

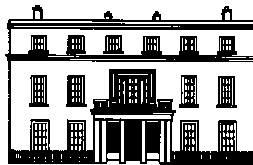
An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

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

**Bridgetown Vocational College
Bridgetown, County Wexford
Roll number: 71610E**

Date of inspection: 22 April 2010



**AN ROINN | DEPARTMENT OF
OIDEACHAIS | EDUCATION
AGUS SCILEANNA | AND SKILLS**

REPORT
ON
THE QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN CSPE

SUBJECT INSPECTION REPORT

This report has been written following a subject inspection in Bridgetown Vocational College, Co. Wexford. It presents the findings of an evaluation of the quality of teaching and learning in 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

Bridgetown Vocational College is a co-educational college with 589 students. Parents are informed of CSPE as a core subject in junior cycle at the introductory meeting for the parents of incoming first-year students. It is recommended that school provide some further information to parents on the rationale underpinning the study of CSPE and on the demands of this subject as it may be less familiar to them. Students are banded in each year group into two bands and students in the lower band follow the Junior Certificate School's Programme (JCSP). Students in the lower bands are also afforded additional support in CSPE and this is good practice.

There is appropriate allocation of time for CSPE and the timetabling of lessons is satisfactory. However, most of the teachers do not have their CSPE group for another subject. It is recommended that ways be explored whereby teachers of CSPE can have their groups for another subject. This would afford them flexibility in securing additional time where necessary for the completion of the action projects. Efforts are being made to ensure that, where possible, teachers retain the same class groups for the duration of their junior cycle programme and this is commended.

There are currently eleven teachers from a wide range of disciplines, involved in the delivery of CSPE. While the commitment of all these teachers to the effective delivery of the subject is acknowledged, consideration should be given to forming a smaller core team of teachers of CSPE who would teach the subject to a number of classes. The creation of such a team would ensure good continuity for students and its members could also be available to mentor teachers who are new to the subject. Some of the teachers delivering the CSPE programme have completed the CSPE module as part of their training for the Higher or Post-graduate Diplomas in Education. All teachers, new to the subject, are shown a DVD on the teaching and learning of CSPE and are mentored by the subject coordinator. Others have availed of professional development offered in local education centres or through the programmes offered by the CSPE support service. Information relating to in-service for CSPE is disseminated to all teachers and attendance at such programmes is supported by school management. In addition, a significant range of whole-school

interventions has taken place in the school in recent years and these have further supported teacher professional development. The commitment of senior management and the members of the CSPE department to ongoing professional development is highly commended.

Most teachers have a base classroom and many of the rooms visited had a small number of CSPE related posters on the walls. There were some classrooms where the displays of students' CSPE projects provided an attractive and stimulating learning environment for the students. There is also a CSPE notice board in the corridor and this is used to post up a range of CSPE related news. This is good practice. Teachers should consider encouraging students to extend the CSPE environments by sourcing relevant photographs, news items and other CSPE related posters.

There is good provision for resources with access to televisions, DVD players and an extensive range of materials which are kept in a resource folder in the staff room. Some classrooms have data projectors and there are a small number of mobile projectors available for use. Logistical difficulties mean that some class groups have limited access to information and communication technology (ICT). However, there is a computer room which is available to students and they are encouraged to use ICT to source information for their project work. Teachers are encouraged to seek out opportunities to access ICT for occasions when its use would be of benefit to the students.

A strong focus is placed on active citizenship in the school through student involvement in a broad range of co-curricular activities. Annual outings are organised to the Dáil and to Mountjoy prison as part of the students' CSPE programme. Speakers from a range of voluntary and environmental agencies are invited to speak to the students. The teachers of CSPE are currently working with first-year students on the organisation of an anti-litter campaign and second-year students are encouraged to investigate and plan for avoiding waste and saving energy. A number of fundraising activities are organised in the school each year and, while not directly related to the work of CSPE in the classroom, students are alerted to the relationship between CSPE and these activities which reflect a concern for the general wellbeing of all. The work of the student council is coordinated by a teacher of CSPE and this is commended. Many other members of the CSPE department are actively involved in community organisations and activities and this is good as involvement in the community models active citizenship in a meaningful way.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

Subject planning for CSPE is well advanced in Bridgetown Vocational College. There is a subject coordinator and this is a position which is voluntary and rotates, in line with good practice. It is suggested that, where possible or desired, the current practice of rotating the coordination on an annual basis could be extended to a two year cycle as this would give teachers the opportunity of making a significant contribution to co-ordinating the work of the CSPE department. In addition to the general work of organising meetings and circulating information, the CSPE coordinator acts as a mentor for any CSPE teacher needing support or advice. This is commended. Subject department meetings usually take place once a term. The CSPE department has met formally four times in the current year and frequent informal CSPE related discussions also take place. Minutes are recorded of all formal meetings. A review of the minutes of subject planning meetings indicates that the CSPE department devotes time to forward planning in addition to dealing with matters of an immediate and practical nature. This is very good practice. Forward planning is currently focused on the introduction of common examinations, reviewing the mock examinations and sourcing new ideas for action projects.

A review of subject planning documentation submitted on the day of the inspection indicated that many good practices are in place in relation to subject planning for CSPE. The long-term plan for CSPE establishes the aims and objectives in terms of learning outcomes. The planning folder includes the syllabus and guidelines for the teaching and learning of the subject and the department's organisational and operating context. It also includes a list of resources including a number of templates and lesson plans for teachers new to the subject. Some of the resources contained in the folder have recently been updated to reflect recent political changes and this is good practice. The curriculum content to be covered in each term for each year group is set out in terms of the concepts and topics to be studied. Teachers are commended for the high quality of the work completed to date in subject planning for CSPE.

There was evidence of careful planning for the lessons observed with advance readiness of resources and worksheets.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

Evaluation activities involved the observation of six lessons; three in first year, two in second year and one in third year. The inspector was also afforded the opportunity to interact with the students and to review their copybooks. The quality of teaching and learning was good in all of the lessons observed.

Most lessons were well structured and paced and the content was appropriate to the needs and abilities of the students. Many teachers began their lesson by communicating the lesson plan to the students, either verbally, or by writing it up on the board. This is good practice. However, to engage them more actively in the teaching and learning process, it is recommended that the lesson plan be shared with the students in terms of the proposed learning outcomes; what students should and may be able to do as an outcome of their learning. When sharing the lesson plan with the students teachers should also remind them of the concept being studied.

In most instances previous learning was consolidated within a short time frame prior to being effectively fed into the new material to be covered in the lesson. In some lessons activities such as brainstorming were used to actively engage the students in new learning. These are effective practices which should be extended to all lessons.

Question and answer sessions were used in all lessons to elicit information and students' opinions on the topic in hand. In some instances it is recommended that teachers extend their use of higher-order questions. There was one lesson where a correct answer proffered by the student was not accepted as it differed from the answer sought by the teacher. It is important for teachers to keep in mind that in CSPE there may be a range of possible correct answers and to accept them.

ICT was used in one lesson in a structured and effective manner and this is commended. Good use was also made of supplementary materials and worksheets to maintain student interest and engagement. As ICT becomes more readily available in the classroom, teachers should incorporate it judiciously into their lessons.

The use of student-based tasks, as observed in all lessons, ensured that a good balance was maintained between teacher direction and student activity. There was one instance however, where a task, completed individually, would have yielded better outcomes had it been carried out in groups. Attention was also needed in some instances where too much time was allocated for a task. All student-based activities should be kept short and focused, thereby ensuring that students do not have the opportunity to disengage from the work.

Students were very well behaved throughout and they applied themselves to the work of the lessons observed. They displayed good interest in and knowledge of the work in hand and there were many students whose answers indicated good student learning and active engagement with the concepts being studied. There was one lesson where the teacher tended to focus attention and ask questions of the students sitting in one area of the classroom. This resulted in some of the quieter students sitting in another corner disengaging from active participation in the lesson. The practice of targeting students when asking questions should help ensure that all students are included in the work of the lesson.

ASSESSMENT

Students' progress is monitored in a number of ways including question and answer sessions in class, homework assignments and tests. A review of students' copybooks or folders indicated that homework is given and corrected in many lessons and this is good practice. However, there were some lessons where it was unclear if the work in the copybooks had been completed in class or at home. It is recognised that both class and homework assignments for CSPE can differ from the traditional format of note-taking and exercises. However, all students need to have a record of both work completed in class and homework to support them in their learning and revision. To this end, a review of current assessment practices should be undertaken and the teachers of CSPE should work together to ensure that protocols are in place for the effective recording and monitoring of student work. Students should keep a CSPE diary in which they record the learning outcomes from each lesson and from their homework assignments.

The members of the CSPE department are currently working on improving their summative assessment practices. Students are given end-of-chapter tests, sit class tests at Christmas and have formal examinations in the summer. Plans are in place to extend the practice of common tests for all students and to introduce a mock examination for CSPE early in the second term.

Contact with parents is maintained through the school journal, school reports and the annual parent-teacher meetings held for each year group. A review of outcomes in state examinations indicates that teachers should remain vigilant to ensure that the improvements achieved in recent years are maintained and extended.

SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The following are the main strengths identified in the evaluation:

- There is satisfactory allocation of time and timetabling for CSPE.
- There is good provision for supporting teachers in the delivery of CSPE.
- A broad range of co-curricular activities are in place to support active citizenship.
- Subject planning for CSPE is well advanced with many commendable planning practices in situ.
- A range of methodologies was observed during lessons and many were used very effectively.
- Active learning was facilitated in all lessons through the use of pair and group work activities.

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

- Senior management should facilitate the creation of a core team of CSPE teachers who can provide continuity for students and support teachers who are new to the subject.
- School management should explore ways whereby teachers of CSPE can have their CSPE class for another subject.
- A review of assessment practices should be undertaken to ensure that all students maintain an ongoing record of work completed and learning outcomes achieved.

Post-evaluation meetings were held with the teachers of CSPE and with 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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