

**An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna**

**Department of Education and Skills**

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

**Blackrock College  
Blackrock, Co. Dublin  
Roll number: 60030V**

**Date of inspection: 22 November 2013**



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

**REPORT**  
**ON**  
**THE QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN SOCIAL, PERSONAL AND**  
**HEALTH EDUCATION (SPHE) AND RELATIONSHIP AND SEXUALITY**  
**EDUCATION (RSE)**

---

**INFORMATION ON THE INSPECTION**

<b>Dates of inspection</b>	18, 20 and 22 November 2013
<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 six class periods</li><li>• Examination of students' work</li><li>• Feedback to principal and teachers</li></ul>

**MAIN FINDINGS**

- The quality of teaching and learning ranged from good to very good, with examples of very good practice evident in every lesson.
- All lessons facilitated students' active participation and the high quality of student engagement supported their personal and social development and health education.
- School management is very committed to sustaining a positive whole school climate and environment supportive of SPHE.
- Senior cycle RSE is taught as an integrated module in the Religious Education (RE) programme in fifth and sixth year.
- Very good subject planning is being undertaken which is being led effectively by an experienced SPHE co-ordinator.

**MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS**

- A systematic planned and incremental approach to continuing professional development (CPD) provision for teachers should be adopted with priority being given to teachers new to teaching SPHE and to senior-cycle RSE teachers.
- The content and learning outcomes of the RSE programme for senior cycle groups should be examined to ensure alignment with the themes in the *Interim Guidelines for RSE*.
- SPHE learning outcomes should be reviewed with a focus on skills development and on the emphases of the Junior Cycle syllabus.

## **INTRODUCTION**

Blackrock College is a voluntary secondary fee-paying school for boys. It has an enrolment of 998 students from second year to sixth year. It offers programmes in Junior Certificate and the established Leaving Certificate as well as a mandatory Transition Year (TY) programme.

## **TEACHING AND LEARNING**

- Teaching and learning ranged from good to very good, with examples of very good practice evident in every lesson. A wide and varied range of effective teaching strategies were used including pair work and group work, brainstorming, and class discussions.
- Lessons were well planned, well prepared and purposeful. Continuity with prior learning was effectively highlighted. The active experiential learning cycle was evident and the emphasis on teaching through all the phases of the active experiential learning cycle should be continued. A greater focus on skills development should be incorporated into all lessons and modules.
- Very good practice was evident when learning outcomes were clearly stated, and revisited as part of the summarisation and consolidation of learning. Several very good creative student-centred activities were observed and the further development of student-led activities would be beneficial.
- Information and communication technology (ICT) was used very effectively and creatively to stimulate and motivate student engagement. In addition to ICT, a good variety of resources including teacher generated resources, worksheets and textbooks were effectively used to support and enhance learning.
- Students actively engaged in lesson activities, responding well to questions and contributing confidently in group and class discussions. Students demonstrated good communication and listening skills and showed capacity for effective co-operative learning. Overall, very good rapport was observed between teachers and students which facilitated a purposeful supportive atmosphere. Students were listened to and commendable affirmation and oral formative feedback was provided by their teachers.
- A strong emphasis on the development of students' oral proficiency and very good use of subject specific terminology contributed to the development of students' literacy. Relevant explicit attention was given to numeracy in one lesson. The incorporation of agreed literacy and numeracy strategies into all lessons should be further extended.
- Classroom layout effectively facilitated pair and small group work. All classrooms lacked a facility for the display of students' work, and SPHE related material including the SPHE ground rules. These limitations are currently being addressed.
- Very effective use of questioning was evident which promoted student reflection and thinking as well as facilitating the assessment of their learning.
- To facilitate continuity between lessons, the setting of a home task is recommended. A consistent approach by all teachers needs to be developed in relation to monitoring written work. Written formative feedback on significant pieces of written work is recommended. Students' progress is tracked and monitored and a comment on individual student's progress is sent home on a monthly basis.

- A consistent approach should be agreed and adopted by all teachers regarding the completion of the learning logs provided in students' textbooks. The development and use of student learning journals and portfolios should be further progressed.

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

- There is good provision for SPHE which is timetabled for second and third-year students for one lesson per week in line with Circular M11/03.
- RSE is taught as part of an integrated SPHE programme in junior cycle and as a three week module in TY. RSE is delivered as an integrated module in the RE programme in fifth and sixth year by the RE department, informed by the school's ethos and facilitating the views of students. Access to the TRUST resource for RSE should be facilitated by school management.
- There is very good whole school support and provision for the well-being and welfare of all students. Key policies are in place which support the content of SPHE and RSE programmes and school management is committed to sustaining a positive whole school environment supportive of SPHE. The guidance plan has been reviewed and updated in the last year to take account of the guidance on *Wellbeing in Post-Primary Schools*. Very good collaborative links are maintained between the SPHE and RSE departments through their representation on the school's Guidance team which meets regularly.
- There is very good deployment of teachers to teach junior cycle SPHE and a core team of committed reflective teachers has been established.
- School management is supportive of training and the development of teachers' knowledge and skills. A systematic and incremental approach to CPD provision for teachers including attendance at refresher courses should be adopted. The RSE teachers should also attend relevant SPHE and RSE training.
- A range of relevant co-curricular activities relating to SPHE are held and an SPHE awareness day is planned which will further support and reinforce learning. Bullying Awareness Days are held biannually which will be augmented by a Mental Health Awareness Day in the coming academic year. The school also has an annual Addiction Awareness Week and could explore gaining recognition as a health promoting school.

#### **PLANNING AND PREPARATION**

- Very good subject planning is being undertaken by an active subject department which is led effectively by an experienced SPHE co-ordinator. There is good provision for formal meetings. Priorities are identified as part of forward planning and a comprehensive review is undertaken at the end of each year which is commendable practice.
- Considerable progress has been made in the development of common schemes of work for junior cycle and TY. The integrated framework adopted for SPHE should be progressed to incorporate a clearly identified weekly timeframe together with methodologies, literacy and numeracy strategies, cross-curricular links, and assessment strategies. Common schemes of work using this integrated framework should be developed for the senior cycle RSE programme.
- The content and learning outcomes of the RSE programme for senior cycle should be examined to ensure alignment with Circular 27/2008, the *Interim Curriculum and*

*Guidelines for RSE and the Senior Cycle Draft Curriculum Framework.* To augment the well-established collaborative links, joint planning between the RE subject department and the SPHE subject department should be facilitated by school management.

- The further development of the SPHE assessment policy should also be prioritised as this would strengthen the delivery of a holistic junior cycle SPHE programme. SPHE learning outcomes would benefit from being reviewed with a focus on skills development and alignment with the Junior Cycle syllabus. At least three key skills should be identified to be focused on and developed for each year of the programme
- Very good provision of resources, including shared electronic resources is facilitated. The planned addition of the TRUST resource would further enhance the delivery of RSE in senior cycle.

---

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.