

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

**Subject Inspection of Civic Social and Political
Education (CSPE)
REPORT**

**Saint Conleth's College
Ballsbridge, Dublin 4
Roll number: 60590N**

Date of inspection: 15 December 2009



REPORT
ON
THE QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN CIVIC SOCIAL AND
POLITICAL EDUCATION (CSPE)

SUBJECT INSPECTION REPORT

This report has been written following a subject inspection in St Conleth's College, Ballsbridge. It presents the findings of an evaluation of the quality of teaching and learning in CSPE and makes recommendations for the further development of the teaching of this subject in the school. The evaluation was conducted over three days during which the inspector visited classrooms and observed teaching and learning. The inspector interacted with students and teachers, examined students' work, and had discussions with the teachers. The inspector reviewed school planning documentation and teachers' written preparation. Following the evaluation visit, the inspector provided oral feedback on the outcomes of the evaluation to the principal and subject coordinator. 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.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

St Conleth's College is a voluntary secondary school with 122 male students in junior cycle. The study of CSPE is compulsory for all students at junior cycle. Incoming first-year students and their parents are informed about CSPE as part of the discussions at induction meetings where all aspects of the secondary school curriculum are explained. It is good practice to make parents and students aware of the demands and expectations of a subject that may be less familiar than others. Students are taught in mixed-ability groupings. This is good practice.

There is generally good whole-school provision for CSPE in relation to the allocation of time and timetabling. All classes have one period per week for the subject. However, there is currently one first-year CSPE lesson where, for a number of weeks in the year, students are permitted to leave class early for rugby training. Given that CSPE only has one period per week, this results in students missing a significant portion of instruction time. This needs to be addressed.

Teachers are normally assigned to CSPE on the basis of suitability and availability. Efforts are also made to ensure that, where possible, students retain the same teacher throughout the three years of junior cycle and that the teacher has the same class for another subject. This is commended as it allows for flexibility in changing around lessons when carrying out or completing action projects.

There are currently four teachers of CSPE, one of whom is a PGDE student. They are all Arts graduates and some have also taken further studies relevant to the CSPE syllabus. In order to keep up to date with best practice in relation to CSPE, all teachers should avail of the in-service

provided by the Second Level Support Service (SLSS) in addition to downloading CSPE related information on the SLSS website (www.slss.ie).

Some teachers have their own base room, while others have to avail of the classrooms allocated to them for the lesson. To support students in their learning it is recommended that a CSPE environment be developed in the teacher-based classrooms and that access to these rooms be made available to the other teachers whenever possible. Otherwise, a CSPE notice board should be created and displayed in a prominent place in the school. A print-rich CSPE environment should include posters relating to the different concepts being studied, photographs of relevant political and international figures, posters of the various celebratory days in the international calendar and projects completed by students.

There is good whole-school provision for resources. An annual budget, which is determined following a request submitted by the subject co-ordinator, is provided for the purchase of supplementary materials by the CSPE department. Teaching materials include videos, DVDs, CD ROMs and work packs sent to schools by various voluntary and non-governmental agencies. These resources are currently stored in the co-ordinator's locker, but are freely available to all teachers of the subject. Secure storage is also provided for students' examination work in the principal's office. Information and communication technology (ICT) has been embraced by some teachers as a tool for teaching and learning. Given the wealth of resources available on the internet it is recommended that all teachers use ICT to support their work in the classroom.

As part of the CSPE programme talks are organised for students on issues of road safety and the local Garda liaison officer is invited to speak to junior-cycle students. Work completed as part of the students' action projects has contributed to improving the school environment in the recent past. Parents have also volunteered to speak to students on a range of issues. Active citizenship, which is central to the aims of the CSPE programme, is fostered in the school through raising students' awareness of community, national, third-world and environmental issues. Students are encouraged to engage in community work in an adjacent nursing home and convent and members of the St Vincent de Paul have been invited to speak to the students. The school has also been very active in promoting fair trade within the school and fundraising takes place on an ongoing basis for some of the Third World agencies. While many of these activities are not directly part of the CSPE programme, students' involvement in fundraising activities indicates the scope for cross-curricular influence in promoting active citizenship. The overall commitment of school management, staff and students to active citizenship is highly commended.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

Teachers of CSPE meet formally at the beginning of the school year. Further meetings are facilitated each term and minutes are recorded. This is good practice. There is a subject co-ordinator, a position which is voluntary and rotates. Consideration should be given to releasing the subject co-ordinator for in-service for co-ordinators of CSPE.

Documentation submitted during the course of the evaluation indicates that subject planning for CSPE is still at a very early stage of development. It is therefore recommended that the subject plan be progressed forthwith and that teachers work collaboratively to establish the desired learning outcomes for CSPE for each year group in terms of 'can do' statements. The subject plan should also include the school context, proposed methodologies, assessment protocols, planning for action projects and proposed events, outings and speakers for the year. It is further

recommended that teachers work together as a group to identify and catalogue their resources and materials in terms of the different concepts.

There was evidence of careful preparation for most of the lessons observed. There was one instance however, where better preparation would have enhanced the structure and purposefulness of the lesson.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

Inspection activities involved the observation of four lessons, one in first year, two in second year and one in third year. Interaction with the students and a review of their copybooks was also facilitated.

Most teachers began by communicating the lesson plan to the students. This good practice should be extended to all lessons and communicated in terms of the proposed learning outcomes for the lesson as this will engage students from the outset. All students were reminded at the beginning of the lesson of the concept being studied. This is also commended.

Some lessons were very well structured and appropriately paced. However, there was one instance where greater clarity in relation to the intended learning outcomes would have resulted in a more structured lesson thereby enhancing more focused learning. One lesson began with an update on progress in relation to the students' action projects. This is good practice as it ensures that students are working on their projects in the interim. However, as an update, it is suggested that it be kept short and focused so that new learning can be progressed.

Question and answer sessions were effectively used in all lessons to reinforce previous learning and to elicit student knowledge and opinions in relation to the topic being studied. Some of the higher order questions asked evoked good responses and facilitated good student engagement. It is recommended that the use of more focused higher order questions be extended in some lessons.

Very good practice was observed in one lesson where a brainstorming approach was used to introduce a new topic and to make students aware of how much they already knew about the subject in question. To further extend the benefits of this commendable practice, students could also be asked to brainstorm in small groups. Pair work was also observed in some lessons. The use of pair or group work is commended as it actively engages the students in their own learning. However, it was noted that some students completed the assigned tasks individually rather than in their groups. When planning for pair or group work, it is important to keep in mind whether the assigned tasks benefit from interaction or whether it is more fulfilling for the students to complete them as an individual task.

ICT was used in some of the lessons observed. In one instance students watched a short video clip on the subject of fair trade as a means of recapping on previous work. While the use of ICT for such purposes is commended, the use of supporting worksheets is recommended to optimise the benefits of this valuable resource.

Examination preparation was the focus in some of the lessons observed. While this is an important aspect of the learning process it is recommended that work on examination papers should be carried out as an outcome of learning rather than dictating it.

Students were very well behaved throughout and most of them applied themselves to the work of the lesson. Student responses in many instances indicated a very good understanding of the

concepts being studied in addition to a broad knowledge of world events. This was also evident in their interactions with the inspector. There were some lessons however, where the teacher's attention remained focused on those students willing to respond to questions, thereby enabling others to disengage from the work in hand without being noticed. This needs to be addressed as many of the lessons were teacher-directed with question and answer sessions as the dominant methodology. To this end teachers need to target all students when engaging in question and answer sessions. Greater use of active methodologies engaging all of the students is also recommended in lessons where it is not currently happening.

ASSESSMENT

A review of assessment protocols for CSPE indicates some variations in practice. There was one lesson where the examination of students' copybooks indicated good evidence of homework being assigned and corrected. Students in another class reported that they answered their homework in their books of examination papers, while other students had group copybooks for the completion of the action projects. However, a significant number of students had no record of work completed in class or at home. Furthermore a review of student journals indicated that students are not recording homework assignments for CSPE. Given the nature of the subject it is recognised that both class and homework assignments may differ from the traditional format of note taking and exercises. However, a record of work is needed by all students to support them in their learning and revision. To this end it is recommended that the teachers of CSPE work together to devise protocols for the effective recording and monitoring of student work. Students should keep a CSPE diary in which they record the main points covered in each lesson. They should also record all homework assignments and include a written record of the outcomes of their research and learning.

Students currently sit CSPE examinations at the end of each academic year. It is recommended that CSPE be included as a subject for all formal school examinations as a means of supporting students in their learning and informing them of their progress. Students currently complete one action project over the three years of junior cycle. The completion of a second action project is recommended to give students further experience of carrying out action research in addition to giving them a choice when writing up their Report on an Action Project (RAP) as part of their Junior Certificate requirement for CSPE. A review of the certificate examination results indicates good outcomes for CSPE.

SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The following are the main strengths identified in the evaluation:

- There is good provision and support for CSPE in the allocation of time and the provision of resources.
- The range of co-curricular activities in the school actively promotes the concept of active citizenship.
- ICT has been embraced by some teachers as a tool for the teaching and learning of CSPE.
- There were some good examples of effective strategies promoting active learning.

As a means of building on these strengths and to address areas for development, the following key recommendations are made:

- The members of the CSPE department should progress subject planning for CSPE to create a comprehensive document that will inform best practice in the teaching and learning of the subject.
- Greater attention to the structure of the lesson is needed in some instances.
- More varied methodologies should be used to ensure a better balance between teacher instruction and student activity.
- Assessment protocols to ensure better recording and monitoring of students' work and progress should be introduced.

Post-evaluation meetings were held with the deputy principal and the subject co-ordinator at the conclusion of the evaluation when the draft findings and recommendations of the evaluation were presented and discussed.

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