



**AN ROINN OIDEACHAIS**

# **THE JUNIOR CERTIFICATE**

**CIVIC, SOCIAL  
AND POLITICAL  
EDUCATION  
SYLLABUS**

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# 1. INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 The Importance of Civic, Social and Political Education

1.1.1 Civic, Social and Political Education aims to prepare students for active participatory citizenship. This is achieved through comprehensive exploration of the civic, social and political dimensions of their lives at a time when pupils are developing from dependent children into independent young adults. It should produce knowledgeable pupils who can explore, analyse and evaluate, who are skilled and practised in moral and critical appraisal, and capable of making decisions and judgements through a reflective citizenship, based on human rights and social responsibilities. Such pupils should be better prepared for living in a world where traditional structures and values are being challenged, and where pupils are being confronted with conflicting interests, impermanent structures and constant questioning.

1.1.2 Civic, Social and Political Education is important for each individual. It enables pupils to use their minds well in a changing, complex society. It helps them to understand the rights and responsibilities of the individual in society, and the workings and nature of democracy. Attention to the concepts, attitudes and values central to citizenship develops the moral and critical faculties of the pupil. Civic, Social and Political Education seeks to be affective and to equip pupils with the skills and understanding of processes which enable them to see, decide, judge and act. Its employment of active and co-operatively structured learning methodologies enables and empowers the pupil to become an active and participative young person.

1.1.3 The general aims and principles of Civic, Social and Political Education concord wholly with those of the Junior Certificate programme. In particular, the aims that the Junior Certificate programme should develop the pupils' personal and social confidence, contribute to their moral development, and prepare them for the responsibilities of citizenship, are central concerns of Civic, Social and Political Education.

## **1.2 The Scope of the Junior Certificate Course in Civic, Social and Political Education.**

- 1.2.1 The course in Civic, Social and Political Education will not, and should not, represent the entire treatment and coverage which the civic, social and political dimensions receive within the Junior Certificate programme. Each day, across a range of subjects, pupils study topics and issues, encounter concepts and practice skills which are common both to those subjects and to Civic, Social and Political Education. In this way, various subject teachers already teach particular aspects of Civic, Social and Political Education through their course material. The Civic, Social and Political Education course provides unique opportunities and greater potential for cross-curricular work in schools.
- 1.2.2 It is increasingly recognised that the ethos, organisation, extra-curricular activities and operational structures of schools also have a significant impact on the pupils' understanding of the civic, social and political dimensions of their lives. Through its 'hidden curriculum', a school provides aspects of Civic, Social and Political Education even where this is not explicit.
- 1.2.3 Taking these factors into account, the main purpose of this Junior Certificate course in Civic, Social and Political Education is to provide the pupil with a concentrated and dedicated focus on all aspects of this area of education, with particular emphasis on the importance of active, participatory citizenship to the life of the young person in society. It is envisaged that this course will also provide pupils with a central reference point for those aspects of Civic, Social and Political Education which they learn about through other subject disciplines, and through their daily school-life.
- 1.2.4 The content of this course has been written in the form of unit descriptions rather than as a specified list of topics to be covered. This format allows teachers and pupils enough scope and flexibility to select and deal with issues such as gender equity, racism and xenophobia, interculturalism, the environment, development, work and unemployment, poverty and homelessness, minorities, and conflict situations such as that in Northern Ireland.

### 1.3 The Structure of the Course

1.3.1 The course in Civic, Social and Political Education should be allocated one class period per week or its equivalent. For a school operating a timetable based on forty-minute class periods, this will allow for a course of approximately 70 hours for Civic, Social and Political Education over the three year period of the junior cycle. The aims and objectives of the Civic, Social and Political Education course emphasise the importance of the central concepts, and of active learning methodologies, to the successful delivery of the course. The content of the course incorporates four units of study.

**Unit 1 : The Individual and Citizenship**

**Unit 2 : The Community**

**Unit 3 : The State - Ireland**

**Unit 4 : Ireland and the World**

1.3.2 The sequence of the four units of study is developmental, taking individual pupils as its starting point and then exploring their citizenship in the contexts of the communities in which they participate, their nation and the wider world. **These units of study are neither discrete nor mutually exclusive and, in practice, the implementation of the course will result in overlapping of topics, ideas and concepts which are common to all units.**

1.3.3 A descriptive outline of the content of each unit is presented in section three of the syllabus. The outline indicates to teachers the range and scope of topics, ideas and concepts (all highlighted) with which a pupil completing a unit should be familiar. It is **not envisaged that each topic would necessarily be studied. Neither is it envisaged that coverage of topics within units would be undertaken sequentially.** Rather, teachers should establish the best way in which a unit of study might be organised and structured to suit school conditions and the needs of their pupils.

- 1.3.4 A teacher might decide to focus on one topic or concept as the organising *idea* of that unit of study. For example, the organising topic of "*Unit 2: The Community*" might be "*Community Development*". The main learning activity of this unit might involve pupils conducting a survey on community development issues in the local area. Around this survey-work classes could cover other topics from the outlined unit of study such as "*how communities are characterised*", "*participation and representation within communities*" and "*comparison of communities*". For example, pupils from a rural area could compare their community with an urban community or vice versa. Alternatively, a teacher may want to organise the course around a specific theme or number of themes e.g. gender equity, racism and xenophobia, interculturalism, the environment, development, work and unemployment, poverty and homelessness, minorities, or conflict such as that in Northern Ireland. Exemplar teaching units are provided in the Guidelines for Teachers which have been developed for this course. **In summary, teachers may choose an approach from the teacher guidelines or they may develop their own approach to teaching the units of study.** Many teachers will combine both approaches.
- 1.3.5 Over the duration of the course students should undertake at least two class/group action projects. An action project is one where the pupils are actively involved in developing an issue or topic which has arisen in class. For example, pupils might undertake a survey of attitudes amongst pupils in the school to a particular issue, or they might research, organise and invite a guest speaker to talk to the class on a particular topic, or they might make a presentation to other pupils in the school on an issue which they have studied. Action projects encourage active and co-operative learning. At best they should arise from the interest of students in a particular issue which is related to one of the course units. Teachers and students may also want to explore the opportunity for a cross-curricular action project with other subject areas. Examples of the range of action projects which could be undertaken are provided in the guidelines for teachers.
- 1.3.6 The content of the course will be treated at a level which is appropriate to the age of the pupils, to the range of their ability levels and to a junior cycle course of approximately seventy hours in total. The depth of treatment required will be apparent from the resource materials and

guidelines for teachers which have been developed for this course. The resource materials and guidelines will indicate that pupils, on completing **the** course, should be familiar with a range of topics, ideas, concepts, issues etc. and be capable of demonstrating and applying **these in the context of their own lives.**

## 2. **AIMS AND OBJECTIVES OF CIVIC, SOCIAL AND POLITICAL EDUCATION**

### 2.1 **AIMS**

Through active exploration and study of citizenship at all levels (personal, local, national, global) in the context of contemporary social and political issues, this course aims to-

- make pupils aware of the civic, social and political dimensions of their lives and the importance of active, participative citizens to the life of the state and all people;
- encourage and develop the practical skills which enable pupils to engage in active, participatory social interaction, and to adopt responsible roles as individual, family member, citizen, worker, consumer, and member of various communities within a democratic society;
- - develop the autonomous potential of pupils as socially literate, independent and self-confident young people;
- encourage pupils to apply positive attitudes, imagination and empathy in learning about, and encountering, other people and cultures;
- enable pupils to develop their critical and moral faculties in agreement with a system of values based in human rights and social responsibilities;
- develop knowledge and understanding of processes taking place at all levels of society which lead to social, political and economic decision - making.

## 2.2 OBJECTIVES

Objectives are outlined in terms of **knowledge, concepts**, skills and attitudes/values. An appropriate vehicle for the achievement of these objectives within Civic, Social and Political Education is active, participatory class-work where the emphasis is on learning-by-doing. Throughout their work on this course pupils should have practical experience of the types of activity listed below.

### **RESEARCH/DISCOVERY ACTIVITIES**

**For example, contacting a community or voluntary organisation for information**

### GROUP-WORK/DISCUSSION ACTIVITIES

**For example, an information-swapping activity or ranking activity on a set of opinions, options, photographs etc.**

### **SIMULATION ACTIVITIES**

**For example, participation in a voting exercise based on an issue debated or campaigned upon**

### ACTION ACTIVITIES

**For example, organising a school display for other pupils about an issue studied; organising a petition on an issue pupils feel strongly about; organising a guest speaker to talk to the class.**

These activities are neither exclusive to Civic, Social and Political Education nor mutually exclusive as categories of activities. They are incorporated and practised within many subject areas and examples of their use in Civic, Social and Political Education are provided in the Guidelines for Teachers which have been developed for this course.

## 2.2.1 **KNOWLEDGE**

Through their work on this course pupils should acquire basic knowledge and understanding of -

- the development of the person as a social being;
- - the various social groups to which every person belongs;
- the rights and responsibilities of every person as a citizen;
- the structure, function and workings of selected civic and political organisations, institutions and systems- how they interact and how individuals can participate in them;
- selected issues of personal, social and political development at all levels- personal, local, national, global;
- how decisions at all levels are made and applied, particularly within the context of a democratic political system.

## 2.2.2. CONCEPTS

The central concept of this course in Civic, Social and Political Education is that of Citizenship. the realisation of the civic, social and political dimensions in the life of the individual person through active participation in society. Through the units of study outlined at 3.1 pupils should come to understand how the seven concepts listed below serve collectively, though not exclusively, to inform and clarify the concept of citizenship.

### DEMOCRACY

Pupils should be aware that through the democratic process, at all levels of society, every individual can exercise power through participation. Participation at an individual or group level represents a central right and responsibility in an ordered democratic society. Non-participation or exclusion can lead to alienation, apathy and lack of responsibility on the part of the individual.

### RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Pupils should be aware that every individual is entitled to basic social, cultural, economic, civic, religious and political rights and to the safeguarding and protection of these rights. Denial of human rights results in the domination and oppression of people. Responsibilities go hand in hand with the rights accorded to individuals. Every person is responsible for their actions towards other people at all levels. Irresponsibility results in self-interested or careless actions which can be damaging to other people at all levels.

## HUMAN DIGNITY

Pupils should be aware of the dignity which every individual should be accorded as a human being, and of how the provision of basic needs (e.g. food, health, security, education) is vital to human dignity. Failure to fulfil the basic needs of people results in loss of human dignity, deprivation, etc.

## INTERDEPENDENCE

Pupils should be aware of the interrelatedness of all human life at the individual, community, national and global levels. The actions of an individual can have effects, sometimes in places and situations they have never seen e.g. the effects on economies, businesses and the environment of the purchases we make as consumers, the effects of our votes in elections on developments at local, national and international levels. Absence of an understanding of interdependence leads to an isolated, powerless and self-interested view of events.

## DEVELOPMENT

Development can be defined as a process of improvement (social, economic, cultural, political) to meet the needs in people's lives at all levels (personal, local, national, international). Pupils should be aware that development is usually planned and can often be influenced through the democratic process. They should also be aware that the process of development is complex, often controversial, and one where planned solutions do not always meet the needs of all parties involved. Failure to develop leads to decline and underdevelopment.

## LAW

Pupils should be aware that laws and rules serve important purposes in any community or society, including the peaceful resolution of conflicts, the protection of life and property etc. They order and set out common codes of conduct for relationships between individuals, and between individuals, groups and society as a whole. They are a means through which we ensure that the rights of individuals are protected and promoted. They inform us of our rights and of our responsibilities for the observance of those rights. Laws and rules are subject to change. Changes in laws may reflect developments in society, or may result from the actions of individuals. A belief in justice and fairness is basic to the process of developing, implementing and valuing laws. Lawlessness and ignorance of the value of laws results in the denial of the rights of each and every individual and a decline in the quality of life in communities and society.

## STEWARDSHIP

Pupils should be aware that as individuals born on the planet every person becomes a temporary owner or steward entrusted and empowered with its care and maintenance e.g. with constructive management of its finite resources, appreciation of the cultural diversity of its peoples, etc. This stewardship will be passed on to future generations and includes complex decision-making on complex issues, particularly in the area of development, where compromise is often the only way forward for those involved. Absence of stewardship leads to the belief that our role in relation to the natural world, the environment, other peoples and cultures is incidental or inconsequential. This results in phenomena like unnecessary depletion of resources, pollution of the environment, diminishment of cultural heritage etc.

### 2.2.3. SKILLS

In exploring topics, issues or phenomena in Civic, Social and Political Education pupils should have the opportunity to develop and practice skills within the categories outlined below.

#### IDENTIFICATION / AWARENESS

These are skills required by pupils in their initial contact with topics, issues, sources of information and phenomena i.e. skills which enable pupils to acquire information.

#### ANALYSIS / EVALUATION

Pupils should be able to analyse, interpret and evaluate any input they receive e.g. information from a television programme they have watched.

#### COMMUNICATION

Pupils should practice and develop skills of communication - personal reflection, interpersonal reflection, group participation and discussion, presentation etc.

#### ACTION

Pupils should be skilled in the ability to act, to apply the results of experience, analysis, reflection and communication in a practical way to a chosen situation or issue. Social and political skills of organisation, procedure, decision-making, voting etc. are required in this context.

## 2.2.4. ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Through their work on this course pupils will be encouraged to recognise values and develop positive attitudes in relation to themselves, other people, the environment and the wider world. Among these attitudes and values are:

a personal commitment to active, constructive, participative citizenship;

a personal commitment to the concepts (see 2.2.2 above) underlying the Civic, Social and Political Education course e.g. a commitment to the values of human rights, social responsibilities and democracy;

an appreciation of critical awareness and independence of thought based on the knowledge and skills learnt during the course;

an appreciation of, and respect for, differing viewpoints, ideas and cultures and an ability to empathise with the situation of other individuals and groups;

awareness of, and respect for, the rights and responsibilities of all individuals and groups in society;

a respect for critical thought processes and non-violent ways of resolving conflict and achieving change in society;

a commitment to oppose prejudice, discrimination and social injustice at all levels of society.

Reflection on, and recognition of, their values and beliefs provides a supportive framework for pupils in practising citizenship. Values reflect what we believe is important in society. They may relate to qualities of life, attitudes or modes of behaviour.

Through their work on this course pupils will be given opportunities to reflect upon, and recognise, the beliefs and values which underlie their attitudes and actions as individuals and as members of groups or communities. The values of this course, expressed in the attitudinal objectives above, are based in a commitment to human rights, individual social responsibilities and democracy. **Schools are encouraged to augment this value-base to reflect the particular educational programme, ethos and denomination of the school.**

### **3. OUTLINE OF THE COURSE**

#### **UNIT 1 : THE INDIVIDUAL AND CITIZENSHIP**

Every individual person is important and unique but what does it mean to be a citizen ? What is our civic, social and political dimension ? We can achieve an understanding of citizenship by exploring and applying it in various contexts e.g. the individual, the family, the school, the local, national and international community, government, the environment and the world of work. Building skills for citizenship is inseparable from personal development. All the concepts outlined in 2.2.2 are relevant to this unit of the course but of particular importance are the concepts of "Human Dignity" and "Stewardship".

## UNIT 2 : THE COMMUNITY

We are all members of differing and various communities e.g. the family community, the school community, the local community. Comparison of communities enables identification of similarities and differences between them. Communities are characterised and can be described by different phenomena e.g. their origins, their membership, the rights and duties of their members, the organisations they contain. People participate in and are represented in many communities through particular structures and procedures. Development and improvement is an important aim of most communities. All the concepts outlined in 2.2.2 are relevant to this unit of the course but of particular importance is the concept of "Democracy"

### UNIT 3 : THE STATE - IRELAND

The state can be seen as a large grouping of communities. Any individual or community can seek to influence what happens at a national level by accessing representative and participative state structures. Through participation in community groups, organisations, local government and other structures, we can influence both **important issues of national development and decisions made at national level** which have an impact on individuals and local communities. As citizens, we should have a basic understanding of the political system and structures in Ireland. We are responsible for the election of representatives at local, national and European level, for the observance of law and order, and for any changes to the constitution. The concepts of "Rights and Responsibilities", "Democracy" and "Law" underpin much of the content of this unit.

## UNIT 4 : IRELAND AND THE WORLD

States seldom exist in isolation from other states. Why do they **group**? **How do states group** ? Through study of Ireland's **membership of international groupings - e.g. the European Union, the Council of Europe and the United Nations** - these questions can be explored. Through participation in larger groupings, countries such as Ireland have potential influence and responsibilities beyond their borders. Important world **development issues** can be influenced by Ireland directly, and through the state groupings of which it is a member. The concepts of "Development" **and "Interdependence"** are closely associated with the content of this unit.