Subject Inspection of Civic, Social and Political Education
REPORT

Scoil Muire agus Pádraig
Swinford, County Mayo
Roll number: 64690O

Date of inspection: 23 April 2010
REPORT
ON
THE QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN CIVIC, SOCIAL AND POLITICAL EDUCATION

SUBJECT INSPECTION REPORT

This report has been written following a subject inspection in Scoil Muire agus Pádraig, Swinford. 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 and deputy principal. The board of management of the school was given an opportunity to comment in writing on the findings and recommendations of the report, and the response of the board will be found in the appendix of this report.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

Scoil Muire agus Pádraig is commended for its overall commitment to citizenship education. Outings such as trips to the Dáil, Four Courts and a recycling centre are organised for class groups to support the work of their action projects. Students have engaged in fundraising activities for charities and have held an awareness day on bullying. To support and promote the practice of recycling, both within the school and among the wider community students have developed a large mural on recycling and it is planned that the school will enter a recycling float in the local St. Patrick’s Day parade next year. These initiatives are commended as they raise awareness of important issues and give practical expression to the aims of the CSPE syllabus. As a further means of fostering whole-school interest in the subject it is suggested that consideration be given to celebrating one of the Designated Days, for example, International Day for Older Persons (October) or Earth Day (April 22).

Parents are informed about students’ progress in the subject through school reports and at parent-teacher meetings. They also receive details of organised subject-related outings in the school journal. On open night, parents of incoming first-year students should be given a brief outline of the CSPE curriculum and its requirements as it is frequently a subject that they are not familiar with. The fact sheet on CSPE produced by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment and available at www.ncca.ie could be used for this purpose. Creating awareness of the demands of the subject should also serve to elicit parental support when students need to meet deadlines for the completion of the action project.

School management allocates a single period per week to CSPE for all junior cycle classes. This provision is appropriate. It was noted from the timetable that a significant number of CSPE lessons are timetabled on Friday. It is recommended that timetabling CSPE lessons on a Friday be avoided if possible as loss of the class is more likely on this day due to interruptions in the school calendar. It is good practice that classes retain the same teacher for second year and third year as it ensures continuity for students and supports programme planning.
In most instances teachers do not have their entire CSPE class group for another subject. In line with Circular Letter M13/05 it is recommended that teachers assigned to CSPE should be teaching the relevant class groups for another subject as well. This provision would facilitate teachers in arranging flexible contact time with their respective classes when undertaking action projects. All students are taught in mixed-ability class groups and this is appropriate for the delivery of the CSPE teaching programme.

A good range of subject resources has been collected over the years. These are listed in the subject plan and stored in a box in one of the classrooms. A more central storage space should be made available to facilitate more convenient access to these resources. Teachers have access to audio-visual equipment and the school has two computer rooms which can be made available by arrangement. Information and communication technology (ICT) is used to research various websites of relevance to the CSPE syllabus. Going forward school management should plan for the greater provision of ICT facilities in classrooms to facilitate teachers in the increased integration of electronic resources.

School management encourages and promotes teachers’ continuing professional development (CPD). A number of whole-school professional development courses have been organised some of which have relevance to CSPE including themes such as bullying and human rights in the school context. The subject co-ordinator has availed of CSPE in-service provided through the Second Level Support Service (SLSS). As three of the CSPE teachers are relatively new to the subject it is recommended that they attend in-service, as it becomes available, to support them in developing their knowledge and expertise. One member of the CSPE teaching team should become affiliated to the Association of CSPE Teachers (ACT) as this network is of benefit in the dissemination of good practice and increasing awareness of subject issues. The subject plan should also include a record of teachers’ engagement in continuing professional development. This will enable professional development needs to be identified in a strategic manner.

**Planning and Preparation**

The CSPE teaching team has engaged well with subject planning. A formal planning meeting is held at the start of the year and the teachers also meet informally on a regular basis. The minutes of formal meetings are documented. This is good practice as it provides a record of actions planned and enables progress to be readily tracked. It is encouraged that this good practice be extended and also that key decisions made at informal meetings be recorded. The longest-established member of the department acts as the subject co-ordinator. As the other teachers gain experience in the subject this role should be rotated to further develop leadership and capacity among the CSPE team.

A review of the planning documentation made available on the day of the evaluation indicates that the teachers of CSPE have made good progress in subject planning. Programmes of work in relation to a concept-based approach to the teaching of the curriculum have been developed. Flexibility is also accommodated within these programmes to incorporate significant current events relevant to the seven syllabus concepts. This is good practice as, in this way, learning in the subject can be directly linked to the real world. The curriculum content is set out for each concept and the expected learning outcomes are also identified for some concepts. To further progress planning and to support teachers in delivery of the curriculum the learning outcomes and appropriate resource materials should be established for all concepts. The subject plan outlines a
range of methodologies to facilitate active learning and provides a focus on the skills to be developed across the syllabus.

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 provision is in line with syllabus recommendations and should be extended to all class groups given the significant assessment weighting allocated to the Report on an Action Project (RAP) for the Junior Certificate examination. This will support students in developing the skills of active citizenship and report writing. It is encouraged that the subject plan documents the health and safety procedures in place for carrying out action projects.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

There was effective planning and preparation by teachers for the lessons observed. Supplementary materials were used in the development of lesson content. The topics being studied formed part of a larger unit of work and were clearly linked to course concepts. Lessons were generally well structured in line with the planned learning objectives.

Overall a good quality of teaching and learning was observed in the lessons evaluated. In the majority of cases teacher instruction was well combined with methodologies that facilitated the active engagement of students with the lesson material. These strategies included discussion propelled by question and answer sessions, role-play, the completion of worksheet activities and group-work. In one lesson role-play was used effectively to explore the reasons for homelessness. Careful planning for the lesson was noted in the preparatory discussion on the topic, in the use of a worksheet and other resources to support the activity. Where group-work was carried out this was managed well with clear tasks assigned, a note-taker appointed within each group and an appropriate timeframe set for the activity. The students were obviously used to this methodology, they formed quickly into their groups and worked diligently in a co-operative manner. Lessons were most effective where there was a good balance between teacher talk and student input. While questioning was a central methodology in all lessons it was most effective where students were given the time to reflect on the question and to develop their answers. This approach is recommended in all lessons as it would facilitate greater student participation and discussion on the topic and would enhance their learning. In this context it is also recommended that directed questioning to named individuals be used more frequently so that all students are challenged to participate and a clearer evaluation of their learning can take place.

There was good use of the white board or overhead projector to structure aspects of the lesson and this provided a clear focus on key points to be learned. Appropriately in some lessons very good links were made between the lesson content and the local environment. This is in line with best practice as it grounds students’ understanding and learning in a familiar and real world context.

Teachers are aware of students with additional educational needs in their classes. The use of active learning strategies and visual stimuli was effective in supporting the range of learning styles and needs. The learning-support department provides additional support if necessary to students when completing the RAP in third year. Good attention was paid to the specific subject terminology in lessons and in some cases terms were further reinforced by writing them on the board. This practice is recommended in all lessons and students should keep a glossary of terms relevant to each of the syllabus concepts. As students engaged in tasks this afforded opportunities for the teacher to provide targeted support where necessary.
In one room the learning environment was enhanced through the display of some student-generated posters on the concept of stewardship. It is recommended that some wall space in classrooms where CSPE is taught be used to display important subject-related materials and photo galleries of key national and international figures. Students should also be encouraged to produce posters and collect relevant materials from media sources to contribute to the learning environment.

There was a positive atmosphere in classrooms and interactions between teachers and students were mutually respectful and co-operative. The students responded very well to instruction and engaged in active learning with enthusiasm. They showed a good understanding of the topics being taught and were confident in expressing their views.

**ASSESSMENT**

A variety of methods is used to assess students’ progress including questioning, observation, worksheets and group activities. Homework is regularly assigned and corrected. The inclusion of project work such as research activities, poster designing or issue tracking is encouraged as an additional mode of assessment. This will further foster independent and activity-based learning. The students’ participation in this work should be rewarded in end-of-term examinations.

In some lessons the students were in the process of writing up the RAP. In some cases there was scope for more developmental feedback to be provided to support students in developing and improving their answers. The increased use of constructive feedback is recommended to achieve this. The amendments made by students based on the teacher’s feedback should then be further checked before the final report is written up by the students. It is suggested that a dedicated timeslot be assigned to junior-cycle class groups to write the final draft of the pro forma RAP booklet. This formalised approach will ensure the completion of RAPs by the stated deadline. The CSPE teaching team should develop agreed practices in relation to the completion of RAPs and the provision of feedback to students on this work. Secure provision for the storage of RAPs is in place.

Students sit formal examinations at Christmas and at the end of the third term. Third-year students sit pre-examinations in the second term. Results obtained by students in the Junior Certificate are analysed each year. A review of examination data indicates that students achieve well in state examinations and indicates the high expectations set for learning.

**SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

The following are the main strengths identified in the evaluation:

- The school’s ethos is supportive of CSPE.
- A good range of resources is available to the subject.
- School management encourages and promotes teachers’ continuing professional development.
- Formal planning structures are in place and the CSPE teaching team have engaged well with subject planning.
- Overall good quality teaching and learning were observed in the lessons evaluated.
- Interactions between teachers and students were mutually respectful and co-operative.
- The students displayed good learning and were confident in expressing their views.
As a means of building on these strengths and to address areas for development, the following key recommendations are made:

- Timetabling CSPE lessons on a Friday should be avoided.
- In line with Circular Letter M13/05 teachers of CSPE should be allocated to those class groups to whom they also teach another subject.
- Two action projects should be undertaken with each class group over the three years of the junior cycle.
- Programmes of work should be further developed to include the expected learning outcomes and resource materials.
- All lessons should include a good balance between teacher talk and student input.
- The CSPE teaching team should develop agreed practices in relation to procedures for the completion of RAPs and the provision of feedback to students on this work.

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

*Published, December 2010*
Appendix

SCHOOL RESPONSE TO THE REPORT

Submitted by the Board of Management
Area 1  Observations on the content of the inspection report

The Board is happy and agrees with the content and sentiment expressed in the Inspection report. The inspection highlighted the positive elements of the teaching and learning process currently at work in the school.

Area 2  Follow-up actions planned or undertaken since the completion of the inspection activity to implement the findings and recommendations of the inspection.

We were unable to alter this year’s timetable with a view to keeping CSPE classes out of Friday. In general we were able to uphold your recommendation that CSPE teachers teach other classes with the same group. The CSPE teachers have agreed on procedures for the completion of RAPS.