An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

Subject Inspection of Home Economics
REPORT

Lough Allen College
Drumkeeran, County Leitrim
Roll number: 71560P

Date of inspection: 12 May 2010
REPORT
ON
THE QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN HOME ECONOMICS

SUBJECT INSPECTION REPORT

This report has been written following a subject inspection in Lough Allen College. It presents the findings of an evaluation of the quality of teaching and learning in Home Economics and makes recommendations for the further development of the teaching of this subject in the school. The evaluation was conducted over one day during which the inspector visited classrooms and observed teaching and learning. The inspector interacted with students and the teacher, examined students’ work, and had discussions with the teacher. The inspector reviewed school planning documentation and the teacher’s written preparation. Following the evaluation visit, the inspector provided oral feedback on the outcomes of the evaluation to the principal and the subject teacher. 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 PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

Lough Allen College was founded in 1935. It was originally known as Drumkeeran Vocational School. The present school, renamed Lough Allen College, was built in 1987. The current enrolment is 146 comprising sixty-one female students and eighty-five male students. In addition to the Junior Certificate and Leaving Certificate programmes, the school provides the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP). The Transition Year programme (TY) is provided depending on demand from students. In the current academic year, no TY class has been formed.

Home Economics is offered as an optional subject on the school’s curriculum for the Junior Certificate and the Leaving Certificate. At the beginning of first year, a six-week taster programme provides students with the opportunity to sample the optional subjects before making final choices. The school reports that, generally, the students then choose between Home Economics and Materials Technology (Wood). In senior cycle the subject option bands are devised by the guidance counsellor following consultation with students on their choices and requirements. Uptake of Home Economics at all levels in the school is above the national average. Overall, the percentage of boys choosing the subject for the certificate examinations is low. This may be due to the fact that in the junior cycle Home Economics is offered against what might be perceived as a traditionally male subject. Whilst recognising the limitations on subject choice in a small school, it is recommended that the importance of equality of access to all subjects for all students be kept under consideration as part of the school’s development planning process.

The time allocation for Home Economics at all levels is satisfactory and timetabled class periods are generally well spread throughout the week. In fourth year and fifth year, home economics classes are allocated two double periods and a single period each week. In order to create an additional opportunity each week for class contact time for students, it is recommended that consideration be given to splitting one of the double class periods, in both fourth year and fifth year, into two single periods.
The facilities for Home Economics consist of a kitchen which is also used for textiles and design and craftwork. This room is well organised and well maintained. Clear procedures are in place to ensure a high standard of health and safety given the range of practical activities that take place in this specialist classroom. A visually stimulating learning space has been created through the display of subject-specific posters and examples of students’ work. There is access to information and communications technology (ICT) equipment for teaching and learning in Home Economics. A laptop and a data projector are available in the kitchen and the room is broadband enabled.

The subject department is staffed by one very experienced specialist teacher of Home Economics. It is good that the teacher networks with home economics teachers in other schools to share ideas and good practices. This worthy initiative is particularly valuable in terms of supporting teachers in small schools where a subject department consists of only one teacher. Management is supportive of and facilitates continuing professional development. The teacher is also very involved in a range of subject-related activities outside of the classroom. It is evident that this involvement has a positive impact on the quality of teaching and learning in Home Economics in this school.

**PLANNING AND PREPARATION**

Subject planning for Home Economics is well advanced and there is evidence of a very organised, thorough and reflective approach to this process. The subject plan provides clear details of how the subject is planned and delivered in the school. Good use has been made of ICT in planning and preparation for Home Economics in Lough Allen College.

The quality of the planning and preparation for teaching and learning in Home Economics is very high. Programmes of work have been developed for each class group in junior cycle and senior cycle. These programmes are based on the relevant syllabuses. The programmes of work for the junior-cycle classes are particularly well developed and this work is ongoing for senior cycle. In the programmes for the junior-cycle classes, the topics are expressed in the form of learning outcomes. Methodologies, resources, modes of assessment and appropriate timeframes are incorporated for each topic. The content of all the programmes of work is arranged in a coherent manner that provides students with a developmental framework for the attainment of knowledge and skills. An analysis of these programmes indicates that there is an appropriate emphasis on the development of students’ practical skills from year to year. Attention is also given to the range of co-curricular and extracurricular activities that is planned to complement the work in the classroom.

As is appropriate, the programmes of work are used as working documents on a daily basis. It was noted during the evaluation that progress in class work for all year groups is in line with what is detailed in the programmes. Very good progress has been made in relation to the amount of work completed by classes so far this year.

An intrinsic part of the planning process for Home Economics is the variety of creative resources that the teacher has developed and filed to support teaching and learning. ICT has been used effectively in the development of many of the resources.

The planning folder indicates that some self-evaluation is underway in the home economics department. This includes the systematic tracking of the percentages choosing Home Economics, the tracking of results achieved by students in the formal in-house examinations and in the certificate examinations, as well as long-term plans for the subject. It is noted that students are
also encouraged to partake in the process of self-evaluation in relation to aspects of their progress. The most recent example involved the self-evaluation of their achievement in the mock examinations.

**TEACHING AND LEARNING**

The short-term planning for all of the lessons observed was exemplary and this resulted in excellent outcomes in terms of teaching and learning. The planning of the lessons was thorough, focused and student-centred. All lessons had very clear aims and learning outcomes and these were communicated effectively to students at the outset. This ensured that students were clear about what they should know and be able to do at end of the lesson.

The lessons progressed at an energetic and efficient pace thus ensuring that a realistic amount of work was completed while taking cognisance of the range of abilities in each class group. The teacher set high expectations for the students and they were encouraged to reach their full potential. Students responded positively to these challenges.

The quality of teaching and learning in all lessons was excellent. Lessons included opportunities to link new material with prior learning and to build on students’ knowledge and skills. In all lessons observed, an excellent variety of very suitable methodologies and resources, including ICT, motivated and engaged the students. Effective use was made of the textbooks and the whiteboard. Teacher instruction and explanations were very clear with a strong focus on helping students understand the content and processes of the lessons. Good emphasis was placed on the development and use of subject-specific terminology. Learning was visual, active and by discovery. Students were very much the participants in the process of learning and there was an appropriate level of teacher input.

In the practical design and craftwork lesson, the strategies used to demonstrate key processes and skills were very effective. In a fifth-year lesson, very good tactics were used to help students revise in preparation for the impending Leaving Certificate examination. This lesson included a timed slot to answer a section of a question from a past examination paper related to the topic being revised. This work was then corrected with the students and it was clear that they had learned from the experience. The stages of the lessons were carefully choreographed to allow time for the assimilation of new material, the development of higher-order skills, the expression of opinions and the sharing of ideas as well as the development of independent and collaborative learning. It was very easy to see that the students were learning and making progress in each of the lessons. Graphic organisers were used effectively to help students summarise their learning.

It was evident in all lessons that students had a good understanding and knowledge of the concepts and processes related to the topics being taught. They were competent in oral, written and practical work. Observation of their copybooks, folders and practical coursework journals provided evidence of good progress in their work. A selection of junior-cycle students’ practical work in textiles and design and craftwork was observed. Students have attained a very good level of competence and skill in these areas, appropriate to their level in the junior cycle. Creativity and originality are fostered and there is a very good emphasis on student ownership of the work. The incorporation of the design brief process as a key feature in all of the practical work from the beginning of first year is a very good practice.

The learning atmosphere in all of the lessons was pleasant, positive and industrious. There was excellent rapport between the students and their teacher and all interactions were characterised by
a high level of respect. Students were at ease in the classroom and displayed a sense of security in seeking clarification, assistance and in answering questions. There was an emphasis on building self-confidence. Students were encouraged to participate and contribute to lessons and their efforts were appropriately affirmed. The students seemed to enjoy the subject and there was evidence of pride in their work. The committed and enthusiastic approach of the teacher contributed in a very positive way to the very good work that was observed in the classrooms.

ASSessment

In all lessons there was ongoing checking and monitoring of learning. Questioning was used very effectively in the lessons. In addition to the recall of knowledge, the questioning strategies used helped students develop skills of analysis, synthesis and application of knowledge as well as the evaluation of information. There was evidence of differentiation in the questioning. Good use was made of ‘wait-time’ to allow students time to form an opinion. These are very good strategies. In the practical lesson, students were given instant and ongoing feedback on their progress. This was very effective in terms of raising students’ confidence and in challenging them to raise the standards.

The wide range of assessment modes used in Lough Allen College to assess students’ competence and achievement in Home Economics reflects the assessment objectives of the syllabuses. It is good to note that an appropriate percentage of the total mark is allocated in the in-house examinations for all year groups for the assessment of students’ practical skills and project work. There is evidence of good practices with regard to the assignment, checking and monitoring of homework and questions from past certificate examination papers. Students’ work is carefully marked using appropriate assessment criteria. Students are provided with constructive feedback on their progress and, where relevant, on what they could do to improve the standard of their work. The students are also encouraged to engage in self-assessment practices.

Students in Lough Allen College achieve excellent outcomes in Home Economics in the Junior Certificate and the Leaving Certificate examinations. Almost all of the students take the higher-level papers in both examinations and the percentage of students achieving high grades at this level is most impressive.

Summary of main findings and recommendations

The following are the main strengths identified in the evaluation:

- Uptake of Home Economics at all levels in Lough Allen College is above the national average.
- The subject department is staffed by one very experienced specialist teacher of Home Economics.
- There is a very organised, thorough and reflective approach to subject planning. Some self-evaluation is underway. The quality of the planning and preparation for teaching and learning in Home Economics is very high.
- The short-term planning for all of the lessons observed was exemplary.
- The quality of teaching and learning in all lessons was excellent. Learning was visual, active and by discovery.
• The teacher set high expectations for the students and they were encouraged to reach their full potential. Students responded positively to these challenges.
• Students have attained a very good level of competence and skill in textiles and design and craftwork, appropriate to their level in the junior cycle.
• The learning atmosphere in all of the lessons was pleasant, positive and industrious.
• In the monitoring of homework and other activities, students are provided with constructive feedback on their progress. They are also encouraged to engage in self-assessment practices.
• Students in Lough Allen College achieve excellent outcomes in Home Economics in the Junior Certificate and the Leaving Certificate examinations.

A post-evaluation meeting was held with the teacher of Home Economics and with the principal at the conclusion of the evaluation when the draft findings and recommendations of the evaluation were presented and discussed.

Published February 2011