lessons.

Recommendations

- Teachers should refine the skills and strategies associated with pair-work and group-work, and the layout of classrooms should be reviewed to facilitate more effective student collaboration.
- The current model for delivery of SPHE by all class tutors in junior cycle should be kept under ongoing review, with an emphasis on its effectiveness in delivering high quality teaching and learning in the subject.
- Teachers should avail of continuing professional development (CPD) for SPHE, as soon as is practicable, and in the interim should make full use of existing expertise within the department; this should lead to less reliance on the textbook.

DETAILED FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. TEACHING, LEARNING, AND ASSESSMENT

- The quality of teaching and learning in the majority of lessons was good or very good, with scope for development in a few areas.
- Overall, lessons were very well prepared. A wide range of relevant teaching resources was generally utilised well in lessons. The textbook was used to varying degrees in most lessons. This was most effective where its use was appropriately balanced with high quality teacher-generated materials.
- Good classroom management was observed in most lessons, and a very good rapport was noted between teachers and students overall. This was particularly evident in lessons that were well structured and paced, where students were appropriately challenged, and where directions for activities were clear. In line with good practice, all class groups have created an agreed class contract, which was on display in most classrooms.
- The good practice of sharing the learning outcomes with students from the outset was observed in most lessons. This was most effective where time was given to review the intended outcome at the end of the lesson, to check and consolidate students' learning.
- Students were generally informed about the content of forthcoming lessons, which is very good practice. A review of prior learning was facilitated in the majority of lessons
- Collaborative learning opportunities were facilitated in all lessons through whole-class discussion, group-work or pair-work. Student engagement in collaboration was very good overall, however greater structure and further refinement of the skills associated with group-work is necessary in some instances. Classroom layout was conducive to small group-work activities in most instances, however consideration should be given to the facilitation of face-to-face contact for larger group discussions.
- Active and experiential learning opportunities were facilitated by teachers through individual and group activities, which is good practice. Student engagement and enjoyment was generally very good during activity-based learning, and this was most effective where they were appropriately challenged to consider and critically evaluate issues.
- Displays of students' work were seen in the 'SPHE corner' of most classrooms, and over time this should be developed to include charts and posters relating to SPHE and Wellbeing.
- A system has been established by all teachers for students to store their work in portfolios and, in line with good practice, these materials are kept by the teachers. Some monitoring of this work was noted, and in a few instances this included written formative feedback. This should be further developed.
- Elements of assessment were incorporated into all lessons observed, mainly through questioning and through feedback from students during plenary sessions after some activities.
- Effective questioning was noted in most lessons and every effort was made by teachers to address questions to the widest possible number of students. The most effective use of questioning was noted in lessons where students were required to use higher-order thinking skills to develop their answers more fully, and to formulate, express and debate opinions.
- Homework for students to reflect on their learning was assigned in almost all lessons, using the 'Learning Keepsake' in workbooks, and commendably these are signed by parents.
- Keywords were referenced appropriately in most lessons, in line with the school's literacy strategy.

2. SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- Whole-school support for SPHE is very good, and leadership for learning in the subject is effective. The school is proactive in promoting students' wellbeing through a very good range of events, guest speakers, and initiatives such as the Amber Flag and 'Mental Health' week.
- In junior cycle, SPHE is delivered by the individual class tutors for each class group. This new approach has seen the small core team expanded to eighteen teachers this year. Management provided a clear rationale for combining the tutor system with the delivery of SPHE as part of the care strategy, and the teachers involved expressed a high level of commitment and enthusiasm for the approach.
- The current model for delivery of SPHE by all class tutors in junior cycle should be kept under ongoing review, and its effectiveness examined at the end of the year. The review should take cognisance of the need to maximise the expertise of teachers in the delivery of highly effective learning for students in SPHE, as well as the efficacy of the tutor role in this context.
- Time allocation for SPHE, including relationship and sexuality education (RSE), is provided for all junior cycle students in line with the requirements of Circular Letter M11/03.
- The subject plan indicates that six to eight weeks is taken each year from the religious education (RE) programme to deliver RSE in senior cycle. The RSE policy should be updated to reflect this. Commendably, elements of SPHE are also incorporated into the senior cycle RE programme.
- A few teachers have accessed training for delivery of SPHE, and the school management reports that all teachers will avail of CPD over time. This is to be encouraged. In the interim teachers should make use of the existing expertise within the department through internal CPD and peer collaboration.

3. PLANNING AND PREPARATION

- The school supports subject planning and provides significant time for the SPHE department to meet. This is good practice. A subject co-ordinator is in place and this role is rotated, and minutes of meetings indicate
- The overall standard of planning for SPHE is very good. Appropriate links with relevant school policies, and with the pastoral care and guidance programmes are documented.
- A three-year plan for junior cycle has been devised collaboratively by the core team. This is spiral and developmental, and detailed programmes of work have been developed to include intended learning outcomes for all topics, and methodologies to deliver content and assess learning. In addition, new schemes of work have been developed this year to align with the textbook.
- Commendably, an agreed approach to SPHE assessment, which encourages teachers to evaluate and keep records of students' progress, is outlined in the subject plan. Approaches include a range of assessment for learning (AfL) strategies, assignment of homework, and assessment of portfolio and project-work.
- The SPHE department has prepared a very good range of material resources over time and these can be accessed by all teachers on the school's share drive.

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.

THE INSPECTORATE'S QUALITY CONTINUUM

Inspectors describe the quality of provision in the school using the Inspectorate's quality continuum which is shown below. The quality continuum provides examples of the language used by inspectors when evaluating and describing the of quality the school's provision of each area.

Level	Description	Example of descriptive terms
Very Good	Very good applies where the quality of the areas evaluated is of a very high standard. The very few areas for improvement that exist do not significantly impact on the overall quality of provision. For some schools in this category the quality of what is evaluated is outstanding and provides an example for other schools of exceptionally high standards of provision.	Very good; of a very high quality; very effective practice; highly commendable; very successful; few areas for improvement; notable; of a very high standard. Excellent; outstanding; exceptionally high standard, with very significant strengths; exemplary
Good	Good applies where the strengths in the areas evaluated clearly outweigh the areas in need of improvement. The areas requiring improvement impact on the quality of pupils' learning. The school needs to build on its strengths and take action to address the areas identified as requiring improvement in order to achieve a <i>very good</i> standard.	Good; good quality; valuable; effective practice; competent; useful; commendable; good standard; some areas for improvement
Satisfactory	Satisfactory applies where the quality of provision is adequate. The strengths in what is being evaluated just outweigh the shortcomings. While the shortcomings do not have a significant negative impact they constrain the quality of the learning experiences and should be addressed in order to achieve a better standard.	Satisfactory; adequate; appropriate provision although some possibilities for improvement exist; acceptable level of quality; improvement needed in some areas
Fair	Fair applies where, although there are some strengths in the areas evaluated, deficiencies or shortcomings that outweigh those strengths also exist. The school will have to address certain deficiencies without delay in order to ensure that provision is satisfactory or better.	Fair; evident weaknesses that are impacting on pupils' learning; less than satisfactory; experiencing difficulty; must improve in specified areas; action required to improve
Weak	Weak applies where there are serious deficiencies in the areas evaluated. Immediate and coordinated whole-school action is required to address the areas of concern. In some cases, the intervention of other agencies may be required to support improvements.	Weak; unsatisfactory; insufficient; ineffective; poor; requiring significant change, development or improvement; experiencing significant difficulties;