

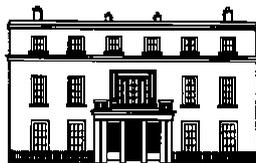
**An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna**

**Department of Education and Skills**

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

**McHale College  
Achill, County Mayo  
Roll number: 72070D**

**Date of inspection: 28 April 2010**



**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**

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**SUBJECT INSPECTION REPORT**

This report has been written following a subject inspection in McHale College, Achill. 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 one day during which the inspector visited classrooms and observed teaching and learning. The inspector interacted with students and examined students' work. The inspector reviewed school planning documentation. Following the evaluation visit, the inspector provided oral feedback on the outcomes of the evaluation to the principal. 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**

McHale College, a co-educational school under the patronage of County Mayo Vocational Education committee (VEC), has a total enrolment of 176 students. There is good whole-school support for CSPE and senior management is committed to the further development of the subject in the school. In line with syllabus requirements timetable provision for CSPE is appropriate, consisting of one class period per week for all junior cycle classes. In most cases teachers also teach another subject to their CSPE class group. This provision facilitates the rearranging of lessons for the completion of action projects and is in accordance with Circular Letter M13/05. Senior management should ensure that there is similar provision for all CSPE teachers in future years. Teachers generally retain their classes from year to year. This is good practice and is particularly important from second year to third year as it allows continuity in programme planning and facilitates the organisation of action projects. The majority of CSPE lessons are timetabled between Tuesday and Thursday. This is commended as it minimises the probability of losing lessons on a regular basis due to interruptions in the school calendar.

Currently two teachers make up the CPSE teaching team and they expressed an interest in teaching the subject. Following discussions in relation to staff changes it is necessary for senior management to put in place a new CSPE teaching team from September. Going forward teachers assigned to CSPE should be selected on the basis of interest or willingness to teach the subject. In the future consideration should also be given to having a larger CSPE teaching team than heretofore. Teachers new to CSPE should also be facilitated to teach it for a number of years so as to develop their professional expertise and knowledge in the subject. This will enable the development of a strong core team of teachers. It is commendable that handover arrangements to the new CSPE team will be organised prior to the commencement of the next academic year.

School management strongly encourages and has facilitated staff professional development. The subject co-ordinator has attended in-service in recent years and is a member of the association for teachers of CSPE (ACT). It is recommended that teachers new to the subject avail of the CSPE starter pack and should attend induction courses provided by the Citizenship Education Support

Service. In the temporary absence of the subject co-ordinator a member of the new CSPE team should become affiliated with ACT. This membership will support the CSPE department in becoming informed of developments in the subject.

There is good whole-school provision of resources. While the CSPE department does not have an annual budget, resources are provided by management as needs arise. There is very good availability of information and communication technology (ICT) facilities and the majority of classrooms have ceiling mounted data projectors. A laptop has been provided to any teacher who requested one. Access to the school's computer room can also be organised through a booking system. Teachers reported using ICT to support the delivery of the subject and students are facilitated to research topics online in the computer room. A good range of subject materials obtained from a variety of sources has been collected over time and these are currently stored in the co-ordinator's classroom. It is recommended that a detailed inventory of these resources is developed and included in the subject plan. Ideally these resources should be linked to the seven syllabus concepts as this would assist teachers new to the subject in identifying suitable materials to support the teaching of the various concepts. It is suggested that a more central and easily accessible area is used to store resources.

School management and staff are commended for promoting the profile of the subject within the school and among the broader school community. Members of the local community including some parents visit the school as guest speakers in relation to action projects. As CSPE is frequently a subject with which parents are not very familiar, a copy of the *Fact Sheet for CSPE* produced by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) should be made available to parents of in-coming first-year students. The students' engagement in projects such as a school litter campaign and fundraising activities for Haiti give practical expression to the aims of the CSPE syllabus and enhance whole-school awareness of the value of active citizenship and participation in societal improvement. As a further support to promoting and fostering whole-school interest in the subject, consideration should be given to marking one of the Designated Days, for example Earth Day, April 22 or International Human Rights Day, December 22 with displays and events in the school. The school has a democratically-elected student council representative of all year groups. The student council should be used as a vehicle for promoting citizenship and the development of students' knowledge in relation to the concept of democracy.

## **PLANNING AND PREPARATION**

Subject department planning is supported by the appointment of a co-ordinator and informal meetings of the CSPE teaching team. Going forward structures should be put in place to provide for a more sustained and cohesive team approach to subject planning. Retaining teachers within the CSPE department for a number of years will greatly facilitate this process. Formal planning meetings should be facilitated and minutes of these should be maintained to include decisions taken and actions planned. This will also enable progress in planning to be reviewed and evaluated. The present co-ordinator is the longest established teacher in the department and has played a lead role in planning for the development of the subject. As new members of the CSPE team gain experience in the subject it is recommended that this role be rotated as a means of building capacity within the school.

It was evident during the evaluation that a concept-based approach has been adapted to teaching the CSPE programme. While acknowledging that a textbook is a valuable resource it is important that the delivery of content is informed primarily by the CSPE syllabus and Guidelines for Teachers as opposed to being directed by the textbook chosen for the subject. As part of the

planning process schemes of work should now be developed for each year group. These should include the key learning outcomes to be achieved in relation to each concept and provide a focus on suitable resources and methodologies to support the attainment of these outcomes. Appropriate time frames should also be agreed for the completion of concepts.

Individual teachers are responsible for the organisation of action projects for their respective class groups. In some cases students have the opportunity to undertake two action projects over the three years of the junior cycle. This good practice is in line with syllabus recommendations and future planning for the subject should ensure that this provision be extended to all class groups. This will provide students with the opportunity to engage in active, participatory citizenship and to develop the skills of report writing. It is encouraged that the subject plan documents the health and safety procedures and other protocols in place for carrying out action projects, a list of the projects completed and a list of relevant contacts in relation to particular projects. This will support teachers in planning for such activities. Teachers are also encouraged to access the website of the Citizen Education Support Service [www.cspe.slss.ie](http://www.cspe.slss.ie) which provides a range of suggestions for action projects.

## **TEACHING AND LEARNING**

There was good preparation for the lessons observed with the readiness in advance of relevant texts and materials for use during the lesson. In line with assessment for learning (AfL) the main learning outcomes were shared with students at the outset. Lessons were well structured, appropriately paced and generally pitched at a level appropriate to the abilities of students.

A good range of teaching methodologies including discussion, questioning, exposition and an individual learning task was employed to develop students' understanding of the topics under study. In one lesson the concept of stewardship was well explained in the context of the students' familiar experience and the local environment. This approach is commended and resulted in the students' eager engagement with the classroom discussion. A video extract from the TV series Eco Eye was used to illustrate the levels of waste production in relation to packaging and the environmentally-friendly solutions developed by TLC Packaging to address this problem. The use of such visual stimuli is commended. In order to maximise the learning value of such a resource it is recommended that the students be given a set of questions to complete during viewing to focus their attention. Subsequently the main points raised in the video should be discussed and recorded on the board to reinforce learning. Active student engagement with the lesson content was also facilitated through the use of a worksheet activity based on the eco-website Jumbletown. The integration of practical activities as a complement to instruction is good practice and is recommended in all lessons. As the students completed the task the teacher circulated monitoring progress and providing help to individual students as required. The preparation of additional resource materials is acknowledged and commended and reflects the commitment of teachers to support and enrich students learning.

In some lessons writing up the report on the action project (RAP) formed the primary learning activity. Question and answer sessions were employed by teachers to focus students on particular areas of the report. A number of RAPs were viewed by the inspector. Given that sixty percent of the marks in the Junior Certificate is awarded for the action project it is very important that students are given comprehensive feedback on their draft reports to ensure that all questions are answered appropriately and in sufficient detail. The amendments made by students based on the teacher's feedback should be checked before the final report is written up by the students.

All of the lessons evaluated were held in the same room. The walls displayed the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), student-generated posters on the seven syllabus concepts and small photographs of Irish politicians. This is commended as it deepens students' awareness and aids learning. Visually stimulating CSPE learning environments should be created in classrooms where the subject is taught. It is encouraged that the students be assigned responsibility for this aspect of their learning and be required to develop relevant posters and contribute articles and photographs from a range of media sources. Photo galleries should include reasonably sized photographs of key Irish and international figures.

Classroom management was excellent and a positive relationship was noted between the students and their teachers. The students had a good understanding of the topics under study and were confident and capable in expressing their views.

### **ASSESSMENT**

Students' progress in CSPE is assessed within the school's formal assessment structures. Students take formal examinations at Christmas and the end of the school year. Certificate students sit pre-examinations in the second term. Reports are issued to home following these and parents are also informed of students' progress at annual parent-teacher meetings held for each year group. As part of the co-ordinator's responsibility appropriate arrangements are in place for the secure storage of RAPs.

Students' results in the Junior Certificate examination are not currently analysed in the school. It is recommended that this practice be adopted so that students' performance can be compared with national norms. This will also inform subject planning and in this regard the CSPE teaching team should set targets to raise student attainment in the top grades.

Informal assessment is ongoing in classes through the use of class discussions, questioning strategies and worksheet activities. Where copybooks were viewed there was good variety in the work assigned to students. This is good practice and it is necessary that homework should have a much broader focus than a pure content, closed-question-answering focus so that the aims of the CSPE syllabus can be realised. Appropriate tasks would include for example, poster designing, slogan-writing, listening to news bulletins or giving opinions on issues. Going forward the CSPE teaching team should develop a policy in relation to homework and assessment procedures. This policy should focus on the frequency and types of homework set for students, procedures in relation to the completion of RAPs and feedback provided to students in line with AfL principles. The policy should be included in the subject plan and guide homework and assessment practices in the future.

### **SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

The following are the main strengths identified in the evaluation:

- Time-tabling provision supports the delivery of the CSPE syllabus.
- School management encourages and support teachers' professional development.
- There is good whole-school provision of resources including access to information and communication technology (ICT) facilities.

- School management and staff are commended for promoting the profile of the subject within the school and among the broader school community.
- Department planning is supported by the appointment of a co-ordinator and informal meetings of the CSPE teaching team.
- The range of methodologies facilitated an appropriate balance between teacher talk and student activity.
- Classroom management was excellent and a positive relationship was noted between the students and their teachers.
- The students were confident and capable in expressing their views.

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

- Teachers new to the subject should attend induction courses and should be retained within the CSPE department for a number of years so as to develop expertise and a strong core teaching team.
- A detailed inventory of resources should be developed and included in the subject plan.
- A more formal and cohesive approach to subject planning is recommended and schemes of work should be developed for each year group.
- In line with syllabus recommendations two action projects should be completed with each class group during the junior cycle.
- The CSPE teaching team should develop a policy on homework and procedures for the completion of the 'Report on the Action Project'.
- Junior Certificate results should be analysed and targets set to raise student attainment in the top grades.

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