

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Subject Inspection in Home Economics

REPORT

Ainm na scoile / School name	Ratoath College
Seoladh na scoile / School address	Jamestown Ratoath County Meath
Uimhir rolla / Roll number	76088T

Date of Inspection: 24-11-2016



WHAT IS A SUBJECT INSPECTION?

Subject Inspections report on the quality of work in individual curriculum areas within a school. They affirm good practice and make recommendations, where appropriate, to aid the further development of the subject in the school.

HOW TO READ THIS REPORT

During this inspection, the inspector evaluated learning and teaching in Home Economics under the following headings:

1. Learning, teaching and assessment
2. Subject provision and whole-school support
3. Planning and preparation

Inspectors describe the quality of each of these areas using the Inspectorate's quality continuum which is shown on the final page of this report. The quality continuum provides examples of the language used by inspectors when evaluating and describing the quality of the school's provision in each area.

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 Inspection in Home Economics

INSPECTION ACTIVITIES DURING THIS INSPECTION

Date(s) of inspection	22 & 24 November 2016
Inspection activities undertaken <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Review of relevant documents• Discussion with principal and key staff• Interaction with students	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Observation of teaching and learning during twelve class periods• Examination of students' work• Feedback to principal and relevant staff

SCHOOL CONTEXT

Ratoath College is a co-educational school under the auspices of the Louth and Meath Education and Training Board (LMETB) and the Bishop of Meath. The school has a current enrolment of 1051 students. Home Economics is offered as an optional subject in the Junior Certificate and Leaving Certificate programmes. A short home economics module forms part of the Transition Year (TY) programme. Hotel, Catering and Tourism (HCT) is provided as an elective in the Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) programme.

SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

FINDINGS

- The overall quality of teaching and learning observed was very good; exemplary practice was noted in supporting students to become reflective and autonomous learners.
- Excellent use is made of information and communications technology (ICT) as a teaching and learning tool.
- The quality of formative assessment practice was a significant strength in lessons; there is scope to develop some assessment practices.
- There a culture of continuous improvement in teaching and learning in Home Economics and this impacts very positively on students' learning experiences.
- The specialist rooms are well resourced; some aspects of room allocation and organisation need review.
- The teachers' collaborative practice is a significant strength in promoting quality learner outcomes and experiences for students of Home Economics.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Assessment strategies should be developed to include the provision of constructive formative feedback on written work, and to provide for an aggregated summative assessment mark.
- The timetabling arrangements for TY Home Economics should be reviewed.
- The whole-school health and safety policy should be amended to include risk assessments for Home Economics.
- The home economics team should use the programme plans as live working documents to inform on-going planning.

DETAILED FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. TEACHING AND LEARNING

- The overall quality of teaching and learning observed was very good. Exemplary practice was noted in encouraging reflective and autonomous learners.
- All lessons were well prepared, with some notable use of ICT. Teachers had prepared and shared a range of relevant resources to be used in lessons via the school's electronic platform. These were shared with students in advance. This practice proved very effective in fostering a sense of co-ownership for learning among teachers and students.
- The shared learning intentions ensured that lesson content built on students' previous learning or experience. This enabled teachers to structure lessons in a manner that responded to students' needs and that facilitated an incremental approach to learning.
- Explanations of new content were very clear, with very good attention paid to integrating and checking students' understanding of relevant numeracy and literacy concepts. Electronic presentations and structured group work were well used to support learning. Students made very good use of graphic organisers to make their own notes and summarise learning.
- Very good routines were evident in practical lessons. A highly commendable focus is placed on developing learner autonomy. Students demonstrated a good range of practical and procedural skills. At times, there was scope to use spot demonstrations to support learning. Optimum use should be made of this strategy to refine students' culinary skills. Very good attention was paid to developing students' sensory evaluation skills.
- The quality of formative assessment practice was a significant strength in the lessons observed. Lesson activities such as three-minute challenges, quizzes and one-minute comment boxes enabled students to reflect actively on their learning. Some very good use of higher-order questioning was noted. Best practice was apparent when there was an appropriate balance between directed and open questions, and when students were challenged to provide detailed answers.
- Teachers tailor assessment strategies to meet individual learning needs. Differentiated homework activities are assigned and success criteria are provided in the form of rubrics to support meaningful engagement with assigned tasks. Observation of copybooks indicated that students' work is monitored regularly; there is scope to extend the formative assessment practices. The feedback provided should provide a clear pathway for improvement.
- Students are challenged to reach their full potential. The school's electronic platform is used very successfully as a collaborative learning environment. Student notebooks include a commendable range of activities. Practical coursework in the areas of textiles, craft and design indicates very high levels of creativity, practical and procedural skills.
- Summative assessment and continuous assessment procedures are well thought out, but there is scope to review the basis for the marks awarded on students' end-of-term reports. The final grade awarded should be based on an aggregated mark that includes an assessment of the relevant practical coursework component.

2. SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- Overall, there is a very good level of provision and whole-school support for Home Economics. Option bands are based on students' preferences and access to Home Economics is very good. The feasibility of offering HCT as a LCA vocational specialism could be considered.
- Allocated teaching time is in accordance with syllabus requirements but class arrangements for TY Home Economics need review. At present, class sizes in TY are very large, given the layout and specification of the specialist kitchens. While two teachers are deployed to team-teach TY Home Economics, the present arrangement does not facilitate ideal learning experiences. The timetabling arrangements for TY Home Economics should be reviewed so that class sizes are better aligned to the design specification the specialist rooms.
- Senior management actively promotes a culture of continuous improvement in teaching and learning. Teachers have engaged in an extensive range of continuing professional development (CPD) and this is impacting very positively on the quality of students' learning experiences in Home Economics.
- The two specialist rooms are well resourced, but the allocation and use of the specialist rooms merit attention. Currently, the specialist rooms are multi-functional hosting practical lessons in food, textiles and craft, and general theory. Given the popularity of Home Economics, once the school extension is complete, strong consideration should be given allocating a classroom for priority use by the home economics team. This room could be organised as a suitable learning space for practical textile lessons and allow for optimum use to be made of the kitchens for food studies lessons.
- Very good health and safety routines were evident in all lessons, but aspects of the formal policy and procedures need development. Risk assessments, specific to the home economics rooms, are not included in the whole-school health and safety statement; this should be addressed. The risk assessment templates should include the full range of learning activities undertaken in each room.

3. PLANNING AND PREPARATION

- The quality of subject planning and preparation is very good. The teachers' collaborative practice is a significant strength in promoting quality learner experiences.
- A very reflective, committed and enthusiastic approach is evident in the work of the home economics team. Data analysis and student feedback inform on-going subject planning.
- Almost all programme plans are very well developed and provide for appropriate levels of differentiation. Teachers' individual planning practices are also of a very high quality. Some very good further development of programme plans was noted in the lessons observed. The school intranet should be used to store the plans as live working documents to support on-going planning.
- The plan for the recently revised TY module would benefit from further development. The revised plan should be underpinned by a set of appropriately differentiated learning outcomes and assessment criteria that challenge all students.

The draft findings and recommendations arising out of this evaluation were discussed with the principal, deputy principals and subject teachers at the conclusion of the evaluation.

THE INSPECTORATE'S QUALITY CONTINUUM

Inspectors describe the quality of provision in the school using the Inspectorate's quality continuum which is shown below. The quality continuum provides examples of the language used by inspectors when evaluating and describing the quality the school's provision of each area.

Level	Description	Example of descriptive terms
Very Good	Very good applies where the quality of the areas evaluated is of a very high standard. The very few areas for improvement that exist do not significantly impact on the overall quality of provision. For some schools in this category the quality of what is evaluated is outstanding and provides an example for other schools of exceptionally high standards of provision.	Very good; of a very high quality; very effective practice; highly commendable; very successful; few areas for improvement; notable; of a very high standard. Excellent; outstanding; exceptionally high standard, with very significant strengths; exemplary
Good	Good applies where the strengths in the areas evaluated clearly outweigh the areas in need of improvement. The areas requiring improvement impact on the quality of pupils' learning. The school needs to build on its strengths and take action to address the areas identified as requiring improvement in order to achieve a very good standard.	Good; good quality; valuable; effective practice; competent; useful; commendable; good standard; some areas for improvement
Satisfactory	Satisfactory applies where the quality of provision is adequate. Overall, learners have access to a basic level of provision. The strengths in what is being evaluated just outweigh the shortcomings. While the shortcomings do not have a significant negative impact they constrain the quality of the learning experiences and should be addressed in order to achieve a better standard.	Satisfactory; adequate; appropriate provision although some possibilities for improvement exist; acceptable level of quality; improvement needed in some areas
Fair	Fair applies where, although there are some strengths in the areas evaluated, deficiencies or shortcomings that outweigh those strengths also exist. The school will have to address certain deficiencies without delay in order to ensure that provision is satisfactory or better.	Fair; evident weaknesses that are impacting on pupils' learning; less than satisfactory; experiencing difficulty; must improve in specified areas; action required to improve
Weak	Weak applies where there are serious deficiencies in the areas evaluated. Immediate and coordinated whole-school action is required to address the areas of concern. In some cases, the intervention of other agencies may be required to support improvements.	Weak; unsatisfactory; insufficient; ineffective; poor; requiring significant change, development or improvement; experiencing significant difficulties;