

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

**Subject Inspection of Materials Technology (Wood) and
Construction Studies
REPORT**

**St Finian's Community College
Swords, Co. Dublin
Roll number: 70120F**

Date of inspection: 30 January 2012



A N R O I N N | D E P A R T M E N T O F
O I D E A C H A I S | E D U C A T I O N
A G U S S C I L E A N N A | A N D S K I L L S

**REPORT
ON
THE QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN MATERIALS TECHNOLOGY
(WOOD) AND CONSTRUCTION STUDIES**

INFORMATION ON THE INSPECTION

Date of inspection	30 January 2012
Inspection activities undertaken <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Review of relevant documents• Discussion with principal and teachers• Interaction with students	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Observation of teaching and learning during five class periods• Examination of students' work• Feedback to principal and teachers

MAIN FINDINGS

- A good standard of teaching and learning was observed during the course of the inspection.
- Lessons were well structured and featured good preparation by the teachers.
- Information and communications technology (ICT) was well used as a teaching aid and to support students in their development of knowledge and understanding.
- All lessons visited were characterised by a friendly atmosphere and a good rapport between students and teachers.
- The subject department is well organised and has good whole-school support through the provision of time, resources and equipment.
- Subject planning is progressing well.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

- In keeping with assessment for learning (AfL) principles, more written feedback should be provided to students on their note copies, homework and portfolio work.
 - Clear procedures should be established for integrating the marks awarded for end of term examinations with those from the continuous assessment of project work and portfolio work.
 - To further improve the schemes of work, greater detail should be provided on teaching resources, methodologies, assessment and literacy supports for each unit of study.
 - The subject department should identify strategies to build on and improve the uptake and performance of students in higher level Construction Studies (CS).
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INTRODUCTION

St Finian's Community College participates in the Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) action plan. It currently caters for 609 students: 335 males and 274 females. Materials Technology Wood (MTW) is offered as an optional subject in the Junior Certificate (JC) programme and Construction Studies (CS) is offered as an optional subject in both the Leaving Certificate (LC) and the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP). The Transition Year (TY) programme is not currently offered to students in the school.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

- In each of the lessons visited, learning outcomes were shared orally with the class. Learning outcomes should be written on the whiteboard or displayed using the data projector. These can then be used initially to put the lesson in context and at the end of the lesson, to aid recap and assess progress.
- Lessons were well organised and good classroom routines were evident. Students were quick to set up for lessons and to clear away at the end. This indicates consistency in lesson structure.
- Teachers used ICT effectively to focus students' attention and to support their learning through the use of concise notes, diagrams and *SolidWorks* models.
- In a CS lesson observed, the workings of a domestic hot water system were well explained using a three-dimensional model in conjunction with graphical presentations. This approach enhanced the understanding of the lesson content.
- A variety of questioning techniques was used during lessons. This included global and directed questions. When higher-order questions were posed, students were given sufficient time to formulate and develop their answers.
- As a support for literacy, some subject-specific terminology is displayed around the classrooms. This is good practice. To further enhance this support, new terminology encountered during lessons should be written and displayed on the whiteboard and recorded by students in their copybooks.
- Demonstrations were clear, concise and well paced. Subject theory and terminology were seamlessly integrated into these demonstrations. This practice is commended.
- There was good teacher movement throughout lessons with all student activities being monitored closely. Sufficient emphasis was placed on the maintenance of good health and safety practices.
- Teachers generated enthusiasm for the work being undertaken. A good teacher-student rapport was evident and this resulted in widespread student participation and engagement in the lessons. Students were appropriately affirmed for their contributions.
- Good levels of work were evident in the students' copybooks examined during the evaluation. The monitoring of this work was limited. It is recommended that there be an increase in the quantity and quality of constructive and affirmative written feedback provided to students on their work, in keeping with AfL principles.
- It is recommended that outcomes from the continuous assessment of students' practical work, portfolio work and homework be combined with results from formal tests held at Christmas and summer. The subject department should set down transparent procedures

to provide students with ongoing feedback on the marks they have accumulated through this process.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- Students are given an open choice of optional subjects for both junior and senior cycles. Following good practice, subject bands are subsequently generated based on students' preferences. Students are well supported when making subject choices. The school is considering a sampling period for first-year students as an additional support.
- Time allocation for the subjects is good across all year groups.
- All MTW and CS classes are of mixed ability. Access to higher and ordinary level is accommodated within class groups.
- All members of the department have attended the programme of continuing professional development (CPD) made available through the Technology Subjects Support Services (t4). In addition to this, recent whole-school CPD has focused on positive behaviour management, classroom management and mixed-ability teaching. Management's support for the in-career development of the teaching team is commended.
- The subject department has access to two rooms for the teaching of the subjects. Both rooms are well equipped and maintained. Good work has recently been completed to organise tool storage.
- Safe operational areas (SOAs) are clearly marked around machines. Following best practice, a range of standard safety signage is displayed and this is supplemented by teacher-generated safe use rules for each machine.
- Some examples of students' project work are exhibited in the school lobby. A subject department notice board and colourful paintings of woodworking hand tools on the corridor wall help to build the identity of the subjects within the school. It is suggested that an increase in the display of students' projects in the workshops and the display of photographs outside the room would further enhance this good work.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

- The subject department has a co-ordinator in place and formal subject planning meetings are held monthly. Minutes of these meetings are copied to senior management.
- Subject department planning follows the SDPI template and is well advanced.
- The schemes of work are well structured around student learning outcomes. To further improve on this good work, it is recommended that greater detail be provided on teaching methodologies, assessment and literacy supports for each topic. Resources such as electronic presentations, worksheets, handouts, digital photographs and video clips should also be listed for each unit of study.
- The order in which topics are presented in the CS scheme should be reviewed.
- It is suggested that second-year students gain experience in producing a project write-up which follows the State Examinations Commission guidelines. This would greatly enhance students' ability to engage with their project brief for the Junior Certificate.

- It is recommended that the subject department plan contain a long-term planning section. Within this section strategies should be identified to improve the uptake and performance of students in higher-level CS.

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 was given an opportunity to comment in writing on the findings and recommendations of the report; a response was not received from the board.