

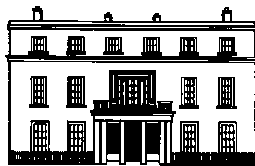
An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

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

**Loreto Secondary School, Saint Michael's
Navan, County Meath
Roll number: 64370T**

Date of inspection: 22 October 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 CSPE**

SUBJECT INSPECTION REPORT

This report has been written following a subject inspection in Loreto Secondary School, St Michael's Navan, conducted as part of a whole-school evaluation. 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 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 three subject teachers.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

The school community effectively supports the delivery of CSPE by providing a range of co-curricular activities, information to parents and through the establishment of a fully representative student council. In line with the school's mission statement, there is a strong emphasis on social justice issues and teachers are aware of the link between the school's mission statement and aims of the CSPE syllabus. The school has in place a Peace and Justice group which operates throughout the school year and helps to organise a Peace and Justice Week. The holding of an annual Mission Week is linked to the key concepts of Human Dignity and Interdependence. These events provide students with an opportunity to give practical expression the aims of the CSPE syllabus. The provision of notice boards on corridors for the Peace and Justice group and for CSPE helps to maintain a high profile for both within the school community. Students sometimes use the school intercom the report on their actions projects. The teachers of CSPE issue a letter to parents providing information on the subject and this is good practice. Elections to the student council, conducted during the evaluation, were very well organised and actively engaged students in the election process. Students in Transition Year (TY) study a number of modules which provide them with opportunities to further develop as active citizens. These include modules entitled, 'World Affairs', 'Working with [Dis]Ability in Sport' and 'Living Christian Witness through Catholic Social Teaching'.

Timetable provision of the subject is satisfactory with one class period per week being provided in each of the junior-cycle years. Class tutors deliver the CSPE teaching programme to their tutor class. However, it was noted during the evaluation that in first year, students do not begin their study of CSPE for a number of weeks as the timetabled period is used by class tutors to help students adjust to their new school. Given the limited time allocation for the subject, all class periods for CSPE should be devoted the study of the subject. Class periods for CSPE are in almost all cases timetabled appropriately in students' timetables. However, it is advisable to avoid timetabling the subject for last period on Friday afternoon. Teachers are allocated to class groups

to whom they teach another subject and each class group is usually assigned the same teacher for the duration of the junior cycle. These good practices are in line with recommendations in *Circular Letter M13/05*.

Eighteen teachers currently make up the CSPE teaching team in St Michael's and the enthusiasm and commitment of teachers to the subject were evident. Teachers of different year groups meet to plan and to review progress. At the time of the evaluation, no subject co-ordinator for CSPE was in place. It is recommended that a core team of teachers, representative of each year group and supported by a subject co-ordinator should be established to oversee the organisation, planning, consistent delivery and evaluation of the CSPE programme.

Continuing professional development (CPD) for teachers is facilitated by school management and teachers have availed of in-service provided by the Citizenship Education Support team. Teachers new to teaching CSPE should avail of in-service provided by the professional development service for teachers (PDST) as it becomes available. Currently, support for teachers new to the subject is provided by the more experienced members of the department.

Resources are provided to support teaching and learning in CSPE, particularly in relation to information and communications technology (ICT). The creation of a shared folder for CSPE on the school's intranet is very good practice. Storage facilities are provided in the staff room for resources and these have been catalogued.

Teachers are made aware of students with additional educational needs. The subject department plan indicates that teachers have agreed that they will focus on teaching the language appropriate to CSPE, will use active teaching methods and students' personal experiences will be used to illustrate themes being studied. These good practices will support students with additional educational needs. These students also receive extra support while preparing a report on their action project.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

A long term curriculum plan for CSPE based on the school development planning initiative (SDPI) template is in place. This plan sets out the organisational arrangements for the subject and indicates that teachers have taken a 'concept based' approach to the delivery of the subject. The long term curriculum plan for the subject sets out a series of concepts to be studied in each year of the junior cycle. Teachers were following the agreed curriculum plan in the lessons observed. The plan also contains suggestions for possible action projects linked to the core concepts. In line with best practice, students complete two action projects. It is recommended that in reviewing the long term curriculum plan for CSPE, teachers should identify precise learning outcomes for each core concept and relate these to curriculum content, resources, teaching strategies and assessment procedures to be delivered within agreed timeframes.

Currently a linear approach is being taken for the delivery of the CSPE syllabus with specific concepts assigned to particular years. It might be useful for teachers to consider a different approach, especially where students find a particular concept difficult. This would involve a spiral and more incremental approach to learning where the concept could be introduced in one year and developed further in later years, thereby building on and extending students' prior knowledge. The review of the long-term curriculum plan has resulted in amendments, as some concepts which were considered to be difficult were moved to later stages.

Planning and preparation by individual teachers for all of the lessons observed was of a very high standard. Lessons were part of a larger unit of work and set the scene for future lessons. This is praiseworthy, as it is particularly important where a subject is timetabled only once per week. Students' learning was supported by the preparation of resources which were appropriately used to enhance teaching and learning. The preparation by students of resources to support their presentations was particularly noteworthy in one lesson. Students presented their ideas in relation to the choice of an action project. The class, through a secret ballot, then decided which project to pursue. Students were impressive in their presentation and in their enthusiasm for their subject. This was a practical illustration of the concept of Democracy as once the project was chosen the class agreed to fully support and become involved in the completion of the chosen topic. The use of ICT by one group of students in their presentation and by some teachers in their lessons was particularly effective in sustaining students' interest.

A number of individual teachers also made available folders of resources they had developed over a period of time. These resources included worksheets, revision aids, class tests and school policy documents. Some folders also contained information on medium and short-term planning by teachers. The development of such resources reflects the commitment by teachers to effectively supporting students' learning and is acknowledged.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

Very high quality teaching was observed in almost all of the lessons observed. Teachers used teaching strategies that were appropriate to CSPE and actively engaged students in the learning process. However, teaching was less satisfactory when teacher exposition was the dominant medium of instruction or where there was an over reliance on the textbook. Frequent references by teachers to local examples and to current news items helped to stimulate interest. In one lesson observed, a local issue was discussed in a question and answer session. Following this discussion students were provided with a variety of written sources, a poster, leaflets and newspaper articles on the issue and in small groups were set the task of reading the material and commenting on the effectiveness of each in communicating the key message. In feedback to the whole class, students were effectively supported by their teacher through the use of appropriate questioning.

Teacher exposition was very clear and lessons were appropriately paced. In some lessons, teachers made the learning intentions clear to students at the outset, this was particularly effective when these were shown on a PowerPoint presentation or written on the whiteboard, were revisited during the lesson and used to summarise at the conclusion. This good practice provides a clear focus for students' attention and its wider use is encouraged.

Some of the most effective teaching strategies used were brainstorming, question and answer sessions, the holding of an election for class captain and small group work. Group work was very effectively used, in one lesson, as students worked in committees preparing for their action project. The explicit linking to the action project to the core concept of Human Dignity was very good practice. Very clear instructions were given by the teacher in relation to the task of each group and appropriate resources were provided. This enabled the activity to proceed with a minimum of disruption. As students worked in their groups the teacher moved around the classroom offering support and affirmation as appropriate. The lesson concluded with students providing feedback in a whole class setting. Students provided practical ideas in relation to the work of the various committees.

The variety of learning activities used enabled students to develop a wide range of skills in line with the aims of the CSPE syllabus. Students were impressive in their ability to work together, to provide feedback, to express their views and to draw on their personal experiences. Questioning by teachers encouraged students to seek clarification, to contribute to discussions and to develop higher-order thinking skills.

Where ICT was used by teachers, it was effective in sustaining students' interest. In one lesson observed, students were required to calculate their carbon footprint using ICT. This investigative approach to learning is commendable. Students obviously enjoyed the task and were supported in reflecting on how they might reduce their carbon footprint by being provided with a worksheet. The lesson concluded with groups being formed to discuss how their ideas could be applied to the school, in Navan and to Ireland. This practical application following students' research is very supportive of the idea of promoting active citizenship. The wider use of ICT in lessons is encouraged.

The good practice of developing students' literacy skills was evident where an election for class captain was held in one classroom visited. The lesson began by revisiting the terms appropriate to an election, such as ballot paper, polling station and polling booth. These were clearly explained by the teacher and were appropriately displayed in the classroom. On conclusion of a well-organised voting activity and realistic counting process, the chosen candidate was announced and the Presidential Oath was used to swear the candidate into office. Students gained a valuable insight into the democratic process. The lesson concluded with the provision of handouts. One handout provided information on the subject matter of the lesson and the other to be used for homework asked students to reflect on the question 'Do you think it matters if people vote in an election?' Encouraging students to reflect on their learning is very much in keeping the aims of the CSPE syllabus.

Students' literacy skills could be further developed by producing and displaying lists of key words in classrooms. Teachers should develop such lists of key words related to each of the seven key concepts and display these in classrooms. These lists should also be provided to the learning support department and used to support students with special educational needs. Students for whom English is an additional language should also use these key words to build up a glossary by translating them into their first language and maintaining a record of this work. It was evident from discussions that teachers are aware of students with additional educational needs in their classes. During lessons, some students received one to one attention, or were helped to organise books and writing materials. In one lesson where students were designing a poster, the use of a video clip from a television series was used to introduce the topic much to the enjoyment of the students. The provision of exemplar materials provided appropriate support for students in completing the set task.

Students are making good progress in their study of CSPE. They were aware of the seven basic concepts, could use the language appropriate to the subject and could relate their study of the subject to events outside the classroom. Where tasks were set and where learning objectives were established, it was evident that these were successfully accomplished by students.

In some of the classrooms visited, there were displays of materials related to CSPE and this helped to create a stimulating learning environment. The display of information on the key concepts, key words, a photo gallery of national and international figures and articles from the print media would further support students' engagement with the subject. Students should be encouraged to contribute to these displays in classrooms.

Classroom management was very effective in all of the lessons observed. Teachers have established clear classroom routines and this created a climate that supported teaching and learning. A positive, supportive and affirming atmosphere was evident in all the classrooms visited.

ASSESSMENT

The subject department plan makes reference to assessment and homework procedures for CSPE. In line with best practice, the subject is included in the school's formal assessment process and parents receive reports following formal assessments. Teachers are urged to set common papers for formal assessments. Students are supported in preparing for certificate examinations with the provision of revision sheets, opportunities to answer past examination questions and they receive constructive feedback, particularly in relation to completion of action projects. The school has in place a group of teachers discussing assessment for learning (AfL). The deliberations of this group should be used by the CSPE teaching team to further develop their policy on assessment.

Teachers use a variety of assessment methods to monitor students' progress and to inform lesson planning. These include questioning during lessons, class tests and the regular setting of homework. It is noteworthy that in a number of lessons homework assigned required students to watch news of television and to become familiar with current events. Records are maintained by teachers of attendance, class tests and homework. These are used to inform discussions at formal parent-teacher meetings held annually for each year group.

Written work in students' copybooks showed considerable variation in terms of quality and quantity. In some instances, students are provided with opportunities to complete extended pieces of writing as well as data-response questions. This was evident both in homework set and in samples of test papers provided by teachers. Best practice was observed where students maintained an accurate record of their progress in the subject. An examination of a random sample of students' copybooks indicated that in some instances the volume of written work was not commensurate with the stage that students were at in the junior cycle programme. It is recommended that a system be put in place that enables students to file and store materials from their CSPE classes that allows them to build up a body of work over the years, to which they can refer for reflective practice and revision purposes. Resource materials provided during the evaluation will support this strategy.

Examination materials issued by the State Examinations Commission (SEC) are made available to teachers. The completed action projects are securely stored and made available during the junior certificate examination in June. Both the Report on the Action Projects (RAPs) and the Coursework Assessment Booklet (CWAB) proforma booklets have been used by students. Students are achieving very well in the junior certificate examination and the CSPE teaching team should analyse these results as a means of identifying good practice and to inform future planning. The provision of marking schemes to students and teachers discussing the report on the 2009 Junior Certificate in CSPE by the chief examiner in the subject would prove useful.

SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The following are the main strengths identified in the evaluation:

- The school community effectively supports the delivery of CSPE through participation in a range of co-curricular activities, by providing information to parents and through the establishment of a student council.
- Elections to the student council, conducted during the evaluation, were very well organised and actively engaged students in the election process.
- Timetable provision of the subject is satisfactory, teachers are allocated to class groups to whom they teach another subject and each class group is usually assigned the same teacher for the duration of the junior cycle.
- A long-term curriculum plan for CSPE based on the SDPI template is in place. In line with best practice, students complete two action projects.
- Planning and preparation by individual teachers for all of the lessons observed was of a very high standard and this included the preparation of resources which were appropriately used to support teaching and learning.
- Very high quality teaching was observed in almost all of the lessons observed, as teachers used teaching strategies that were appropriate to CSPE and actively engaged students in the learning process.
- Students are making good progress in their study of CSPE. They were aware of the seven basic concepts, could use the language appropriate to the subject and could relate their study of the subject to events outside the classroom.
- A positive, supportive and affirming atmosphere was evident in all the classrooms visited.

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

- It is recommended that a core team of teachers, representative of each year group and supported by a subject co-ordinator should be established to oversee the organisation, planning, consistent delivery and evaluation of the CSPE programme.
- It is recommended that in reviewing the long-term curriculum plan for CSPE, teachers should identify precise learning outcomes for each core concept and relate these to curriculum content, resources, teaching strategies and assessment procedures to be delivered within agreed timeframes.
- Strategies should be developed to further support students with additional educational needs.
- It is recommended that a system be put in place that enables students to file and store materials from their CSPE classes that allows them to build up a body of work over the years, to which they can refer for reflective practice and revision purposes.

A post-evaluation meeting was held with three teachers of CSPE, one teacher representing each year group, and the principal at the conclusion of the evaluation when the draft findings and recommendations of the evaluation were presented and discussed.

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