

An Roinn Oideachais agus Eolaíochta
Department of Education and Science

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

F.C.J. Secondary School
Bunclody, County Wexford
Roll number: 63550Q

Date of inspection: 21 October 2008

Subject inspection report
Subject provision and whole school support
Planning and preparation
Teaching and learning
Assessment
Summary of main findings and recommendations

REPORT ON THE QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN CIVIC, SOCIAL AND PERSONAL
EDUCATION (CSPE)

Subject inspection report

This report has been written following a subject inspection in F.C.J. Secondary School, Bunclody, conducted as part of a whole-school evaluation. 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.

Subject provision and whole school support

F.C.J. Secondary School is a co-educational voluntary school with 783 students. The study of CSPE is compulsory for all students at junior cycle. Incoming first-year students and their

parents are given an information booklet about CSPE at the first-year enrolment night. Parents are given further information in relation to the assessment of CSPE at parent-teacher meetings and are also advised as to how they might support their children in this subject area. Letters are also sent out to parents informing them of when the students will complete their action projects. This is highly commended as it makes parents aware of the demands and expectations of a subject that may be less familiar than others, in addition to supporting them in the subject specific work.

There is appropriate whole-school provision for CSPE in relation to the allocation of time. Classes have one period per week for the subject. Some lessons are thirty-five minutes while others are of forty minutes duration. Given that students only have CSPE once a week, forty-minute periods should be allocated to the subject where possible. Teachers are normally assigned to CSPE on the basis of teacher preference and of ensuring, where possible, continuity for students. Some teachers also have their CSPE groupings for another subject. This is in line with best practice as it allows for flexibility in swapping around lessons when carrying out or completing action projects. It is recommended that school management endeavour to ensure that all teachers of CSPE have their class group for another subject.

There are currently seven teachers involved in the delivery of CSPE all of whom are arts graduates. Many of the teachers have qualifications in religious education while others are also involved in the delivery of Social Personal and Health Education (SPHE), subjects that have a degree of overlap with the concepts being studied in CSPE. Some of the teachers have been actively involved with the provision of CSPE-related in-service while many others have availed of in-service in the past five years. Teachers who are new to the subject are provided with the materials available from the CSPE support services including sample modules of work, planning sheets and exemplar material. They are also encouraged and supported by senior management to attend subject-specific in-service. Senior management also pays for the school membership of the association of CSPE teachers (ACT), and two of the CSPE teachers in FCJ Bunclody are convenors for the regional branch of the association. This strong commitment by both teachers and senior management to the induction of teachers new to the subject and to continued professional development is highly commended.

A wide range of resources is available to all teachers of CSPE, including newspapers and newspaper supplements, information and teaching materials from non-governmental organisations, text books, information on active teaching methodologies and packages of photographs. Resources are provided on request to management and the CSPE department has been granted funding in the current academic year for the purchase of a camera for use in action projects. Two large storage presses have been allocated to the CSPE department and resources have been catalogued according to the different concepts studied as part of the programme. This is highly commended. Secure storage for the students' reports on an action project (RAP) is provided by school management. Information and communication technology (ICT) has been embraced by the teachers of CSPE and is used primarily for the downloading of materials, and students are also encouraged to research information for their work on the internet.

Active citizenship, which is central to the aims of the CSPE programme, is fostered in the school through activities such as the very high-profile elections to the student council, where the principles of democracy, as studied in first year, are put into practice. Guest speakers and visits to judicial or environmental centres also contribute to greater awareness of people's social rights and responsibilities. Students have participated over the years in competitions promoting citizenship awareness. School management acknowledges the importance of CSPE as a subject in its recognition of student achievement in CSPE-related events at the annual student awards ceremony. There is also a CSPE page on the school's website and a CSPE album in the website's photo gallery. The contribution of both senior management and the CSPE department to the promotion of active citizenship is highly commended.

Planning and preparation

The members of the CSPE department in FCJ Secondary School Bunclody have embraced subject planning as part of school development planning. Teachers meet formally once per term and a record is kept of all meetings. This is good practice. There is a subject convenor, a position which currently forms part of a post of responsibility. In the interests of affording all teachers of CSPE the experience of subject coordination and the opportunity to build up subject and management experience, consideration should be given to making the coordination of the subject a voluntary rotating position.

A review of subject planning documentation submitted on the day of the evaluation indicates that subject development planning for CSPE has been developed to a very high standard. The plan outlines the aims of the CSPE programme in the school and the attitudes and values to be promoted as part of developing active citizenship. The strong emphasis on skills development as a means of supporting these aims is commended. The content is laid out in terms of what the students will learn, what they will be made aware of and the opportunities afforded to them for possible action projects in order to fulfil the aims of the programme. Syllabus information, in-service provision and proposed methodologies, assessment procedures, health and safety protocols and planning for students with special educational needs (SEN) are also included in the plan. The members of the CSPE department are highly commended for the very high quality of the work completed as part of the subject development planning process.

Teachers also submitted individual planning folders, which included copies of the long-term plan, schemes of work, lists of resources and marking protocols. A record of work completed was also included. This enabled the teacher to indicate where the actual work completed deviated from the planned scheme of work, in the interests of integrating current affairs of relevance to CSPE. This is very highly commended as it responds to the overall aims of the CSPE programme which recommends provision for such flexibility.

There was evidence throughout of very careful planning and preparation for the individual lessons observed with the advance readiness of supplementary materials and equipment, including photographs, activity cards and worksheets.

Teaching and learning

All lessons evaluated were very well structured and paced and the content was appropriate to the abilities and interests of the students. Many of the lessons opened with a question and answer session reviewing national events from the previous week. This is commended as such a review encourages students to become more aware of the relevance of the concepts studied in CSPE to their everyday lives. In some instances the ensuing discussion was skilfully fed into the work of the lesson. In other classes the topic of the lesson was subsequently introduced. It is suggested however that, when introducing the topic for the lesson, the teacher remind students of the specific concept being studied.

Question and answer sessions were further used throughout all lessons and there were many commendable examples of higher-order questions engaging students in a more reflective process. This was achieved through a guided process where the teachers began by initially grounding the concept being studied in examples from the students' own lives before engaging in discussion of the relevant concept at a more global level.

Visual supports including pictures and laminates of key words were effectively used in many lessons to reinforce learning. The laminates were posted up on the wall, affording students the opportunity to refer to and assimilate these key words during the course of the lesson. This is good practice. The board was also used well to support learning.

A very good balance was maintained in all lessons evaluated between teacher instruction and student activity. Group work or, in one instance, a game involving the entire class as a group, was used to actively engage all the students in the learning process. In some instances, where the classroom was not big enough to facilitate the activity, teachers used a hall or the corridor as an alternative venue and students moved without incurring any loss of time or disruption to the smooth running of the lesson. In one instance, the corridor was very effectively used for an activity where pictures were posted up on the walls and students had the opportunity to move around, view and choose the picture most relevant to their individual tasks. Worksheets were distributed in some instances to enable students to record their findings.

A very positive learning environment was observed in all lessons evaluated. Teachers were affirming of their students, who in turn engaged fully in the work of the lesson. Students' involvement in discussion and their responses both during the lesson and in interaction with the inspector indicated high levels of interest in the topics studied in CSPE and a very good understanding of the work in hand.

The overall quality of teaching and learning as observed in the lessons evaluated was of a very high standard.

Assessment

A range of very commendable assessment and recording protocols has been put in place to monitor students' progress in CSPE. These include participation in classroom activities, homework assignments, the maintenance of a student diary, the completion of action projects and formal examinations.

A review of copies indicated that homework is given and corrected. Given the nature of CSPE where both class and homework assignments may differ from the traditional format of note-taking and exercises, the CSPE department has introduced a class diary where students record the work they have completed in the lesson and their own learning outcome. This is highly commended as it provides students with a valuable resource for their own learning and for revision.

Students in FCJ Bunclody complete two action projects as part of their junior cycle programme. The action project completed by first-year and second-year students is written up as a report on an action project (RAP) for their end-of-year examination. First and second years also sit a formal CSPE examination at Christmas. Certificate examination students sit a written examination in October in addition to a formal 'mock' examination in February. They also carry out an action project and the RAP, which is submitted as part of their Junior Certificate examination, is completed in the school under examination conditions.

Contact with parents is maintained through the use of the student journal, school reports which are issued twice yearly and the annual parent-teacher meetings held for all year groups.

Summary of main findings and recommendations

The following are the main strengths identified in the evaluation:

- There is a strong commitment to the effective delivery of CSPE as a subject by both school management and the members of the CSPE department.
- Subject planning for CSPE has been developed to a very high standard.
- Lessons were very well structured with a very good balance between teacher instruction and student activity.
- A variety of active methodologies was observed and used to optimum effect.
- Very good student engagement and learning were observed in all of the lessons evaluated.
- A variety of very commendable assessment and recording protocols are in place to support and monitor students' progress.

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

- School management should endeavour to ensure that all teachers of CSPE have their class group for another subject.
- Consideration should be given to making the coordination of CSPE a voluntary rotating position.

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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