An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

Subject Inspection of Home Economics
REPORT

Our Lady’s Secondary School
Belmullet, County Mayo
Roll number: 64570E

Date of inspection: 16 May 2011
REPORT
ON
THE QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN HOME ECONOMICS

INFORMATION ON THE INSPECTION

<table>
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<th>Date(s) of inspection</th>
<th>16 May 2011</th>
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| **Inspection activities undertaken** | • Observation of teaching and learning during three class periods  
• Examination of students’ work  
• Feedback to principal, deputy principal and teacher |
| **Review of relevant documents** |               |
| **Discussion with principal and teacher** |               |
| **Interaction with students** |               |

MAIN FINDINGS

• There was a positive learning atmosphere in lessons.
• Many aspects of the teaching of Home Economics are in need of review.
• There is scope to improve the quality of students’ learning in Home Economics.
• Students complete a good variety of childcare and craft-work projects in junior cycle.
• An outline subject plan and brief curricular plans of work exist.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

• There is a need for more active learning methodologies to be used in lessons, particularly those that support differentiation.
• Practices and procedures in relation to homework, revision and assessment should be further developed.
• Strategies should be implemented to promote Home Economics as an optional subject with appeal for all students.
• Programme planning for Home Economics should be further developed.
INTRODUCTION
Our Lady’s Secondary School is a voluntary secondary school with an enrolment of 270 male and female students. It serves a largely rural student population. All students in the school’s optional Transition Year (TY) take Home Economics.

TEACHING AND LEARNING
- The learning atmosphere was positive and there was good rapport between students and their teacher.
- Whole-class instruction tended to dominate the lessons observed. The lessons were mainly concerned with whole-class correction of examination paper questions which students had completed. The level of student engagement was confined to answering questions.
- While the lessons observed were mainly focused on revision, a greater focus on learning outcomes at relevant stages of each lesson would have enhanced students’ understanding and learning.
- Teacher explanations were generally clear and accurate. There was good continuity with prior learning through the use of questioning strategies. Some questions were of a higher order.
- In the context of mixed-ability classes, the use of more active learning methodologies for differentiation is recommended in order to enhance provision for diverse student learning needs. This would have the effect of challenging and motivating students in order to encourage them to take greater responsibility for their own learning. An appropriate balance should be maintained between teacher input and active student engagement.
- The use of information and communication technology (ICT) to support teaching and learning needs to be extended. As more ICT resources become available and expertise is developed over time, management should take steps to support this.
- Students complete a good variety of childcare and craft-work projects in junior cycle. Prior to students undertaking a draft of their project, it is recommended that students be guided by the advice provided by the State Examinations Commission through such publications as examinations criteria, guidelines and associated marking schemes (issued annually), and the chief examiners’ reports.
- Students are encouraged by their teacher to undertake evaluations of tasks completed and this informs assessment of students’ work. However, there is scope for students to further develop this skill under the guidance of the teacher. Evaluations should be a critical appraisal of the completed task, to include product, process and the overall task.
- Observation of students’ work and interaction with them provided evidence that there is a need to ensure a higher quality of learning in Home Economics. It is essential to focus on the needs of learners in order to raise students’ expectations and to improve standards so that all students achieve their potential.
- Students keep a cookery notebook as well as a homework copybook. The cookery notebook could be further developed to include recipe modifications, costings and evaluations.
- In order to maximise the learning experience of students, careful planning for and the incorporation of regular homework, revision and assessment is recommended. Regular monitoring and appraisal of student work should be carried out. The continued application of assessment-for-learning principles across all year groups in Home Economics is necessary.
SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- Appropriate provision is made for Home Economics in all relevant curricular programmes.
- A double class is scheduled for all TY students for half of the year. However, there are issues regarding gaps in students’ attendance as a result of other ongoing TY activities. This should be addressed at a whole-school level.
- Subject option bands at junior and senior cycle are formed annually based on students’ preferences. Students and their parents are well supported in choosing subjects and levels within subjects.
- The uptake for Junior Certificate is in line with the national average. However, in Leaving Certificate, the numbers taking Home Economics tend to be very low. There are currently no fifth years taking Home Economics.
- Despite efforts to influence traditional factors that may exist in relation to subject choices, gender imbalance in uptake of Home Economics is apparent and there are currently no boys taking the subject. Strategies should be devised and implemented to promote Home Economics as an optional subject with appeal for all students, in order to strengthen uptake and encourage boys to take the subject.
- While current facilities for Home Economics are adequate but in need of refurbishment, it is positive to note that the completion of a new school extension will provide separate state-of-the-art facilities for both food studies and textiles skills. The development of ICT resources would further enhance the home economics facilities.
- The school’s health and safety statement is currently under review and the home economics department reports any risks or incidents as they appear.
- Student absenteeism in certificate examination classes was high at the time of the visit.
- There is a need to develop an agreed whole-school assessment policy. In addition, an assessment policy for Home Economics should be devised and implemented.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

- An outline subject plan, based on the school-development-planning template has been prepared. In addition, outline curricular plans of work, including timeframes for delivery of topics, have been drawn up for each year group. Programme planning for Home Economics is underdeveloped. It is recommended that more comprehensive short-term curricular plans be developed to include the learning outcomes to be attained, the corresponding methodologies, resources and agreed assessment modes. A review section should also be included to support regular review. The use of ICT would facilitate the preparation and regular review of subject planning.
- A review of the current programme for junior cycle textiles is recommended in order to fully comply with the syllabus requirements.
- To support the incremental development of students’ skills, all students should complete the smaller projects planned for first and second year, in tandem with a short design brief.
• Some good work is undertaken in TY Home Economics, such as the cross-curricular project work. However, further planning for the provision of an appropriate TY home economics programme, to reflect a variety of aspects of the subject and to promote the development of key transferable skills, is recommended.

• As part of the process of subject planning, self evaluation leading to improvement should be progressed, with the support of management. Developmental priorities, including timeframes for their implementation, should be identified. Action plans should then be developed to achieve these priorities and performance indicators designed to appraise progress.

• Records of student achievement and uptake in certificate examinations should be analysed annually against national averages by the home economics department. The outcomes from this process should be used to inform ongoing planning.

• The records of student achievement and uptake in certificate examinations which are analysed annually against national averages should be further examined. The outcomes from this process should be used to inform ongoing planning.

• The school informs parents of students’ progress regularly through such mechanisms as school reports and parent-teacher meetings.

The draft findings and recommendations arising out of this evaluation were discussed with the principal, deputy principal and subject teacher at the conclusion of the evaluation. The board of management of the school was given an opportunity to comment in writing on the findings and recommendations of the report, and the response of the board will be found in the appendix of this report.

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Appendix

School Response to the Report

Submitted by the Board of Management
Area 1  Observations on the content of the inspection report

Area 2  Follow-up actions planned or undertaken since the completion of the inspection activity to implement the findings and recommendations of the inspection.

We are currently developing a policy on assessment.

There is a review of subject planning ongoing.

Continuing professional development is being encouraged and facilitated.

Promotion of the subject at senior cycle is ongoing through project work in the Transition Year programme and through parent information evenings. All Transition Year students take a module in Home Economics.