Subject Inspection of Home Economics
REPORT

Gort Community School
Gort, County Galway
Roll number: 91498C

Date of inspection: 24 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>23 and 24 February 2012</th>
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<td><strong>Inspection activities undertaken</strong></td>
<td><strong>Observation of teaching and learning during eight 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 and teachers</td>
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<td>• Interaction with students</td>
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MAIN FINDINGS

- The standard of teaching and learning was of a high quality in all the lessons observed and there was evidence of some use of differentiated teaching.
- Teachers make excellent use of a range of resources to enhance teaching and learning.
- Very good rapport between teachers and students was evident.
- Students displayed a good understanding and knowledge of the subject and demonstrated various skills in practical work in accordance with their abilities.
- A strong commitment to continuing professional development is evident.
- The home economics teachers work well as a team and readily engage in the process of collaborative planning, both on a formal and informal basis.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

- Differentiated teaching should be further developed across all classes.
- The provision of a specialist room for textiles should be investigated in the context of future developments at the school.
- Timeframes, methodologies and agreed modes of assessment should be integrated into curricular plans on a phased basis.
INTRODUCTION

Gort Community School opened in September 1995. As a result of an amalgamation this co-educational post-primary school is the sole provider of second-level education in the locality. There is a current enrolment of 706 students. Transition year (TY) is optional at the school.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

- Teaching of a very high quality was characterised by excellent 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.
- In all the lessons observed effective questioning and explaining strategies were used to engage students in the learning activity and to check understanding.
- Instruction was accurate and contextualised and was frequently supported by the use of a range of relevant visual and tactile stimuli and resources to enhance teaching and consolidate learning.
- Teachers make excellent use of information and communication technology (ICT) in planning and to support learning. Good attention was paid to promoting the development of students’ literacy and numeracy skills.
- There was evidence of some use of differentiation, for example by questioning and by teacher intervention during practical work. In the context of the mixed-ability classes observed, the use of differentiated teaching strategies should be further developed so that students continue to be challenged to foster independent learning in oral, written and practical work.
- Well-organised practical work was observed and at appropriate intervals throughout, 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.
- Students’ behaviour was exemplary in all lessons observed and they were well managed, and directed in all learning activities. Their work was monitored carefully by teachers in a supportive and encouraging manner.
- The teachers set high expectations and the majority of students aspire to take higher level in certificate examinations. Observation of and interaction with students indicated that they had a good understanding and knowledge of the subject and various skills in practical work appropriate to their class group and level. Observation of students’ project work indicated a high level of competence in terms of task investigation, organisation and presentation.
- 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. With regard to formative assessment, the good practice of annotation of students’ work was evident.
While teachers view assessment as part of the activity of teaching and learning, there is scope to develop this further. The teachers should ensure that the good assessment practices observed on the ground be reflected in curricular planning.

**SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT**

- Home Economics has a high profile at Gort Community School 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.
- Albeit traditionally a subject chosen predominately by the female cohort, uptake of the subject in the school is generally in line with the national average. 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-developed cookery module for a half-year. Hotel, Catering and Tourism is a popular vocational specialism offered to Leaving Certificate Applied students.
- The provision of other aspects of Home Economics in TY should be kept under review to ensure that it bridges the gap between Home Economics at junior-cycle and senior-cycle effectively.
- Deployment of teachers facilitates their rotation across all subject levels and programmes and provides for a continuity of teachers from year to year when this is practicable.
- There are currently two specialist dual purpose rooms for food and textiles studies. Management is supportive of requests made for the ongoing maintenance, replacement and updating of equipment and resources for both Food Studies and Textiles.
- Given the commitment to design and craft work and textiles at junior cycle, it is recommended that the school should investigate the provision of a specialist room for textiles. This should be expedited as resources allow, in line with best practice guidelines as space becomes available.
- The school’s policy for health and safety has been drawn up in consultation with teachers and there is evidence of very good health and safety practices in home economics classes.
- A strong commitment to continuing professional development is evident.

**PLANNING AND PREPARATION**

- A very good blend of experience and expertise exists among the home economics teachers and the role of subject co-ordination is rotated.
- Very good progress has been made in developing a subject plan, which includes details on the procedures for the organisation of the subject, as well as issues of a direct pedagogical nature such as planning, teaching and learning, and assessment. In addition, outline curricular plans which detail the expected learning outcomes, have been drawn up for each year group.
- In the context of ongoing subject planning, consideration should be given to the inclusion of the specific sequence for the completion of theory, practical and course work as well as suitable methodologies and resources. A subject department homework and assessment
policy has been agreed and the practicalities involved should be reflected in the curricular plans for each year group. A review section should also be included to support teachers’ in undertaking self-evaluation.

- 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 and this informs future planning of teaching strategies and learning activities.
- Students and their parents are advised regularly on their progress in the subject.
- The school promotes reflection and self-evaluation as part of subject department planning. Developmental priorities are identified and the next step for the team should be to further develop action plans, including timeframes, which will focus on achieving those key developmental priorities, in the context of available resources.

The draft findings and recommendations arising out of this evaluation were discussed with the principal, deputy 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.

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