

**An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna**  
**Department of Education and Skills**

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

**St Catherine's Vocational School  
Killybegs, Co. Donegal  
Roll number: 71241W**

**Date of inspection: 11 May 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**

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**INFORMATION ON THE INSPECTION**

<b>Date of inspection</b>	11 May 2012
<b>Inspection activities undertaken</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Review of relevant documents</li><li>• Discussion with principal and teacher</li><li>• Interaction with students</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Observation of teaching and learning during five class periods</li><li>• Examination of students' work</li><li>• Feedback to principal and teacher</li></ul>

**MAIN FINDINGS**

- The teaching and learning observed was good.
- Lessons were conducted at an appropriate pace and contained a variety of learning activities.
- Best health and safety practices were modelled by the teacher during demonstrations with safety points consistently repeated during lessons.
- The teacher has engaged in extensive continuing professional development.
- Across most year groups, time provision for the subjects is good. The subject department is well resourced through the provision of rooms, materials and equipment.
- Subject department planning is at an early stage of development.

**MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS**

- Homework should be assigned more regularly to build on students' classroom learning.
  - There should be an increase in written developmental feedback provided on students' work.
  - Safe operational areas (SOAs) need to be marked around machines.
  - A considerable body of work needs to be done to further develop the subject department planning documentation.
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## **INTRODUCTION**

St Catherine's Vocational School currently caters for 299 students: 139 boys and 160 girls. Materials Technology Wood (MTW) is offered in the Junior Certificate programme and Construction Studies (CS) is offered in both the Leaving Certificate programme and the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP). Transition Year (TY) is optional in the school and does not currently contain a CS module.

## **TEACHING AND LEARNING**

- The proposed learning outcomes for the lessons were shared orally with the students. To build on this good practice, the learning outcomes should be written on the chalkboard or displayed using the data projector. This would facilitate an end of lesson summary and reflection on the progress made during the lesson.
- A variety of questioning techniques was used during lessons. This included individual, group and higher-order questions. Students were given sufficient time to formulate and deliver their answers and were well affirmed for their responses.
- Information and communication technology (ICT) was used effectively during a theory lesson on thermoplastics and thermosetting plastics. Presentations consisted of diagrams supported by concise notes. The theoretical learning was supplemented by practical demonstrations on the bending and drilling of acrylic. This teaching strategy is commended as it helped to bridge the gap between practical experience and theoretical learning.
- The chalkboard was used to present quick explanatory sketches during a theory lesson visited. The teacher displayed considerable presentation skills using this medium. It is suggested that a greater emphasis be placed on the development of students' freehand sketching skills. All students should use pencil for their sketching and should be encouraged to shade and colour their diagrams.
- During a practical lesson observed, the teacher employed very effective demonstration techniques. Principles and skills were introduced incrementally with good links to subject theory.
- Best health and safety practices were modelled during teacher demonstrations. Safety points were consistently repeated to reinforce learning and all practical activities were closely monitored by the teacher to ensure student compliance.
- The terminology associated with MTW and CS was well integrated into lessons. As a support for literacy, new terminology encountered during lessons should be written on the chalkboard. Students should record these key words in their copybooks.
- Good levels of work were evident in students' portfolios. This work is signed and dated regularly by the teacher. It is recommended that there be an increase in written comments on such assignments. This allows high-quality work to be purposefully affirmed and also provides developmental feedback to students.
- There is continuous assessment of students' practical work in MTW and CS with oral feedback provided. As is good practice, the outcomes of these assessments are combined with formal test results at Christmas and summer. The criteria used for this process should be set down clearly in the subject plan and communicated to students.

- Homework is assigned to students periodically. It is recommended that homework be assigned more regularly to build on students' classroom learning activities.
- Classroom management was effective and discipline was sensitively maintained. The structure and tempo of lessons was good with varied learning activities.
- A good teacher-student rapport was evident during lessons evaluated. The teacher demonstrated an awareness of the range of students' abilities and provided varying degrees of support accordingly.

#### **SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT**

- Incoming first-year students choose their option subjects prior to entry into the school. Students moving to senior cycle are given an open choice of all available optional subjects. In both cases, option bands are generated to best suit students' choices. Good supports and information are provided to students and parents at times of transition.
- Time provision for the subjects across most year groups is good. However, the allocation of three class periods per week to first-year students for MTW is not ideal. All classes are of mixed ability with access to higher level and ordinary level accommodated within class groups.
- The teacher has availed of continuing professional development (CPD) provided by the Technology Subjects Support Service (t4) and has attended night classes provided by the National Centre for Technology in Education (NCTE). Recent whole-school CPD has focussed on student motivation, study skills and ICT. Management's support for the in-career development of the teaching staff is commended.
- The workshop is neat and well presented. Some examples of students' project work are displayed but the limited wall space in the room makes this difficult. It is suggested that the subject department seek to create a more organised display of projects outside the classroom. This could stimulate and inspire students and also promote the work of the department.
- Machine-specific safe use rules are displayed as well as a good range of standard, colour-coded signs. Personal protection equipment was available as required. To build on this good practice it is important that SOAs be marked around machines. The rationale for these SOAs and the implications for behaviour in the vicinity of machines should be explained to students.

#### **PLANNING AND PREPARATION**

- Subject planning meetings are facilitated once per term. It is recommended that minutes of these meetings be recorded, retained in the planning folder and copied to senior management.
- Subject department planning is at an early stage of development and currently consists of brief schemes of work. It is recommended that the subject plan be developed to form a comprehensive document which details all information relating to the teaching and learning of the subjects in the school. It should include, for example, reference to student access to the subject, class organisation, homework and subject department policies.
- When developing the schemes of work, it is recommended that the subject department identify key student learning outcomes for each content area of the syllabus. This would

ensure that planning is centred on students' learning as opposed to focusing on the delivery of curricular content.

- Within the schemes, reference should be made to the teaching resources, teaching methodologies and assessment procedures found to be most effective when teaching each topic.
- It is suggested that as part of their planned programme of work, second-year students should be guided through the production of a project and a project write-up which follows the State Examinations Commission guidelines. This would provide the students with valuable experience for their Junior Certificate assessment.

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The draft findings and recommendations arising out of this evaluation were discussed with the principal and subject teacher 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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