An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Subject Inspection of Civics, Social and Political Education (CSPE)
REPORT

Columba College
Killucan, Co. Westmeath
Roll number: 71430C

Date of inspection: 24 January 2011
SUBJECT INSPECTION REPORT

This report has been written following a subject inspection in Columba College, Killucan, Co. Westmeath. It presents the findings of an evaluation of the quality of teaching and learning in Civics, 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 one day 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 teacher. 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 teacher. 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

Columba College is a co-educational, non-denominational school under the management of County Westmeath Vocational Educational Committee. At the time of the evaluation there were 162 students enrolled in the school.

CSPE is part of the core curriculum in junior cycle and is delivered to all students preparing for the Junior Certificate examination. Students are provided with one period a week for the subject in line with syllabus guidelines. At present the CSPE department is a one teacher department. In most instances the teacher teaches another subject to the class. This is in line with the recommendations in Department of Education and Science Circular letter M13/05.

The delivery of CSPE is supported very effectively by the school community through the establishment of a student council, the provision of resources and the provision of a number of co-curricular activities including an anti-bullying week and the celebration of Europe day. It is highly commended that the school has engaged very productively with the Green Schools programme and is currently working on its fifth Green Flag. Very good links with the community in this regard were noted. It is also praiseworthy that the school has engaged with the European Studies Programme. These co-curricular activities encourage active citizenship which is a key objective of the CSPE syllabus and deserves to be acknowledged. It is recommended that every effort is made to keep parents informed of the aims and objectives of the CSPE syllabus and any actions projects that may be undertaken.

Provision for information and communication technology (ICT) is very good. The room in which CSPE is taught has a data-projector and a laptop computer and good storage areas. With regard to areas for development it is recommended that resources are stored and catalogued according to the seven core concepts of CSPE.
School management is supportive of teachers availing of continuing professional development (CPD) and very comprehensive CPD in relation to CSPE, including the European Studies programme, has been availed of. Many of the core concepts of CSPE including rights and responsibilities and stewardship of the environment are lived out in the life of the school.

**PLANNING AND PREPARATION**

Effective planning for this subject is in place. As it is a one-teacher department no department meetings take place however very good indicators of reflective practice were noted such as the end-of-year report for the subject evident in the department folder. It is praiseworthy that plans are afoot to link up with teachers of the subject in another local rural school. To progress subject planning further it is recommended that when in-school subject department meetings take place, that teachers of general subjects like CSPE, History and Geography meet to discuss generic areas such as suitable methodologies and resources, differentiation and active learning.

Significant work has gone in to putting together a department folder for the subject. This folder contains schemes of work, information on the European Schools Programme, Green Schools Programme and other relevant documentation. Care should be taken to ensure that all seven concepts are covered in the schemes of work. With regard to areas for development it is recommended that the subject plan is developed and expanded to include relevant aims and objectives, planning for students with additional educational needs and suitable learning outcomes and resources matched to the seven core concepts of CSPE.

Very good planning for individual lessons was in place, including planning for resource use. The high quality teacher-generated resources, acquired via the internet, reflect a commitment to the provision of stimulating and rich learning experiences for students. This is commendable.

**TEACHING AND LEARNING**

Very good quality teaching and learning was seen in all lessons observed, with good pace and timing in evidence throughout. The introduction of the lesson topic in writing to students as was seen in one instance is commended as it clarifies the aim of the lesson for all students. It is suggested that it is good practice to reflect on and review the main points of the lesson towards the end. Resources provided during the evaluation will support this approach.

The quality of student-teacher relationships was excellent throughout as evidenced by students’ willingness to ask and answer questions and the responsiveness of the teacher to those questions. The use of higher and lower-order questioning and an awareness of gender balance where questioning was concerned promoted inclusiveness. This supportive classroom environment is commended. The integration of independent learning opportunities such as individual or pair work into the lesson would serve to further consolidate the learning achieved in the lesson as would an emphasis on the key words associated with the lesson.

Very good use of resources, including excellent use of ICT, supported the lessons. The textbook was supplemented by the use of video-clips such as one of Martin Luther King’s “I have a dream” speech in one lesson and a clip relating to child labour in India in another lesson. Good attention was paid to linkages to the core concepts of CSPE such as rights and responsibilities. It is suggested that a classroom display of the seven core concepts of CSPE to which the teacher could refer would prove to be useful resource for classroom teaching.
Students’ learning was evident in the lessons observed. A review of a sample of their copybooks showed good progress. Students were reflective and knowledgeable when questioned and their ability to discuss the subject of the lessons being taught was impressive.

**ASSESSMENT**

Good practices in relation to assessment are in place in the department. Formal assessment for the subject takes place twice a year and common assessment is in place. Homework is given frequently and regularly monitored, in line with the school’s assessment policy.

Good preparation for the certificate examinations are in place with good procedures in relation to the action project in third year evident. Student attainment in certificate examinations is monitored by the CSPE department. This is good practice as it serves to identify trends and inform future planning in the department. At present all students use the Report on an Action Project (RAP) proforma booklet. Consideration should be given to using the Coursework Assessment Booklet (CWAB) with some students to cater more effectively for the needs of those students.

**SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

The following are the main strengths identified in the evaluation:

- The delivery of CSPE is supported very effectively by the school community.
- It is highly commended that the school has engaged very productively with the Green Schools programme and is currently working on its fifth Green Flag.
- School management is very supportive of teachers availing of continuing professional development for CSPE, including the European Studies programme, and comprehensive CPD has been availed of.
- Very good indicators of reflective practice were noted such as the end-of-year report for the subject evident in the department folder.
- Very good quality teaching and learning were evident in lessons observed.
- Very good use of resources, including excellent use of ICT, supported the lessons.
- Homework is given frequently and regularly monitored.

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

- Consideration should be given to using the Coursework Assessment Booklet (CWAB) with some students to cater more effectively for the needs of those students.
- The integration of independent learning opportunities such as individual or pair work into lessons would serve to further consolidate the learning achieved in the lesson as would an emphasis on the key words associated with the lesson.

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