

**An Roinn Oideachais agus Eolaíochta**

**Department of Education and Science**

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

**REPORT**

**Castleknock Community College**

**Carpenterstown, Dublin 15**

**Roll number: 76062B**

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**AN ROINN OIDEACHAIS  
AGUS EOLAÍOCHTA** | **DEPARTMENT OF  
EDUCATION  
AND SCIENCE**

**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 Castleknock Community College. 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 four 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, deputy 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**

CSPE is a compulsory subject in the junior cycle curriculum and Castleknock Community College provides it in each of the twenty junior cycle classes. The school's ethos is supportive of CSPE. Information about all subjects, including CSPE, is disseminated at designated open nights held for parents of incoming first years. Parents have the opportunity to meet the CSPE teachers at parent-teacher meetings. Formal in-house examinations include the subject and the results are communicated to parents on the school's report form in line with other subjects. The walls of corridors reflect concepts that underpin CSPE. For example, a framed copy of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights hangs on the wall of one of the corridors. Posters advertising Amnesty International Candle Day were observed throughout the school during the course of the visit. Other relevant posters were noted in public areas. Efforts should be made to extend this good practice and to mark all international designated days. The entrance and reception area in particular could be a focal point for CSPE related displays. This would not only be of benefit to students and create a public platform for the display of their work and their level of engagement with the subject, but would also help to inform parents, visitors and those who participate in the school's adult education programme. More linkages could be made between CSPE and the other very worthwhile events that are organised in the school, for example, Grandparents' day. It is reported that parents have been invited to the school as part of an action project and this is highly commended. To build on the many good practices already in existence, consideration could be given to cultivating an even more positive attitude to CSPE. For example, staff training days and staff meetings could provide a forum for briefing all staff members concerning the nature of the CSPE syllabus and the seven concepts that underpin it.

CSPE receives an excellent level of whole-school support across a number of areas. Timetabling allocation is appropriate and one class period is provided for each class group in each year of the

Junior Certificate programme. If a lesson is allocated to a class group at a time that results in the occasional loss of the period due to disruption of the school calendar, it is reported that management makes every effort to ensure that the same class group is allocated a different slot on the timetable in other years of the junior cycle. Teachers are encouraged to bring matters relating to timetabling that impact negatively on learning to the attention of senior management and the matter is dealt with as expediently as possible. It is also reported that management and staff as a whole facilitate the provision of the extra time required to engage in subject-related activities such as the conducting of surveys and the organisation of events such as inviting visitors to the school.

Eighteen teachers are deployed in the teaching of CSPE. This is a very large number of teachers for twenty class groups. It is highly desirable that a core team of teachers deliver the CSPE syllabus in line with all other Junior Certificate subjects. It is recommended therefore that the school develop a smaller team of teachers with experience and interest in the subject that can, over time, deepen and enrich the pool of expertise available to the subject and so impact positively on teaching and learning. The nucleus of such a team already exists in the school. Teaching continuity over the three years of the junior cycle is the norm in Castleknock Community College. During the course of the evaluation it was found that only in a very small minority of cases was there a lack of such continuity. This reflects the reality of school life. To remedy any negative impact on learning when such events occur, the school makes appropriate intervention. It would prove useful for the CSPE department to document procedures in relation to the handover of classes.

There is a designated special duties post for the co-ordination of the subject and the duties attached to the role are clear. This is highly commended. Management facilitates regular formal meetings of the CSPE teachers. Continuous professional development (CPD) is encouraged and all those who wish to avail of the courses provided by the CSPE support services are encouraged to do so. It was noted that two new members of the teaching team had just completed training provided by the support services and the benefits of this for teaching and learning were clearly observed during the course of the evaluation. The support service has also visited the school in the past. In addition, in-house induction of teachers new to the subject is good. The staff as a whole has benefited from CPD in areas of relevance to CSPE. For example, interculturalism was the theme of a recent whole-staff development course. Such engagement with ongoing CPD reflects the level of professionalism that characterises the school as a whole. The co-ordinator's membership of the Association of CSPE Teachers is funded by the school.

Cross-curricular links are encouraged and reference is made to these in the planning folder. The school has a students' representative council for which elections are held and this process is overseen by class tutors. Linkages should be made between the students' council and CSPE lessons throughout the junior cycle.

Resources available to the subject are appropriate. There is designated storage space for a very good range of reference materials to which all teachers have access. Secure storage is in place for action projects that are presented for examination. The process of managing the completion and storage of the action projects is one of the roles of the CSPE co-ordinator. CSPE teachers have good access to information and communications technology (ICT). Most teachers have designated classrooms and this allows for the display of project work.

The school has adopted the *Child Protection Guidelines*, published by the Department of Education and Science, as official school policy. Guidelines for bringing students on school trips and the health and safety statement are included in the planning folder for CSPE.

Liaison between learning-support and CSPE teachers is good. Castleknock Community College practises an inclusive ethos and students with special educational needs (SEN) are supported in a variety of ways. The school has a language centre to support students with additional language needs.

## **PLANNING AND PREPARATION**

A collaborative planning process is well embedded in Castleknock Community College. Co-ordination is efficient and effective. A good plan has been put in place. The school's CSPE policy document is in draft stage but has yet to be ratified. The planning folder contains a schedule of work, lists of teachers and class groups, and records of planning meetings. Policy and procedural documents include the school's homework charter of good practice, the code of behaviour, health and safety classroom practice and the *Child Protection Guidelines*. Information on special educational needs includes the role of special needs assistants (SNAs). This is very positive. The section would be improved by the addition of detailed plans to be put in place for the completion of action projects by students with SEN. It is commendable that procedures on the induction and mentoring of new staff are documented. The folder contains a list of suggested teaching methodologies in addition to information provided by the CSPE support service, the Department of Education and Science and the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA). There are helpful templates such as a generic meeting report template (for submission to management) and a very good template for lesson planning. More use could be made of this by all teachers of the subject. Information on in-service courses is also included in the folder and to supplement this, details of courses already attended (including the names of personnel who attended them) could be added in order to assess future needs. The results of past examinations and sample papers from in-house examinations in the subject are included. This represents very good collaborative effort and very good co-ordination over a number of years.

While the yearly scheme of work for all classes is informed by the aims and objectives of the syllabus, delivery of content is directed by the textbook chosen for the subject. It is acknowledged that a textbook is a very useful and convenient resource and provides scaffolding especially for those teachers who may be unfamiliar with the subject. However, planning and delivery should be informed primarily by the CSPE syllabus and *Guidelines for Teachers*. Sufficient scope should be built into the yearly scheme to allow for the discussion of topical issues (local, national and international) relevant to the subject and to celebrate designated days. The key principle of active citizenship should be central to the scheme. The yearly scheme for the subject should be documented in greater detail. The exemplar for a module of work on the concept of Law on page twenty-one of the *CSPE Guidelines for Teachers* might be a useful model. Such an approach could be adopted but customised for the school itself in the light of local experience. Working groups of two to three people within the CSPE department could be allocated the task of devising a twelve to fifteen week module for each of the seven concepts and these could be implemented for the academic year 2008-9. A review date should be set. The yearly scheme should make specific reference to desired learning outcomes for each year group across all skills and these in turn should be implemented in individual lesson planning. Assessment modes and procedures should be stitched into planning for syllabus delivery.

Planning documentation could also give details of the school's activities that mark designated days. The role of the Student Council and its relationship to CSPE is another area for development in the planning folder. Information that is specific to the school (as distinct from

generic information provided by the support services and other agencies) should be included. Consideration could be given to the creation of an electronic folder for the subject.

## **TEACHING AND LEARNING**

There was evidence of good lesson planning and lessons followed the department scheme for the delivery of the subject. In some cases, lesson plans were presented to the inspector and content was of a high quality. This is highly commended. A variety of resources had been prepared in most lessons visited and exemplary practice was noted in a few. Text (both the chosen textbook and handouts) was central to some lessons and was appropriately used. Additional resources and materials were prepared in a few cases, for example, visual material, a PowerPoint presentation and cards for group work. The board was used well for a variety of purposes that impacted positively on learning. Very good practice was observed in many classrooms where the wall space was used to display subject materials and students' own work. This should be extended to all spaces where the subject is taught and the classroom itself should be fully utilised as an additional learning resource.

Lessons were purposeful and well organised. In almost all cases, the concepts underpinning the lesson were very clear. While overlap of concepts is inevitable in CSPE, in all cases it is advisable to clarify with students which specific one is being highlighted by the day's lesson to avoid confusion. Lessons were well structured and paced in most cases. In some, planning should be revisited since content was overambitious. It is recommended that clear and achievable learning outcomes be shared with students. Lesson outcomes can be phrased in "I can do" statements that can be written on the board. At the end of the lesson, teachers and students should engage in review to assess whether the learning outcomes have been achieved. In a small number of lessons visited, sufficient flexibility was built into lesson planning to facilitate reference to or discussion of contemporary events, campaigns and designated days. This very good practice should be extended to all lessons.

There was continuity with previous lessons and this is very positive since a week typically intervenes between lessons. Good practice was observed in lessons where adequate emphasis was placed on an appropriate vocabulary for the subject. Many copybooks examined indicated students' familiarity with key vocabulary. During the course of some lessons, students' knowledge and understanding of subject-related key words was checked. Cross-curricular connections were explicitly made in one lesson and this good practice is commended. Good practice was also noted where activities planned for future lessons were flagged so that students understood the development of their learning plan.

Teacher instructions to students were clear in almost all lessons observed. It is highly commendable that many lessons deployed active learning methodologies. This is in line with syllabus guidelines. Group and pair work was used to good effect in many classes. Best practice was observed where all students had clearly defined roles and activities were time bound and this should be a model for all. Useful worksheets were distributed to guide learning and teachers circulated to monitor progress. Good practice was noted where students were encouraged to actively engage with reading materials and were instructed to underline and highlight key ideas. Textbook illustrations reinforced learning. Information and communications technology was used well in a few lessons. In one example, a PowerPoint presentation efficiently delivered bulleted information points; in another, students were directed to research their projects as a homework assignment, using the internet. There is scope for further development in the integration of ICT into teaching and learning and ways should be explored at departmental level as to how best to

achieve this. There was discussion around the themes of action projects in some lessons. Particularly commended is the encouragement of student autonomy in relation to the choice of action project themes noted in some lessons. During interaction with the inspector, students were able to discuss the various roles they had undertaken in the organisation of their action projects. The practice of facilitating students' review of their choice of themes was noted in one lesson and through this valuable exercise, students learned from their own experience. There was good use of textbook illustrations to reinforce points made. Questioning strategy was used effectively for whole-class brainstorming activity, for information retrieval, to probe issues and encourage discussion. Good practice was noted where students were encouraged to find evidence to support views.

There was a good level of engagement in the lessons visited. Students participated in lively discussion in many classes. They asked questions, for example in relation to the democratic system of elections in another country. Some volunteered information, for example actions they themselves had taken in the past to support development in the third world or shared direct interesting information with classmates in relation to the role of the UN peace-keeping force. Students also demonstrated familiarity with rights and responsibilities: in a lesson observed, they were able to give some examples of rights to which everyone is entitled under the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Many students were able to identify and name a variety of actions they could take in order to progress an issue. They were generally articulate and enthusiastic in their interactions. To deepen their experience of CSPE further, it is recommended that students be encouraged to apply this understanding and knowledge to real issues of importance to themselves both at local and national level.

Copybooks examined showed that in the majority of classes, a fair range of appropriate content had been covered and a variety of skills was practised. In some groups, students were encouraged to develop media files and kept copies of newspaper articles. This is commended. Classroom management was effective in the classes visited. There was a lively atmosphere conducive to the subject and a positive attitude to CSPE is fostered. Very good assessment outcomes are achieved in the school, high academic expectations are set for students and individuals are encouraged to achieve their full potential.

## **ASSESSMENT**

The school has a homework and assessment policy. Tests in CSPE are held at Christmas and in the summer term and "mock" examinations are held for the third years. Students are required to record all assignments in their homework journals. It is reported that, in addition to the assessment of writing and research assignments, classroom observation forms part of assessment. Homework assignments were set in all the classes visited and they were linked to lesson content. Copybooks indicate that teacher corrections are very conscientious in many instances and helpful feedback and encouragement is given. The practice of setting regular homework to develop a variety of skills should be extended to all classes.

Good procedures are in place regarding the management of the action projects but these should be fully documented in the planning folder. Guidelines in relation to the CSPE department's own policy, planning and procedures around the assessment of action projects should be written up. This would be very helpful, especially to new teachers, since it is expected that at least two action projects are completed during the course of the three year cycle and one of these is presented for assessment in the Junior Certificate examination.

As a focus for development in the area of assessment, it is recommended that a broad range of assessment modes, in line with syllabus guidelines, be documented and implemented in all year groups and classes. In the interest of accurate profiling of students, all assessment outcomes across a broad range of skills should be recorded. Attendance is electronically recorded through the e-portal system. The school has plans in place to extend further the use of the e-portal system in the area of assessment.

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

The following are the main strengths identified in the evaluation:

- The school's ethos is supportive of CSPE.
- Whole-school support for the subject is excellent across a number of areas.
- Timetabling allocation is generally very appropriate.
- The role of co-ordinator is a designated special duties post, co-ordination is facilitated by management and has been efficient and effective over a number of years.
- There is a strong emphasis on collaborative subject planning, a good plan for the subject has been put in place and very helpful information has been assembled in the planning folders.
- Lesson planning is thorough and a good variety of resources is used.
- Lessons are purposeful and well organised.
- Students demonstrated a thorough knowledge and understanding of the seven concepts underpinning the CSPE course.
- Students were generally articulate and enthusiastic in their interactions.
- There is a very good emphasis on active learning and discussion.
- A positive attitude to CSPE is fostered in the classroom.

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

- The school should develop a smaller team of teachers with experience and interest in the subject that can, over time, deepen and enrich the pool of expertise available to the subject.
- In the context of very good collaborative planning, the yearly scheme for the subject should be written up in greater detail and the textbook should be used primarily as a resource.
- Clear and achievable learning outcomes should be shared with students in all lessons.
- To develop students' experience of CSPE further, students should be encouraged to engage fully in discussion of contemporary current events both locally, nationally and internationally in order to apply and transfer learning and reinforce the principle of active citizenship.
- A broad range of assessment modes should be documented and implemented in all year groups and classes. In the interest of accurate profiling of students, all assessment outcomes across a broad range of skills should be recorded.

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

