An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

Subject Inspection of Home Economics
REPORT

Saint Joseph's Secondary School
Charlestown, County Mayo
Roll number: 64600K

Date of inspection: 7 March 2012

AN ROINN OIDEACHAIS AGUS SCILEANNA | DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND SKILLS

REPORT
ON
THE QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN HOME ECONOMICS

INFORMATION ON THE INSPECTION

Dates of inspection	7 March 2012
Inspection activities undertaken • Review of relevant documents • Discussion with principal and teachers • Interaction with students	• Observation of teaching and learning during five class periods • Examination of students' work • Feedback to principal and teachers

MAIN FINDINGS

- The standard of teaching and learning was of a high quality in all the lessons observed.
- Resources were successfully integrated, and provided the students with visually stimulating and intellectually challenging learning experiences.
- Students were very well behaved and they displayed very good knowledge and demonstrated various skills in practical work in accordance with their abilities.
- Subject option bands at junior and senior cycle are formed annually based on students' preferences**.**
- The quality of planning for programme organisation is good, with some scope for development.
- There is evidence of some ongoing reflection and self-evaluation.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

- Curricular planning for Home Economics should be further developed.
- As part of the process of subject planning, self evaluation should be further developed and formalised.

INTRODUCTION

St. Joseph's Secondary School, Charlestown, is a co-educational voluntary secondary school under the trusteeship of the Marist Sisters. It is the only post-primary school in the town and draws its students from a wide area. There is a current enrolment of 221 students. Transition year (TY) is optional for students entering senior cycle.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

- Teaching of a very high quality was observed that was characterised by very good planning, the use of student-centred classroom activities, and clear learning outcomes communicated to the students at the beginning of the lessons and assessed at the end.
- The teachers' subject knowledge was very good and current. Subject matter was well structured and there was evidence of good continuity with previous learning and appropriate integration of theory with practical skills.
- The expert use of demonstration strategies in the practical class observed is to be commended as it ensured all students were on task and allowed the teacher to model best practice. During practical work clear instruction was provided in relation to the steps of the task, importance of hygiene and safety, resource management, nutritional value of food, and the relevant underlying principles of cookery.
- The wide range of practical work demonstrated the incremental development of students' skills in accordance with their level and ability.
- Suitable resources were successfully integrated, and provided the students with visually stimulating and intellectually challenging learning experiences. Information and communication technology (ICT) was used very effectively in planning as well as a teaching and learning tool. Students are also encouraged to make very good use of ICT.
- Very good questioning and explaining strategies were integrated effectively to engage students in the learning activity, to check understanding and to support students in the development of higher-order thinking skills.
- Student's literacy skills were being supported by a suitable keyword approach.
- Teachers made use of a range of active learning methodologies such as brainstorming, pair work, group work and peer presentations which facilitated active student participation in their learning.
- There was good use of differentiation by teacher intervention during practical work and a particularly good example of the use of differentiated teaching was observed in a mixed fifth and sixth year class group where extension activities were set for the sixth-year students. Learner autonomy is promoted as students are encouraged to accept responsibility for their own learning.
- Classroom management was excellent. A positive learning environment characterised by warm relationships and very good student behaviour was evident in lessons.
- Students were fully engaged in the learning activities and demonstrated very good understanding of subject knowledge and various skills in practical work appropriate to their level.

- Students' progress and competence is monitored and assessed effectively by a range of assessment modes, for example oral questioning, regular class assessments, homework assignments, examination questions and continuous monitoring of students' practical and project work. Students are awarded an aggregated mark throughout the year based on written tests, practical work and coursework. The teachers set high expectations and formative feedback is given to students to support them to improve the quality of their work.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- Home Economics has a high profile at St. Joseph's and this can be attributed to the work of a committed and pro-active home economics department that is well supported by the management of the school.
- Class period provision is very good especially for second year, third year and TY.
- Currently Home Economics is chosen predominately by the female cohort, and uptake is generally in line with the national average. The school has acknowledged that gender imbalance in the uptake of the subject is an issue that it will continue to address.
- In September a short taster programme enables first-year students to sample each optional subject. Subject option bands at junior and senior cycle are formed annually based on students' preferences**.** All students of the school's optional TY undertake a well-managed home economics programme which focuses on the development of key transferable skills. Consideration should be given to reviewing the TY home economics programme in order to reflect a greater variety of aspects of Home Economics.
- It is commendable that there are two separate specialist rooms for Home Economics: a recently refurbished kitchen and a designated textiles room. Teachers have maintained equipment and resources for Home Economics to a high standard and management is supportive of requests made for the ongoing replacement and servicing of specialist equipment.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

- The home economics teachers work well as a team and engage in the process of collaborative planning, both on a formal and informal basis.
- Good progress has been made to date in developing a subject plan. Schemes of work have been developed for each year group. These include the time frames for the teaching of topics; the corresponding methodologies and resources to be employed. With a view to plans being utilised as working documents, the schemes of work should be further developed, on a phased basis, to include the learning outcomes to be attained, agreed assessment procedures and a review section should be included to support self-evaluation.
- There is evidence of some ongoing reflection and self-evaluation as part of subject department planning. Existing approaches for self-evaluation would benefit from being formalised and further developed. Developmental priorities, including timeframes for their implementation, should be identified. Action plans should then be developed to achieve these priorities and success criteria designed to appraise progress, in the context of available resources.

- In order to reflect the good practice on the ground, it will be necessary to integrate the theory with the relevant practical and project work to be completed in the revised schemes of work.
- In order to support ongoing evaluations in the school, a written plan should be developed for the short taster programme in first year.
- There was evidence of excellent individual lesson planning and preparation.
- A range of co-curricular and extracurricular activities provides students with opportunities to enhance and support learning.
- Records of student achievement in certificate examinations are analysed annually. In order to inform future planning, the uptake of levels and results should be compared to national norms.
- Students and their parents are advised regularly on their progress in the subject.

The draft findings and recommendations arising out of this evaluation were discussed with the principal and subject teachers at the conclusion of the evaluation. The board of management of the school was given an opportunity to comment on the findings and recommendations of the report; the board chose to accept the report without response.

Published September 2012