

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

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

**O’Fiaich College
Dundalk, County Louth
Roll number: 71770D**

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**AN ROINN | DEPARTMENT
OIDEACHAIS | OF EDUCATION
AGUS SCILEANNA | A N D S K I L L S**

REPORT
ON
THE QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN CSPE

SUBJECT INSPECTION REPORT

This report has been written following a subject inspection in O’Fiaich College. 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 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 teachers. 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

O’Fiaich College is a co-educational, non-denominational school under the management of County Louth Vocational Education Committee (VEC). CSPE is part of the core curriculum in the junior cycle and it is delivered to all students preparing for the Junior Certificate examination.

The delivery of CSPE is supported very effectively by the school community through the provision of resources, the establishment of a student council, the reporting of student progress to parents and the provision of a number of co-curricular activities. Notable amongst these activities are an intercultural week in the second term, an anti-racism campaign and an anti-litter campaign known as ‘waste watchers’. During the evaluation solar panels were installed on the roof of the school to supply a portion of its electricity needs. These co-curricular activities encourage active citizenship which is a key objective of the CSPE syllabus and deserve to be acknowledged. As a means of further extending these good practices consideration should be given to engaging with the Green-Schools Programme and celebrating a ‘Designated Day’ such as International Human Rights Day.

Timetabling for the subject is in line with syllabus recommendations. Every effort is made to ensure continuity of teachers with their classes and to provide teachers with an opportunity to teach another subject to their CSPE class in line with the recommendations of *Circular Letter M13/05*.

Students enrolling in first year are assigned to one of two bands within each of which there are two mixed-ability class groups. This form of class organisation is suitable for the delivery of the CSPE teaching programme. Teachers are made aware of the educational needs of students in their classes. There is very good liaison between the CSPE teachers and the learning support and

language support departments in the school. Whole-school in-service has been provided in relation to supporting students for whom English is an additional language.

School management is supportive of teachers availing of continuing professional development (CPD). Two teachers are currently engaged in CPD in relation to Education for Reconciliation, a cross-border initiative and this is praiseworthy. Teachers of CSPE should avail of any appropriate CPD that is available particularly when it will address the needs of their daily work, for example in relation to co-ordination of the CSPE subject department.

Provision for information and communications technology (ICT) is very good. Teachers have access to ICT in classrooms and in a teachers' workroom. In addition, a computer laboratory can be pre-booked for use with students. Teachers have been provided with laptop computers and there is a loan scheme for laptop computers for students in conjunction with the college book loan scheme. Teachers have begun to use the school's ICT facilities as a means of sharing their developing store of teacher-generated resources and this is commended. School management is very supportive of the use of ICT and believes in its potential to enhance teaching and learning. Teachers have been provided with a storage area for CSPE resources and these have been catalogued based on the seven core concepts of the subject.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

The CSPE department is co-ordinated very effectively and this has resulted in significant developments in planning and in resource provision and organisation. At some stage consideration should be given to rotating this role amongst other members of the CSPE teaching team as a means of providing opportunities for others to assume a leadership role and to build capacity within the school. School management is very supportive of the planning process and formal time for planning is provided once a term. Informal discussions take place on an ongoing basis amongst members of the department. New members of the department are supported and encouraged by more experienced colleagues and there was evidence of sharing of professional expertise amongst teachers of CSPE. This is very good practice.

There was clear evidence of collaborative planning by the members of the CSPE subject department. Agendas and minutes of meetings provided during the evaluation indicated that the CSPE teaching team has worked together to develop a detailed subject department plan. The plan makes reference to aims, objectives, teaching methods and procedures for recording and reporting on student progress. It also contains a planned teaching programme for each of the three years of the junior cycle. This programme is based on teaching a specified number of the core concepts of the CSPE syllabus in each of the three years. It is planned to engage the students in carrying out two action projects in line with syllabus recommendations. In most cases teachers are following the agreed teaching programme. It is essential that the agreed teaching programme be followed by all members of the department so as to ensure consistency of experience across all class groups. It is recommended that in reviewing the subject department plan teachers should focus on identifying specific learning outcomes for each of the core concepts and on linking these to resources, teaching methods, timeframes and methods of assessment. In line with best practice this plan has been monitored and reviewed on an ongoing basis.

Whole-school policies on literacy and numeracy, which were provided during the evaluation, set out clearly that the development of these key areas requires the support of all members of the teaching staff. As a means of supporting these policy initiatives it is recommended that in

reviewing the subject teaching plan the CSPE teachers should consider ways of applying the whole-school policies on literacy and numeracy to the planned teaching programme for CSPE. It was evident during the evaluation that much good work is being done in classrooms to support both literacy and numeracy. For example students' numeracy is enhanced by the holding of mock elections and by the interpretation of statistical diagrams. These good practices should be documented and further discussions of these policies would provide an opportunity for teachers to share and to further develop their professional expertise.

A notable feature of subject department planning in O'Fiaich College is the end-of-year class report where the class teacher records the work completed by each group. This maintains a record in some detail of the topics taught over each of the three years of the junior cycle. It also contains a record of action projects completed and results of assessments undertaken by students. This is an invaluable aid to teachers taking over a new class group and reflects the commitment and proactive approach of the subject teachers.

Planning and preparation by individual teachers for the lessons observed in almost all instances was of a very high standard and included the preparation of high-quality teacher-generated resources. The creation of teacher-generated resources and resources obtained via the internet reflects a commitment by teachers to provide stimulating and rich learning experiences for their students. In some instances more careful and detailed preparation is needed for lessons. This preparation should include identification of specific learning outcomes, appropriate teaching strategies, the provision of supportive worksheets or resource materials, and the selection of appropriate homework designed to reinforce or extend the students' understanding of the subject matter of the lesson. This would ensure the continued and active engagement of students and would maximise the learning potential of both class and homework.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

Very high-quality teaching was evident in most of the classrooms visited. The sharing of the planned learning outcomes with students was evident and is good practice. Learning is most effective where a number of very specific learning outcomes are shared with students and where they are written on a board. These can then be ticked off as each one is achieved and this provides students with a sense of achievement.

Teachers used a variety of teaching strategies to actively engage students in the learning process. Teaching was most effective where there was a good balance between teacher exposition and student activity. The use of PowerPoint presentations, film clips, and the completion of worksheets, short student tasks and ice-breaker exercises created a stimulating and positive learning environment. The use of ICT in the lessons observed is commended. In one lesson observed students had to move around the classroom and find someone to match a description of a person on a worksheet. There was an obvious sense of enjoyment as students eagerly participated in the planned learning experience. Following the completion of this ice-breaker exercise feedback from students resulted in the development on the whiteboard of a diagram showing how students in the class were connected to people in other countries. This was followed by the teacher unpacking a shopping bag, which was viewed by students with great interest. Students were then divided into groups, were provided with a worksheet and were asked to match the products with a list of countries. This again helped to establish for students the link between their lives and people in other countries. This is a most appropriate way to introduce the concept

of interdependence and provides a concrete and understandable way of dealing with this key concept.

In another lesson observed students were viewing a scene from a film showing a courtroom setting. The aim of the lesson was to identify the key personnel and to understand their respective roles. The learning potential of this lesson could have been enhanced by a more careful setting of the scene prior to viewing and a clearer definition of the planned learning outcomes. The provision of a worksheet with very specific questions or activities would have ensured the active participation of students in this worthwhile learning opportunity. Pausing the film during viewing would allow students time to complete the worksheet. Without a supportive worksheet some students became distracted or were passive spectators and the learning potential was greatly diminished.

Teachers are made aware of students with additional educational needs in their classrooms and support for these students is provided in a number of ways. In one lesson observed a special needs assistant (SNA) provided support for students. Key words in relation to the seven concepts of CSPE were displayed in some classrooms. As students were engaged in an activity teachers moved around the classroom providing support and guidance as appropriate. It was evident that teachers are supportive and caring for their students. As a means of catering for the range of student abilities in classes teachers should develop further methods of differentiated learning. Requiring students whose first language is not English to develop a glossary of key terms in relation to the key concepts is a useful learning strategy that should be considered. This could be done by means of ensuring they have an appropriate dictionary and that their homework regularly requires them to develop this glossary.

In lessons observed there was a good emphasis on developing appropriate academic and social skills in line with syllabus recommendations. Through careful questioning students were encouraged to develop their oral skills as they provided feedback from an activity or when discussing issues. The use of group or pair work also provided students with an opportunity to collaborate and to develop their social skills. As a means of ensuring students engage with each other rather than just complete an activity individually, assigning roles such as chair or recorder and structuring worksheets so as to require co-operation should be considered. The use of topical issues, such as a recent natural disaster or the outcome of a talent competition, is good practice and helps to link classroom activity with the students' personal experiences.

Classroom management was generally very good. Most teachers have established clear classroom routines and this contributed to the good order which was evident. Lessons began with roll call, folders were distributed, homework was monitored and corrected and previous learning was recalled before new subject matter was introduced. The lesson concluded with homework being assigned and recorded by students before students' folders were collected. Teachers and students were respectful of each other and students were frequently affirmed for their engagement in the lessons. Questions were in most cases directed to named students; however global questioning and chorus answering which occurred on occasion should be discouraged. The display of key words and materials relevant to CSPE supported the learning environment. This display provided an effective way of celebrating and acknowledging students' work.

Students' learning was evident in a number of ways. An examination of a large sample of their copybooks and folders showed good progress. Students displayed a good grasp of previously taught subject matter when questioned and their ability to recall and discuss the subject matter of the lesson being taught was impressive.

ASSESSMENT

Formal assessment of students' progress takes place at Christmas for all students and at the end of the school year for first and second year students. Students in third year sit pre-examinations in the second term. Reports on student progress are sent to parents after each formal assessment and progress is reported on at formal parent-teacher meetings held annually for each year group. These arrangements serve CSPE well.

The good practice of setting common assessments has begun and this is further evidence of collaborative planning by members of the CSPE teaching team. The samples of assessment papers provided mirrored those of the certificate examinations and this is a most appropriate way to support students' preparation for these examinations. Students were required to answer both multiple-choice questions and questions that required a more extended piece of writing as well as designing a poster. It was noted in one case that a page was appended to the examination paper for the teacher to provide feedback to the student. This good use of assessment for learning (AfL) procedures should be considered for wider use.

Teachers also assess students' progress through assigning and correcting homework, through questioning during lessons and by setting short tests when sections of the teaching programme have been completed. In most cases teachers maintain records of attendance, homework and results from class tests. It is important that all teachers do this.

In most lessons observed students were using folders and copybooks to maintain a record of their work and some written work was of a high standard. Some students will need ongoing support in the organisation of their work, for example work relating to each of the core concepts should be segregated and kept together in their folders. This method of recording students' work should be standardised and extended to all CSPE classes. In a subject like CSPE where there is a strong emphasis on the learning process care needs to be taken to ensure that students acquire the requisite knowledge of the subject. A very good example of ensuring this was evident in one lesson observed where periodically students were allowed time to record the main points of the subject matter which had first been recorded on the whiteboard. It is good practice to provide some time towards the end of a lesson for students to reflect on and to record the main points of a lesson. Resources provided during the evaluation will support this approach.

Students' work has been monitored by teachers and in some instances students had received constructive feedback on their work. Feedback is provided to students when they are writing up the report on their action project for the certificate examinations while at the same time they are reminded that this should be their own work.

Examination materials issued by the State Examinations Commission (SEC) are made available to teachers and the completed documentation is returned to the school's examination secretary for secure storage until the day of the CSPE examination in June. A review of subject planning folders indicated that student attainment in certificate examinations is analysed by the CSPE teaching team. This analysis is used to discover trends, to identify issues and to inform future planning as a means of raising student attainment. To date students have been using the Report on the Action Project (RAPs) proforma booklet. Consideration should be given to using the Course Work Assessment Booklet (CWAB) for some students. This would be a worthwhile development as it would cater more effectively for the needs of some 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 through the provision of resources, through the establishment of a student council, by reporting student progress to parents and by the provision of a number of co-curricular activities.
- Timetabling for the subject is in line with syllabus recommendations and every effort is made to ensure continuity of teachers with their classes and to provide teachers with an opportunity to teach another subject to their CSPE class in line with the recommendations of *Circular Letter M13/05*.
- Teachers are made aware of the educational needs of students in their classes and there is very good liaison between the CSPE teachers and the learning support and language support departments in the school.
- The CSPE department is co-ordinated very effectively and this has resulted in significant developments in planning and in resource provision and organisation.
- There was clear evidence of collaborative planning by the members of the CSPE subject department and this has resulted in the preparation of a detailed subject plan.
- Planning and preparation by individual teachers for the lessons observed in almost all instances was of a very high standard and included the preparation of high-quality teacher-generated resources.
- Very high-quality teaching was evident in most of the classrooms visited, as teachers used a variety of teaching strategies to actively engage students and to develop appropriate academic and social skills in line with syllabus recommendations.
- Classroom management was generally very good. Teachers and students were respectful of each other and students were frequently affirmed for their engagement in the lessons.
- Learning of a high quality was evident from an examination of students' copybooks folders, their grasp of previously taught subject matter and their ability to recall and discuss the subject matter of the lessons being taught.
- Members of the CSPE teaching team carry out an analysis of results obtained in certificate examinations. This is used to discover trends, to identify issues and to inform future planning as a means of raising student attainment in line with best practice.

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

- It is recommended that in reviewing the subject department plan teachers should focus on identifying specific learning outcomes for each of the core concepts and on linking these to resources, teaching methods, timeframes and methods of assessment.
- In reviewing the subject teaching plan the CSPE teachers should consider ways of applying the whole-school policies on literacy and numeracy to the planned teaching programme for CSPE.
- In some instances more careful and detailed preparation by individual teachers is needed.
- As a means of catering for the range of student abilities in classes teachers should develop further methods of differentiated learning.

- Consideration should be given to using the Course Work Assessment Booklet (CWAB) instead of the Report on the Action Project (RAP) proforma booklet where appropriate to meet students' needs.

These findings and recommendations were presented and discussed in the school following the evaluation.