

**An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna**

**Department of Education and Skills**

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

**Presentation Secondary School  
Cannon Street, Waterford  
Roll number: 64970U**

**Date of inspection: 26-27 April 2010**



**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 Presentation Secondary School, Waterford. 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 informal discussions with 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. 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**

Presentation Secondary School, Waterford offers CSPE as a core subject for all classes in junior cycle, in line with national curricular requirements. The provision of one period per week across the three years to Junior Certificate is satisfactory. At present, a core team of four teachers is responsible for the delivery of all CSPE lessons. This is a manageable number, although it was unfortunate that the co-ordinator of CSPE was not timetabled for the subject in 2009-10, a situation which was rectified for 2010-11.

School management has been very supportive of the involvement of CSPE teachers in accessing subject-specific training. One member of the department acts as a local facilitator with the CSPE support service. Teachers have attended training in the management and coordination of CSPE, RAPs, induction for new teachers, as well as training provided by Amnesty International in conjunction with the Abbey Theatre and workshops run by the Society of St. Vincent De Paul. Some department members have also been accepted on a European Commission teacher training course this summer. This commendable involvement in continuing professional development is a credit to the subject's teachers and to school management.

Two important areas of subject provision require attention in future timetabling. Firstly, it is recommended that as much teacher continuity as possible be sought, especially where classes are moving from second year to third year. At present, it is common for CSPE classes to have a different teacher in each junior cycle year and this is not satisfactory. Secondly, Circulars M12/01 and M13/05 urge that teachers of CSPE should have their classes for another subject as well, to better facilitate teachers in getting to know students and to allow for flexibility in the completion of action projects. This occurs at the school in a minority of cases at present and it is

recommended that a renewed effort be made to ensure greater compliance with this element of the circulars.

Despite the timetabling difficulties identified above, whole-school support for teaching CSPE and citizenship is very good. It is commendable that, in the roll-out of information and communication technology (ICT) at the school, the CSPE department has obtained a fixed data projector for use in lesson delivery, with access to others as required. Clear procedures are also in place to facilitate relevant school outings and visiting speakers. A block of time is allocated annually during which teachers are able to consult and support students in the completion of reports on action projects (RAPs). This goes some way towards offsetting the change of teachers which happens in some instances between the time the action project itself is done and the period of writing up the report. Given that a significant number of students at the school fall within the remit of the Junior Certificate School Programme (JCSP), and the school is involved in the DEIS (Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools) initiative it is recommended that the school also consider how the promotion of learning targets and statements, literacy and numeracy can be factored into future planning in CSPE and other subjects. Beyond the CSPE department, language-support teachers host an annual multicultural day and the general level of signage and displays around the school promoting such civic activities is very good. Student council elections are not linked to CSPE but the presence of a vibrant council is a further support to citizenship awareness across the school.

#### **PLANNING AND PREPARATION**

CSPE has a clearly defined department structure, with four teachers and a co-ordinator in place. Formal meetings are held once a year, and are minuted, with informal meetings on specific issues also occurring from time to time. The coordinator takes responsibility for curricular, assessment and managerial aspects of CSPE, including colleague support, convening meetings and managing resources. To this latter end, the level of organisation evident in the storage of relevant resources within designated cabinets in the teachers' resource room is deserving of great praise. The department is otherwise very active and has, for example, organised class trips to Dáil Éireann and the European Parliament Information Centre in Dublin, the local courthouse and city library. Plans are already underway to hold a Europe Day celebration with neighbouring schools. Also, visiting groups are regularly facilitated by the department, ranging from environmental and animal welfare groups to the Juvenile Liaison Officer of the Gardai and politicians offering workshops on democracy under the Houses of the Oireachtas initiative.

Department plans have been developed for each of the three years of the junior cycle. These are concise and focus on covering the seven course concepts in a systematic fashion which allows for local, national and international angles to be explored. It is also sensible that time is specified in the plans for RAP completion, a Dublin outing and practice at examination questions in third year. Good planning is in evidence in relation to the action project, with department policy being that a short project is done in first year and a more substantial one in second year. Some challenges have arisen where teachers change between second year and third year. As previously recommended continuity of teachers from second year to third year should be prioritised. Even with such continuity, it would still be better for the department to persevere with its good practice of asking students to retain detailed notes of their project work from second year and wait until third year to write them up as RAPs. At that stage they should be more mature and focused on the Junior Certificate.

Individual lesson preparation was of a very high standard in all lessons observed and all lessons were centred on topics relevant to the course concepts. A substantial amount of handout materials, flashcards to accompany activities, replica recycling bins and other materials for classroom use were organised in advance. Teachers had managed to mount CSPE-relevant displays on the walls of most rooms and it was good to see student work displayed in a number of the classrooms visited. In some classes, very good organisation of seating arrangements, including the use of an adjacent drama area, was in evidence. Where student tasks were planned for, all items required such as glue sticks, prompt cards and blank posters were available.

## **TEACHING AND LEARNING**

All lessons began promptly, following roll call or other initial settling activities. In most instances, teachers gave clear outlines of the aim of the lesson ahead, and this was done at optimum level where the learning intentions and outline structure of the lesson were also highlighted on the board. Teachers' instructions when given orally were always clear and audible. Some very good ice-breaking strategies were observed, including the oral monitoring of learning in previous lessons, an open question on whether students had any news items to report or any views on how to progress the aims of the lesson. The lessons observed dealt with litter and recycling, animal welfare, local development and practical democracy and were clearly related to syllabus concepts. It is recommended that in addition to placing learning intentions on the board as lessons begin, a similar written reminder for students of the concepts linked to each lesson topic would be a further support to learning.

In the five lessons observed during the evaluation, very good teacher-student rapport was evident throughout. Equally important was the fact that student-student rapport was also very positive wherever they were asked to engage with each other in pair or group activity. Where students were asked to give short oral presentations to their classmates, this was a strong support to developing their self-confidence and all were listened to with great respect and often applauded by their classmates. On the rare occasions where a student needed to be challenged by a teacher, for non-completion of a home task or inattentiveness, this was always done firmly and sensitively and never distracted from lesson development.

A commendable emphasis on student activity was evident in all lessons observed. Invariably, for significant portions of each lesson, students were asked to work in groups at pre-assigned tasks. Such activities ranged from working on a structured handout about recycling with a nominated reporter, to tasks done on animal welfare initially at individual levels with the outcomes then collated onto group project sheets. Some very good group work was employed in order to identify a set of questions for a visiting speaker, while in another lesson very productive use was made of a walking debate strategy to gauge students' views and simultaneously train them in democratic practices. Once or twice, teachers performed a little too many of the activities personally and ought to have placed more onus for carrying out the activities on students themselves, but the overall emphasis on promoting interaction and self-directed learning was very good. Where student activities related to a potential action project report, the teacher was very careful to highlight how students were being asked to play different roles within the group tasks. This was very sensible and the roles were well tailored to individual students' aptitudes and confidence levels.

In tandem with student activity, a range of other teaching strategies were used to ensure progression of the lesson aims. Teachers' explanations of sometimes complex issues and terms were very good. It is recommended that any situations where measurements of area or distance

are required, such as a reference to 250 acres, would be best explained by comparisons with places and distances well known to students rather than using imperial or metric measurements. Questioning was used in all classrooms, sometimes with a little too much emphasis on open questions seeking volunteers. On the other hand, some excellent differentiation was also witnessed, where teachers showed great sensitivity to the ability levels, and degrees of self-confidence among different students, in identifying the different tasks which would be carried out when a speaker visited the class. Elsewhere, some very good use of visuals helped in lesson development, ranging from handouts with diagrammatic templates to illustrated books and newspaper cuttings which mixed visual and verbal stimuli. Many of the good visual and other teaching strategies observed can be built upon through the use of ICT and it is recommended that this be given greater consideration as time and resources allow, particularly with the level of equipment now available to subject teachers.

Overall strategies to support student retention of learning were good. In some lessons, note taking by students was encouraged. This was not overdone and was a good support to retention. It is recommended that the development by students of glossaries of any new or difficult terms in a section of their copybooks would further support retention. In some other instances, students read short extracts from their textbook or from handouts. This was done best where they were subsequently asked to pick out a key sentence or piece of learning from such reading. Very good use of a questionnaire on recycling was noted, as was the use of oral feedback from group reporters to develop a sort of checklist of key points. In another lesson, a looser form of student brainstorming was also gainfully employed to get feedback on learning. In most lessons, such feedback was also reinforced by teachers placing summary points on the board. This, or an alternative where students might be asked to write on the board instead, is recommended for wider application. Again, in most lessons, time was found for a brief return to the initial aims of the lesson and a recap of what learning had been achieved. This is good practice.

Different practices obtained when it came to how students stored any notes, handouts or project components they had worked on during lessons. It may be worthwhile discussing at department level how a more uniform approach to longer term retention of materials, and of learning, can be developed. This does not take from the fact that the overall standard of teaching and learning observed in the CSPE lessons visited was very satisfactory.

## **ASSESSMENT**

A wide range of good informal assessment methods are employed in CSPE. Students are given occasional written homework tasks but are also given drawing tasks or work seeking the completion of projects through identification of items in newspapers or through interviewing relatives. This is good, varied practice. In class, oral questioning was well employed, both to assess and to promote learning. On some occasions, a little more probing with higher order questions or questions which supported subject literacy would have been worthwhile, but the overall quality of in-class questioning was very good. Teachers monitored work done at home, and also the work done by groups as lessons proceeded. Some very good assessment handouts were also used, with word-matching tasks, short-answer questions and stimulus-driven tasks.

On a broader level, it is CSPE department and school policy to hold class tests at Christmas in first year and then formal common assessments from summer in first year onwards. This is good practice, as is the fact that CSPE is given the same level of importance as other subjects at annual parent-teacher meetings, in school reports and in other forms of communication with home. Teachers are allowed flexibility as to whether their CSPE students complete RAPs or coursework

assessment books (CWABs) as part of their assessment component in third year. This is satisfactory but is deserving of ongoing review and reflection to ensure that the most suitable model of assessment is used for each class group. Finally, as the school is engaged in the DEIS initiative, it is recommended that some consideration be given by all subject departments, including CSPE, to any means by which additional literacy and numeracy supports can be factored into assessment in future DEIS planning.

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

The following are the main strengths identified in the evaluation:

- General whole-school supports, time allocation, provision of resources and teachers' access to CPD are very good.
- Subject department planning is very well advanced and coordinated, with a particularly impressive resource facility developed and available to all subject teachers.
- The level of individual planning and preparation observed was very thorough.
- The standard of teaching and opportunities for learning provided in the lessons observed were very satisfactory.
- Teacher-student and student-student relations were very positive in all lessons observed.
- Informal and formal assessment practices are good and support student learning.

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

- Greater consistency in terms of teacher continuity with class groups is needed, especially from second year to third year.
- Wherever possible, CSPE teachers should have their classes for another subject as well, in line with Department circulars.
- Greater emphasis within classes on the identification of lesson aims, use of pinpointed questioning and students' use of folders to store lesson materials is recommended.

Post-evaluation meetings were held with the principal near the conclusion of the evaluation when the draft findings and recommendations of the evaluation were presented and discussed.

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