



An Roinn Oideachais
Department of Education

Subject Inspection: Social Personal and Health Education (SPHE) Report

REPORT

Ainm na scoile/School name	Blackrock College
Seoladh na scoile/School address	Blackrock College Co Dublin
Uimhir rolla/Roll number	60030V
Dáta na cigireachta/ Date of evaluation	04/10/2024
Dáta eisiúna na tuairisce/Date of issue of report	17/12/2024

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(s) 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.

Included in this subject inspection report is a student-friendly page that provides information for the children/young people in your school about the inspection that occurred recently. It outlines for them some of the main findings and recommendations.

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.

Actions of the school to safeguard children and prevent and tackle bullying

During the inspection visit, the following checks in relation to the school's child protection and anti-bullying procedures were conducted:	
<i>Child Protection</i>	<i>Anti-bullying</i>
<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. The name of the DLP and the Child Safeguarding Statement are prominently displayed near the main entrance to the school.2. The Child Safeguarding Statement has been ratified by the board and includes an annual review and a risk assessment.3. All teachers visited reported that they have read the Child Safeguarding Statement and that they are aware of their responsibilities as mandated persons.	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. The school has developed an anti-bullying policy that meets the requirements of the <i>Anti-Bullying Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools (2013)</i> or <i>Bí Cineálta (2024)</i> and this policy is reviewed annually.2. The school's current anti-bullying policy is published on its website and/or is readily accessible to board of management members, teachers, parents and students.

The school met the requirements in relation to each of the checks above.

Subject inspection

Date of inspection	04/10/2024
Inspection activities undertaken <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Review of relevant documents• Discussion with principal and key staff• Interaction with students, including focus groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Observation of teaching and learning during five lessons• Examination of students' work• Feedback to principal and relevant staff

School context

Blackrock College is a day and boarding post-primary school for boys, which operates under the trusteeship of the Spiritan Education Trust. With a current enrolment of 1051 boys, the school offers the Junior Cycle from second year, while students complete first year in Willow Park School on the same campus. In senior cycle the school offers a compulsory Transition Year (TY), and the established Leaving Certificate.

Summary of main findings and recommendations:

Findings

- The overall quality of teaching, learning and assessment in the observed lessons was very good.
- Social Personal and Health Education (SPHE) teachers promoted learning for wellbeing by creating classroom environments where interactions with and between students were warm and respectful.
- Teachers facilitated very good opportunities for student collaboration in all lessons, but classroom layout was not optimal for student engagement.
- The overall quality of timetabling provision and whole-school support for SPHE was very good.
- A small core team of teachers delivered SPHE; the team met regularly and were passionate about teaching the subject.
- The overall quality of planning for junior cycle and TY SPHE was very good; planning for Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) in leaving certificate was good with a few areas in need of improvement.

Recommendations

- To further enhance students' experiences and learning in lessons, the SPHE department should consider approaches to building a print rich environment, including opportunities for students to showcase their work. They should also develop an agreed approach to classroom structures to ensure that layout is more conducive to student collaboration.
- RSE teachers should collaboratively develop the subject plan further, including the development of units of learning, ensuring that all elements of the RSE curriculum are implemented separately from the delivery of Religious Education (RE), and that all students access RSE lessons.

Detailed findings and recommendations

1. Teaching, learning and assessment

- The quality of teaching and learning in the lessons observed was very good.
- The intended learning was shared in all lessons. This practice was most effective when students' understanding of learning intentions was checked and reviewed to consolidate learning. To build on the highly effective practice seen in most lessons, teachers should co-create success criteria with students.
- All teachers promoted learning for wellbeing by creating classroom environments where interactions with and between students were warm and respectful. Meditations and movement breaks were incorporated into most lessons that effectively supported wellbeing.
- Class contracts developed by students were referenced frequently to remind students of their responsibilities in SPHE lessons. In one lesson these were available on students' desks. Building on this good practice, consideration should be given to displaying the contracts and other student work in the classroom to showcase their learning in SPHE and RSE. Teachers should consider means to building an environment that is print rich with both student work and subject related materials to enhance learning.
- Teachers took a range of highly effective approaches to delivering SPHE and RSE. Appropriately selected videos were used to support students understanding of topics and to prompt discussion. Worksheets and booklets were used very effectively to focus students' attention and to record new learning.
- Teachers facilitated collaborative work in all lessons. This was most effective where they implemented structures such as the assignment of roles within groups and timeframes for completion of tasks. While teachers encouraged students to move furniture to facilitate face-to-face discussion, the layout of most classrooms was not conducive to student collaboration. To maximise student participation, engagement and learning from group activities, teachers should review the layout of furniture in classrooms.
- In most lessons teachers provided opportunities for plenary sessions following activities. This was most effective when adequate time was given for students to share their views and to debate and discuss ideas. This approach supported students to develop attitudes and values through the experiential learning cycle. To build on this, students should be facilitated to consider how they could apply their learning to new contexts, empowering them to take ownership of their own decision making.
- Teachers utilised effective formative assessment strategies, such as high quality questioning, reflection tasks, and digital feedback to evaluate student progress and understanding. Teachers provided very good verbal feedback that supported student learning during lessons.
- Overall, students engaged well in asking and answering questions. Student responses to questions indicated very good knowledge and understanding of topics. Students demonstrated confidence and thoughtfulness in their responses, particularly in lessons where they were encouraged to be themselves and where they felt assured of confidentiality. In the best lessons, teachers encouraged students to think critically. To build on the very good questioning strategies in place, teachers should consider methods to glean answers from a wider range of students, and challenge responses to develop attitudes and values.
- Very good communication was provided to parents and students regarding progress in SPHE. Students were formally assessed regularly through individual and group tasks and projects. Students received weekly and monthly report cards which keep students and parents informed of progress. More detailed written feedback was provided termly.
- Students used digital devices effectively in most lessons to research topics and to collaborate. In some instances where all students in groups were using devices, this acted as a barrier to communication. In order to set healthy habits regarding face-to-face communication, the place of digital devices in groupwork should be reviewed to ensure that communication skills such as eye contact and body language are optimised.

2. Subject provision and whole school support

- The overall quality of subject provision and whole-school support was very good. All students had access to appropriate class contact time in both junior and senior cycle.
- In line with good practice, a small core team of teachers delivered junior cycle SPHE. Management assigned lessons to teachers with a passion and aptitude for the subject, and teachers were consistently timetabled for the subject. This ensured very good capacity building and experience within the subject department. In most instances teachers taught either second or third year SPHE. To ensure continuity, teachers should be timetabled to teach the same class group throughout junior cycle where feasible.
- A larger team of RE teachers was delivering RSE to leaving certificate students. Students reported that not all students access RSE in senior cycle if they do choir or are involved in certain TY activities. This needs to be addressed. It is commendable that a timetable review committee had been set up in the school to examine the most appropriate means to maximise timetabled provision across all subjects. The committee should work with SPHE and RSE teachers to consider the most effective way of delivering senior cycle RSE to ensure that all relevant topics are learned by all students.
- School management was highly supportive of teachers' professional learning (TPL) and had facilitated teachers to attend training provided by the support services, as well as post-graduate training in DCU.
- A draft RSE policy was in place. In line with guidelines it provided clarity regarding how and when RSE was to be provided in both junior and senior cycle. Specific topics to be covered should also be documented.
- A wide range of supplementary initiatives was provided to support and enhance SPHE. This included highly effective whole-school initiatives such as the Wellbeing team comprising staff and students, wellbeing weeks, and retreats for personal development. Wellbeing related student leadership opportunities were provided through class captains, and the *Auxilium* community service programme.

3. Planning and preparation

- Very good planning was in place for junior cycle SPHE. A long term plan outlined subject strands and units of learning based on relevant learning outcomes. Students reported that they would benefit from learning about relationships earlier in second year and study skills at a later stage. Consideration should be given to the sequence in which units are delivered, with a degree of flexibility to address arising issues.
- The SPHE department used a very good range of appropriate resources to design lessons, including the FUSE anti-bullying programme. In line with good practice, these resources were targeted to meet the needs of the students in the school.
- The RSE coordinator for TY had developed highly effective plans for the delivery of RSE in TY. These included units of learning that focused on the importance of respectful interactions and awareness of their roles and responsibilities regarding relationships.
- The long term subject plan for the senior cycle RSE indicated that all key topics were included. Teachers had compiled a range of useful resources to support learning. However, units of learning had not yet been developed and sixth year planning for RSE overlapped with RE. This should be addressed.
- Co-ordinators were in place for all programmes. The position of co-ordinator from within the core team rotated on a regular basis, fostering ownership of the subject and building leadership capacity within the SPHE department.
- The core SPHE team met regularly on a formal and informal basis and minutes of meetings indicated very good discussion of key topics including TPL, subject resources and subject planning. Management ensured that sufficient time was provided to facilitate all SPHE teachers to meet and plan collaboratively.

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.



An Roinn Oideachais
Department of Education

**For the students of Blackrock
College about their learning in
SPHE**

Date of inspection: 4/10/2024

What kind of inspection did your school have?



A subject inspection was completed in your school. The inspector observed lessons and spoke with the principal and teachers. The inspector met with a group of students to talk to them about their learning in SPHE.

What were the main findings of the inspection?



- Teaching, learning and assessment was very good.
- Students and teachers worked together respectfully in lessons.
- Students had very good opportunities to work together in lessons but the layout of the classroom made this more difficult.
- SPHE lessons were very well planned, especially in junior cycle.

What did the inspector recommend to make teaching and learning better in Subject?



- Teachers should display SPHE materials and student work to make classrooms more attractive.
- Teachers should move the furniture in the room so that students can work together more easily.
- Teachers should make sure that all students can attend all RSE lessons in senior cycle.

**Thank you for taking the time to read this page.
Special thanks to the students who participated in the focus group.**

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 quality of the school's provision of each area.

Level	Description	Examples of descriptive terms
Excellent	Provision that is excellent is exemplary in meeting the needs of learners. This provision provides an example for other schools and settings of exceptionally high standards of provision.	Excellent; exemplary; outstanding; exceptionally high standard; with very significant strengths
Very good	Provision that is very good is very effective in meeting the needs of learners and is of a very high standard. There is potential to build on existing strengths to achieve an excellent standard.	Very good; of a very high quality; very effective practice; highly commendable; very successful
Good	Provision that is good is effective in meeting the needs of learners. There is need to build on existing strengths in order to address the aspects to be developed and achieve a very good standard.	Good; of good quality; effective practice; competent; useful; commendable; good standard; strengths outweigh the shortcomings; appropriate provision although some possibilities for improvement exist
Requires improvement to achieve a good standard	Provision that requires improvement to achieve a good standard is not sufficiently effective in meeting the needs of learners. There is need to address certain deficiencies without delay in order to ensure that provision is good or better.	Fair; less than effective; less than sufficient; evident weaknesses that are impacting on learning; experiencing difficulty; shortcomings outweigh strengths; must improve in specified areas; action required to improve
Requires significant improvement to achieve a good standard	Provision that requires significant improvement to achieve a good standard is not meeting the needs of learners. There is immediate need for significant action to address the areas of concern.	Weak; poor; ineffective; insufficient; unacceptable; experiencing significant difficulties; serious deficiencies in the areas evaluated; requiring significant change, development and improvement to be effective