

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

**Subject Inspection of Civic, Social and Political
Education
REPORT**

**Seamount College
Kinvara, County Galway
Roll number: 63050T**

Date of inspection: 18 January 2011



**A N R O I N N | D E P A R T M E N T O F
O I D E A C H A I S | E D U C A T I O N
A G U S S C I L E A N N A | A N D S K I L L S**

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 Seamount College, Kinvara. It presents the findings of an evaluation of the quality of teaching and learning in Civic, Social and Political Education (CSPE) and makes recommendations for the further development of the teaching of this subject in the school. The evaluation was conducted over two days during which the inspector visited classrooms and observed teaching and learning. The inspector interacted with teachers and students and examined students' work. 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, deputy principal and subject teachers. 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.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

Seamount College is a co-educational school with a total enrolment of 254 students. CSPE is a compulsory subject on the junior cycle curriculum. At the opening evening for parents of incoming first-year students the CSPE programme is well explained. This is good practice as CSPE is a subject that may be less familiar to parents than other subjects. The CSPE fact sheet produced by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment could also be used to inform parents in relation to the subject.

In accordance with syllabus requirements class groups are assigned one lesson per week in CSPE across each year of the junior cycle. It is appropriate that all class groups are of mixed-ability. In some cases teachers have their CSPE class group for another subject. In line with Circular Letter M13/05 this provision should be extended to all class groups. This would allow teachers greater flexibility in arranging contact time with their classes for the completion of action projects.

Five teachers currently deliver the CSPE teaching programme. It is recommended that teachers should continue to teach the subject for a number of consecutive years. This will allow teachers to develop their professional knowledge and interest in the subject. It is not always the case that classes retain the same teacher from year to year. It is recommended that every effort should be made to ensure continuity of teachers at least in second year and third year. This will enable a more cohesive approach to programme planning and will support the management and organisation of action projects.

Active citizenship is fostered in the school through raising students' awareness of community, national and third-world issues. Seamount College has a strong Development Education programme and is linked with a school in Ghana. School exchanges are organised for teachers and students as part of this programme and are an important means of developing students' understanding and facilitating action in the area of development studies. Some of the ways by which the school supports the aims of the CSPE syllabus include student involvement in

fundraising activities for charities, recycling activities in the school, a corridor display on Age Action and the planned promotion of Fair Trade Fortnight to increase whole-school awareness of fair trade issues. These initiatives are highly commended. In building on these good practices it is recommended that the CSPE teaching team arranges to celebrate one of the 'Designated Days' such as International Human Rights Day, December 10 or Earth Day, April 22.

School management is committed to promoting teachers' continuing professional development (CPD). Two of the CSPE teachers have availed of in-service in the past. For support in the delivery of the subject the CSPE teachers should liaise with the Second Level Support Service (SLSS) and attend on a rotational basis the CPD opportunities provided in CSPE. This will facilitate the development of skills and knowledge among the team in a strategic manner. Teachers new to the subject should also consult the CSPE starter pack. A record of the different courses attended should be maintained in the subject plan.

There is a limited range of resources available to the subject. These are stored in a central location and accessible to all teachers. Resource planning should focus on acquiring a greater stock and variety of materials across the seven key concepts. Attendance at in-service will support this process. The website of the support service at <http://cspe.slss> also provides information on suitable resource materials. Teachers have access to audio-visual equipment, a number of laptops and data projectors and the school's computer room through a booking system. Plans are underway to further develop the school's information and communication technology (ICT) infrastructure and the school reports that each classroom will be equipped with a computer and digital projector by September 2011. This development is commended and will greatly facilitate teachers in the increased integration of ICT in the classroom.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

At the start of the current year structures were established to facilitate a more systematic and cohesive approach to planning for CSPE. A subject co-ordinator is in place and it is planned that this role will rotate so that all members of the department will get a chance to lead the team. The co-ordinator has responsibility for convening meetings, collating resources and disseminating subject information to department members. While the co-ordinator is leading planning all members of the CSPE teaching team are contributing to the process. This collaborative approach is commended and is further encouraged in building up a bank of communal teaching resources. The co-ordinator should avail of the in-service training provided for co-ordinators of CSPE as it becomes available and should consider becoming a member of the Association of CSPE Teachers (ACT). This will enable the team to stay informed of ongoing developments in the subject.

Minutes of formal meetings are recorded and filed in the subject plan. It is evident from this documentation that the CSPE teachers are engaged in reflective practice and have identified priorities for attention within the department. These include a review of curricular plans, updating resources, and teacher continuity and training. This approach is highly commended. The outcomes of reviews and the progress achieved should be recorded on an annual basis in an evaluation section of the CSPE plan.

The subject plan provides information on the department's organisation, resources, and assessment, record keeping and reporting procedures. A record of the action projects undertaken by students should also be included in the plan. These will be useful to new members of the department and will be a good guide when planning for variety in the learning experiences provided to students. The curricular programme followed by teachers is based on a concept

approach to the syllabus. The schemes of work in place outline the concepts taught to each year group and include learning outcomes, methodologies and resources. Term and monthly timeframes for the delivery of agreed concepts and topics in each year of the programme in addition to action projects should be indicated on all plans. This will ensure standardisation of provision across the department and will further support teachers in their short-term planning for the subject.

It is planned that a formal mentoring system is to be established for teachers new to the subject. This is commended as it will also support effective handover arrangements in the event of teachers changing classes.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

The classroom atmosphere in all lessons observed was conducive to learning. Good student-teacher rapport characterised by mutual respect was in evidence and this contributed to a productive learning environment. Appropriate classroom routines were noted which contributed to students' learning and to good order. Lessons began with roll call, homework was monitored and corrected and previous learning was recalled before new subject matter was introduced. The lesson ended with homework being set and recorded by students in their journal.

There was effective individual planning for the lessons observed. A variety of good quality resources had been prepared in advance of the lesson. This is commended as the use of these additional learning aids including worksheets, a video clip, and handouts enriched the learning opportunity for students. In one lesson on Interdependence ICT was used to illustrate the links between countries. In the context of the school's extended ICT infrastructure the increased use of ICT is recommended in the classroom to support teaching and learning in CSPE. The learning objectives were shared with students and this was used to set the lesson within the context of previous lessons. The content covered was in line with syllabus requirements and in general the pace of lessons was appropriate to the level of students' ability.

Good quality teaching and learning was observed with some very good practice in evidence. A range of teaching methodologies was employed which added variety to some lessons and actively engaged students in their learning. In some lessons there was a very good focus on student activity facilitated through the use of role play, a class survey and a video extract with accompanying worksheet. The use of such active learning methodologies is particularly appropriate to CSPE and it is recommended that they be incorporated into all lessons.

In many lessons efforts were made to make the topic under study relevant and concrete by linking the content to students' experiences and topical events. This is good practice. Effective use was made of questioning to revise material, check understanding and initiate discussion on topics. Students' contributions were encouraged and they were prompted in developing their answers. It is recommended that greater use be made of directed questioning spread across the class group to ensure the participation of all students.

Teachers are aware of students with additional educational needs and there was evidence of differentiation in the integration of lower-order and higher-order questions, the use of practical activities, visual stimuli and explanation of terminology. In one lesson simplified worksheet activities and handouts are prepared where necessary to support individual learning needs. This practice is highly commended.

Students displayed a good level of knowledge about their courses and were confident in discussing issues raised. They willingly participated in the planned learning activities and were affirmed for their contributions to discussions. A good rapport was evident between teachers and students and this supported a positive learning atmosphere.

In some classrooms there were displays of materials related to CSPE and this created a stimulating learning environment. There is scope for some rooms to be further developed in this regard and students should be encouraged to contribute to this through the generation of posters, CSPE news boards and photographic galleries of political and other relevant national and international figures.

ASSESSMENT

Student progress is assessed using a variety of modes including questioning during lessons, correction of homework, class observation and holding class tests on the completion of topics. Homework based on the lesson content was assigned in all classes observed. There is good variety in the type of homework tasks set which include writing opinion-based answers, poster designing, judging and evaluating views, researching topics on the internet and completing examination questions. This is good practice as it fosters the development of a range of skills and provides a variety of learning experiences for students. It is recommended that examination papers are used from an early stage in all examination classes. It is suggested that students be required to track news items so that they are informed on and can explore relevant issues or topics that are currently in the news.

There was a range of syllabus-related work completed in workbooks and copybooks. Students work is monitored and corrected and in some cases there was very good evidence of the use of both affirming and guiding comments on draft reports of action projects and other exercises completed by students. It is recommended that this good practice be extended to all year groups.

Formal assessments are held at Christmas and the end of the third term for first and second year students. A sample of assessment papers viewed mirrored the style and format of questions on certificate examination papers. This practice is appropriate. In third year students sit pre-examinations in the second term. It is recommended that the Christmas assessment of third-year students should extend beyond a class period in preparation for certificate examinations.

Secure arrangements are in place for the storage of the Report on an Action Project (RAP). In line with syllabus recommendations the students should complete two action projects over the three years of the junior cycle. This provision should be factored into programme planning as it is necessary that students are aware of the importance of active participatory citizenship from an early stage. Student attainment in certificate examinations is analysed by the guidance counsellor. It is recommended that the results obtained by students in this examination be analysed annually by the CSPE teaching team and recorded in the subject plan. This will support future collaborative planning for the subject as it enables trends in performance to be identified. The students achieve very well in the Junior Certificate and this is reflective of the high expectations for learning set by the teachers.

A good level of communication is maintained with parents in relation to students' progress through the use of school reports which are issued twice yearly, the school journal and annual parent-teacher meetings convened for all year groups.

SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The following are the main strengths identified in the evaluation:

- The school's ethos is supportive of CSPE and facilitates initiatives to promote active citizenship.
- Time allocation to the subject is appropriate.
- Planning for CSPE is collaborative and reflective. A subject plan and schemes of work have been developed for each year group.
- There was effective individual planning for the lessons observed.
- Good quality teaching and learning was observed with some very good practice in evidence.
- Students displayed a good level of knowledge about their courses and were confident in discussing the topics under study.
- A positive learning environment was evident in all lessons.

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

- Teachers should retain classes from second year through to third year and should have their CSPE class group for another subject in line with Circular Letter M13/05.
- In the interests of building an experienced CSPE teaching team teachers should continue to teach the subject for a number of years and avail of professional development courses provided by the Second Level Support Service.
- The provision of developmental feedback on students' written work should be further developed in some cases.
- In line with syllabus recommendations students should complete two action projects over the three years of the junior cycle.

A post-evaluation meeting was held with the teachers of CSPE and with the principal and deputy principal at the conclusion of the evaluation when the draft findings and recommendations of the evaluation were presented and discussed.