An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

Subject Inspection of Home Economics
REPORT

Bishopstown Community School
Bishopstown, Cork
Roll number: 91397T

Date of inspection: 8 February 2012
REPORT
ON
THE QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN HOME ECONOMICS

INFORMATION ON THE INSPECTION

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<th>Dates of inspection</th>
<th>7 and 8 February</th>
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<td><strong>Inspection activities undertaken</strong></td>
<td><strong>Observation of teaching and learning during seven class periods</strong></td>
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<td>• Review of relevant documents</td>
<td>• Examination of students’ work</td>
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<td>• Discussion with principal, deputy principal and teachers</td>
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MAIN FINDINGS

- The overall quality of teaching and learning in lessons observed was good, with much excellent teaching practice noted.
- Lessons were rich in content and delivery was student-centred.
- Teachers’ questioning of students was found to be most effective.
- While good assessment practices are evident, consistency in the application of such practices across the subject department is needed.
- Home Economics is being successfully re-introduced to the school’s curriculum.
- Planning and provision for a range of co-curricular, cross-curricular and extracurricular activities is impressive.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

- Consideration ought to be given to varying the participation demands placed on students in lessons.
- The very low number of students currently opting to study Home Economics at senior cycle presents an immediate challenge.
- The outcomes of current and future self-evaluation activities should inform the identification of subject goals and related action planning.
- Priority ought to be given to the development of agreed outline programmes of work that will inform and guide classroom practice.

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INTRODUCTION
Bishopstown Community School is a co-educational school with a student population of 180. It is an inclusive school that provides a broad education for students of all abilities while, simultaneously, specialising in providing programmes designed to cater for Deaf students. The school offers an optional Transition Year (TY) programme. The school is involved in Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) action plan.

TEACHING AND LEARNING
- The overall quality of teaching and learning in lessons observed was good, with much excellent teaching practice noted.
- Lesson introductions were thoughtfully planned. Efforts were made to underline the relevance of work to be explored, and to highlight links between new topics and students’ existing experiences and knowledge.
- In all lessons, teachers shared general learning outcomes with students. Some suggestions for the more effective use of this strategy were provided as follows: specific learning outcomes should be identified and shared; these should be framed, as relevant, within the concepts of knowledge, skills, attitudes and values; the re-introduction of learning outcomes at lesson conclusion, as a tool against which to measure students’ progress, should be considered.
- Lessons were rich in content and delivery was student-centred. Demands for student participation were high, although student involvement was mainly through the provision of verbal responses or commentary to teacher questioning. It is recommended that consideration be given to seeking to vary the participation demands placed on students in lessons.
- With a view to increasing the teachers’ strategy portfolio, two areas are suggested for consideration: note-making, to include the use of graphic organisers, writing frames and mind maps; and cooperative learning, to support the introduction of a greater variety of pair and small group learning activities.
- Practical food-studies lessons were well executed. Best practice was observed when there was a strong emphasis on the development of good practice in the areas of food preparation, cooking, hygiene, safety, resource management and self-evaluation.
- Teachers’ questioning of students, the key strategy utilised, was found to be most effective. Excellent practice was observed where: a mix of lower and higher-order questions were incorporated; students were supported in answering a question they found difficult or in the further development of an answer; adequate time was given for students to consider a response to a question; and questions were well distributed across class groups. Students demonstrated varying degrees of learning, often good, sometimes excellent. An interesting finding was the fact that the more persistent the teacher was in her supportive questioning of the student, the better the quality of answer.
- Classroom atmosphere was positive, founded on a school-wide philosophy that promotes positive affirmation.
- The department is exploring the value of team teaching in helping to meet the needs of Deaf students. Currently teachers are operating the ‘Lead and Support’ model but they are very open to exploring other models. Principles of inclusivity could also be seen in
teachers’ efforts to use sign in their delivery of lesson content, admirably assisted at times in this task by the Deaf students.

- While good assessment practices are evident, consistency in the application of such practices across the subject department is needed. This should be addressed at subject department planning meetings.

**SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT**

- Home Economics is being successfully re-introduced to the school’s curriculum. Prior to decision-making, all matters relating to subject provision should be jointly considered by management and the members of the subject department. Particular attention should be paid to the potential impact that any decisions might have on overall uptake levels in Home Economics.

- Students’ access to the subject is advantaged by the fact that all first-year and TY students study Home Economics, and that option bands are generated around students’ choices in both junior and senior cycles.

- The very low numbers of students currently opting to study Home Economics at senior cycle presents an immediate challenge that needs to be addressed in the short term.

- Overall, the subject is appropriately timetabled in line with syllabus guidelines. However, in the future timetabling of fifth-year Home Economics, it will be necessary, as part of the normal five period allocation, to timetable one double period each week.

- Home Economics is relatively well resourced, with requests for additional resources always considered favourably. The home economics kitchen has, for example, recently been equipped with room-based information communication technologies, and the department is awaiting the delivery of a visualiser.

- Particular credit is due to management who, in line with the school’s principles of inclusivity, has recently appointed a Deaf teacher to the home economics department. With the recent growth in the home economics department, from one teacher to three, a discussion with management regarding what is perceived to be the most desirable deployment principles, and what is possible, would be valuable.

**PLANNING AND PREPARATION**

- All of the normal planning structures and processes are in place. In the interest of tracking progress internally, teachers are advised to maintain a file of minutes for all years, not just the current year.

- The subject department has completed a self-evaluation exercise through the completion of a SWOT analysis and, thereby, has identified the perceived, context and subject-specific strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. The outcomes of this, and any future self-evaluation activities, should inform goal formation and the related and recommended action planning.

- Outline programmes of work have been prepared. Whilst acknowledging the positive features of these documents, there is a need to rebalance them in terms of general subject content. To this end, care should be taken to ensure that time devoted to each area of study reflects the weighting identified in syllabuses. Furthermore, considering the recent
growth in the subject department, outline programmes of work that will inform, guide and direct all classroom practice need to be agreed. Teachers are encouraged to ground these in general learning outcomes, to include a focus on how students’ progress and achievement in each of the identified learning outcomes will be assessed.

- An impressive level of co-curricular, cross-curricular and extracurricular activities is planned and provided by the subject department.
- Individual planning for lessons observed was of a high quality. A wide selection of resources was prepared and collected for use in lessons.

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.

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