

A whole school approach to personal and social development

School/centre: St Ninian's High School

Age range: S1 - 6

Education for Citizenship contexts: cross curricular, community links, curricular areas, young people's participation.

Role of Personal and Social Development (PSE) at St Ninian's High School

St Ninian's High School in East Renfrewshire has a distinctive approach to education for citizenship within the context of its overall strategy for personal and social education (PSE). It emphasises the role of all teachers and all subject departments, as well as offering strong whole school leadership from the headteacher, senior management team and guidance team.

The most unusual aspect of the school's approach is that there is no discrete course in PSE in S1-S4, but rather a carefully audited PSE programme taught overwhelmingly within subject departments. This approach within subjects is complemented in three ways: by thrice-yearly seminars for every year group, by special course inserts where appropriate, for example 'Smoking' in science, and by weekly assemblies. Seminars provide opportunities for all pupils to be involved in school self-evaluation and decision making, and assemblies are an important vehicle for whole school communication and for public reinforcement of values and attitudes regularly transmitted in smaller contexts throughout the school.

Staff consultation and integrating PSE into the curriculum

The school's approach to PSE is the result of teacher preference expressed in a major consultation exercise with staff at the school's opening in 1984, and subsequently as part of the PSE audit process. Regular staff curriculum evaluations suggest there is continuing strong support for this structure. Departments are asked to identify contributions to personal and social education made through the normal content and activities of their subject or to consider undertaking specially prepared 'inserts' needed for a rounded approach to PSE. Thus in its most recent audit, the following subjects accepted responsibility for covering themes of particular interest within education for citizenship. Departments take into account appropriate learning and teaching approaches as well as content, for instance, they make use of talk developments in English and modern languages, enquiry skills in social subjects, and developing appropriate attitudes in environmental studies. Special PSE 'inserts' are frequently workshop-based or include external speakers or other community links.

Education for Citizenship in Scotland case study

	S1	S2	S3	S4
Multicultural awareness	RE, music, art, social subjects	Modern languages, geography, home economics, modern studies		
Environmental awareness	Technical education, RE, modern languages, social subjects, maths, computing	Geography, art, modern studies	Science, social subjects	Science, social subjects
Industrial awareness and the world of work	Geography	Geography	Social subjects, English	English, modern languages
Principles of democracy	Modern studies	Modern studies	Modern studies	Modern studies, RE
Media awareness		English, art		
Equality issues		Modern studies, English, music, history, RE	History, modern studies	
Consumer skills and money management		Mathematics	Mathematics, modern studies	Mathematics
Awareness of Safety	Social subjects	Social subjects, technical education, home economics, PE, science	Sciences, HE, technical education, PE	

Issues around subject choices and maintaining the PSE work

Beyond S2 there is some evidence that the PSE programme confronts issues concerned with subject choice raised in Education for Citizenship in Scotland. There is a corresponding increase in references to English, mathematics, religious education (RE) and other subjects usually taken by all students, and to all subjects in a mode (e.g. sciences, all technology subjects, social subjects). However, optional subjects are also credited with certain contributions, for instance in exploration of world equality issues like poverty and deprivation (history, modern studies), consumer skills (shared between modern studies and mathematics), and the principles of democracy (modern studies, with a contribution from RE in S4). Where shortfalls occur in any year in particularly important areas arising from patterns of subject choice, these are made up with inserts within subject or RE time by agreement with relevant departments.

Maintaining PSE in S5 and S6

In S5 and S6, a different approach is taken with a common PSE programme integrated within the school's RE programme. Two periods a week are allocated to RE in S5-S6, and a programme of PSE inserts is arranged within this time by negotiation with the RE department. Inserts may be taught or facilitated by members of staff outwith the RE department or may use visiting speakers. Occasional inserts are also negotiated within other subjects, such as for instance a recent programme of workshops on domestic abuse within the English department.

Whole school seminars and pupil participation

Whole-year seminars complement the PSE programme in Years 1-6. These are held three times a year, and are occasions when all pupils are encouraged to express their views on a range of school issues. Staff members in consultation with students identify issues for seminars. Seminars add to the PSE programme by allowing for wider discussion of certain key issues, and contribute in an interesting and inclusive way to the school's approach to consultation with students.

Seminars last for approximately one hour. Students are allocated to small discussion groups with balanced gender composition and friendship groupings. A chair and note-taker are appointed from each group, and are responsible for leading and reporting on discussion. Before each seminar, pupils receive training on discussion skills, minute-taking and chairing. Seminars rotate around a number of departments, with the same department usually undertaking seminar training, providing the time for the seminar to take place, and supervising the seminar. Teachers attending seminars circulate around groups and monitor discussion, but do not take part. Guidance teachers undertake detailed preparation and support for seminars. S6 students are encouraged to take part in seminars as 'buddies'. Their role is to encourage young people to contribute, and they receive training to help them to support discussion, and to avoid dominating it.

Seminar topics

Seminar topics have included what makes a good teacher, or a good class; equality of opportunity, including the characteristics of subjects and departments that appeal to boys and to girls; strategies to overcome bullying; personal organisation and school expectations of work. Pupils have also evaluated programmes of work related to study skills and drugs education. Most recently, pupils have evaluated the current provision for Education for Citizenship within school. Guidance teachers are responsible for collating pupils' responses. A point is made of acknowledging all responses in collation, including negative comments. As in many student consultation exercises most comment is positive, but it is recognised that negative comment even when from a small minority is important and should be considered and responded to. For instance, in a question at an S5 seminar about whether pupils show genuine concern and tolerance for others, only two negative comments were received, but both were highlighted to indicate that there are groups of young people who feel vulnerable or who recognise the vulnerability of others. All comments from seminars are forwarded to relevant members of teaching and support staff in the school and where appropriate, to East Renfrewshire Council.

Discussion topics at weekly assemblies

Assemblies are held weekly for each year group. They provide further whole school support for institutional values and for the personal and social education programme. Assemblies last about twenty minutes, and are usually led by the headteacher, with some contributions from other members of the senior management team. They begin with a prayer, and include announcements and a relevant discussion topic. Discussion might focus on issues raised at seminars. In cases where specific requests for additional resources have been made to East Renfrewshire Council, students are informed of the outcome and the expressed reason for it at assemblies.

Foundation for citizenship

This imaginative approach to personal and social education enjoys a continuing high level of staff support. It recognises the social relevance of subjects and the professionalism of teachers in dealing with the wider social concerns relevant to their subjects, and in relating to young people in a way that respects and supports their right to have a say in their education. As such it provides an excellent foundation for auditing existing contributions to education for citizenship, and for carrying forward any new developments that may be agreed.

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