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

Our Lady of Lourdes Secondary School Rosbercon, New Ross, County Wexford Roll number: 63630O

Date of inspection: 6 May 2010
REPORT
ON
THE QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN CIVIC SOCIAL AND
POLITICAL EDUCATION (CSPE)

SUBJECT INSPECTION REPORT

This report has been written following a subject inspection in Our Lady of Lourdes Secondary School, Rosbercon, New Ross. 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

Our Lady of Lourdes Secondary School is a voluntary secondary school with 335 female students. Prior to entry into the school the principal meets with each incoming first-year student and her parents and, during this meeting, provides information on new subjects including CSPE. This is good practice as both parents and students need to know about the demands of lesser known subjects. Classes are taught in mixed-ability groupings.

There is good whole school provision and support for CSPE in the allocation of time and timetabling. All classes have one period a week in line with curriculum requirements and the principal endeavours to ensure that CSPE is not timetabled for last period in the day. Furthermore the teachers of CSPE have their class groups for another subject. This is good practice as it allows for flexibility if additional time is needed for the completion of action projects.

There are currently two teachers of CSPE in the school, who have been assigned on the basis of willingness to teach the subject. Every effort is made to ensure that teachers continue with the same class group for the three years of junior cycle. Senior management facilitates regular attendance at in-service programmes provided for teachers of CSPE and members of the CSPE department are members of the Association of CSPE teachers (ACT). This is commended.

Classrooms in our Lady of Lourdes school are student based. This limits somewhat the opportunity to develop a print-rich CSPE environment. However, there were some CSPE related posters in one of the classrooms visited and there is a CSPE notice board in the school canteen displaying students’ projects and photographs of famous people. To further extend this good practice, students themselves should be encouraged to source and post up information to highlight various international events such as national tree week or fair trade fortnight, events which are relevant to the promotion of active citizenship.
There is good availability of resources to support the teaching and learning of CSPE and these are stored in a cabinet which is accessible to all. Secure storage for students’ action projects is provided in the principal’s office. Resources to support the use of information and communication technology (ICT) are currently somewhat limited as data projectors are only available in a small number of classrooms. There is however some access to the computer room and it is used by class groups for researching and downloading information. Given the wealth of information available on the internet to support the teaching and learning of CSPE, teachers should plan for how best they can embrace ICT as soon as it becomes more readily available in the school.

A range of co-curricular activities are in place in the school to promote active citizenship. Some of these are directly connected to the implementation of the CSPE curriculum, while others are whole-school events which result in raising students’ awareness of their place in and responsibility to the community in which they live. Students learn about the role of the student council during CSPE lessons and first-year students have recently learnt to work through the student council to effect desired changes in the school. Guest speakers include members of the Garda Síochána and local politicians. Annual visits are organised to the Dáil and the Courts and students have also visited Waterford to study the topic of urban renewal. A tidy classroom project has been organised in the first-year classes to raise awareness of environmental issues and the teachers of CSPE and Social Personal and Health Education (SPHE) work together to organise a week of actions promoting a safe school. Students also engage in a number of charitable events including fundraising for the Marie Keating Foundation, the Irish Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (ISPCC) and take part in the annual Trócaire fast. The school’s support for local community initiatives is manifest in their organisation of Christmas presents for the senior citizens resident in the local hospital. Students also involve themselves annually in decorating the Christmas tree in the parish Church. The school community is commended for the initiatives undertaken to promote active citizenship by students.

**Planning and Preparation**

A review of planning documentation submitted on the day of the evaluation indicates that subject planning for CSPE has been in place for a number of years. There is a subject co-ordinator, a position which is voluntary and which is alternated between the teachers of the subject. Formal meetings are facilitated each term and, as the need arises. Minutes are kept of all meetings held. These are good practices.

The subject plan for CSPE sets out the aims and objectives for the teaching and learning of the subject and outlines the school’s organisational and operating context. The curriculum content is categorised under four headings, the concepts to be studied, class work, homework and assessment. The planning folder also includes evidence of subject planning reviews which have taken place, guidelines for teachers, examples of a self-assessment sheet developed for students and homework templates. Samples of previous tests and state examination papers, information on writing up the action projects and a checklist to support teachers in the completion of their work are also contained in the subject planning folder. The members of the CSPE department are commended for the very good work already completed in subject planning.

As the planning process continues the members of the CSPE department should further build on work completed to date by articulating the learning outcomes for each year group in terms of what the students will be able to do as a result of their learning. They should also include the
proposed methodologies to achieve these outcomes. This will help the teachers to advance the self-evaluation process within the subject department.

There was evidence of good preparation for the lessons evaluated. In some instances the seating had been efficiently organised to support the work of the lesson. There was advance readiness of supplementary materials for all of the lessons observed.

**TEACHING AND LEARNING**

Evaluation activities involved the observation of four lessons: two in first year, one in second year and one in third year. Interaction between the students and the inspector and a review of students’ copybooks was also facilitated. Good standards of teaching and learning were observed in all lessons.

All lessons were well structured and paced and the content responded to the needs and interests of the students. The topics being studied included homelessness, the role and work of the United Nations and voting in an election, thereby dealing with the concepts of human dignity, rights and responsibilities, development and democracy. In some lessons teachers began by sharing the lesson plan with the students and by reminding them of the concept being studied. This is good practice and should be extended to all lessons as it makes students aware of teaching and learning as a shared responsibility and is central to the syllabus objectives and guidelines for CSPE.

Question and answer sessions were effectively used to consolidate previous learning and to integrate it into the work of the lesson. A good range of higher-order questions resulted in students engaging with the topic at a deeper level and enabling them to discover the issues common to a number of the concepts being studied.

In one of the lessons observed students reported on a series of collages they had just completed on the topic of homelessness. The questions asked during that phase of the lesson encouraged the students not only to think about the knowledge accrued, but also about the learning process and the manner in which they expressed the outcomes of their learning. This is very good practice.

Active learning was promoted in some lessons through the use of individual and group tasks. This is good practice. There was one lesson however, where the completion of one task was followed immediately by a further task. In this instance, it is recommended that time be allocated between the two tasks for the purpose of discussion and the consolidation of learning. In other lessons, where the focus was on information giving, more varied student activity such as the use of short focused individual or group tasks would have further enhanced the good work being carried out.

A mini action project was carried out in one lesson where students applied their learning about voting systems to the election of a student for a future position of responsibility in the school. This was followed by work from past examination papers relating to the topic. This approach afforded students an enjoyable and meaningful opportunity to engage in a democratic activity and the subsequent use of the examination papers provided an appropriate context in which to assess the impact of their learning.

A positive and well-managed learning environment prevailed in all of the lessons observed and students and teachers worked together in the pursuit of the proposed learning outcomes. The action project had been well planned and prepared by the students and they carried it out in an orderly manner. The sensitive approach to the topics discussed in some lessons evoked thoughtful
and personal responses indicating that students had meaningfully engaged with the work of the lesson and had achieved the learning outcomes. Interactions with the inspector provided further evidence of good student learning.

**ASSESSMENT**

Assessment protocols to monitor student progress in CSPE in Our Lady of Lourdes School include question and answer sessions in class, homework assignments, class tests and formal end-of-year examinations. The use of a self-assessment sheet as observed at the end of one lesson is very good practice as it ensures that students have a record of work completed in class. Given the nature of CSPE and the time devoted to active learning in class, it is recommended that this practice or the introduction of a CSPE diary in which students can record their learning outcomes be extended to all lessons.

Teachers have also drawn up templates and guidelines to support good practice in the assigning of homework. This is commended. A review of students’ copybooks indicated that homework is given and corrected. However, in order to differentiate between work corrected by the teacher and work corrected by students it is recommended that teachers sign and date their corrections. Furthermore, in situations where students are asked to watch a news item or research a topic, teachers should ask them to record in writing the outcomes of the task.

Students sit tests at Christmas and in the summer. Students also complete one action project in fulfilment of the requirements of the Junior Certificate curriculum in addition to a number of mini-action projects which are completed in a shorter time frame. A review of outcomes in certificate examinations indicates good levels of achievement in CSPE.

Contact with parents is maintained through the use of the school journal, school reports and the annual parent-teacher meetings held for each year group.

**SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

The following are the main strengths identified in the evaluation:

- There is good whole school provision and support for CSPE in the allocation of time and timetabling.
- Very good work has been completed to date in subject planning for CSPE.
- All lessons were well structured and paced and there was good evidence of active learning.
- Good use of question and answer sessions resulted in personal and meaningful engagement with the learning process and the concepts being studied.

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

- Teachers should plan for the integration of ICT into their teaching and learning as soon as it becomes more readily available in the school.
- Teacher instruction should be interspersed with a variety of activities including individual or group tasks to enhance and consolidate student engagement and learning.
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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