An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

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

Saint Anne’s Community College
Killaloe, County Clare
Roll number: 70901K

Date of inspection: 28 November 2011
REPORT
ON
THE QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN CONSTRUCTION STUDIES AND MATERIALS TECHNOLOGY (WOOD)

INFORMATION ON THE INSPECTION

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MAIN FINDINGS

- Group work was well planned and engaged students actively.
- Teachers encouraged students to reflect on their learning.
- Materials Technology (Wood) (MTW) and Construction Studies (CS) are well represented in the curriculum of the school and are timetabled effectively.
- Students are well supported in making informed subject choices and their preferences are considered in the formation of subject option bands.
- Subject department planning is collaborative and effective and can be further enhanced by strengthening the department’s formal structure.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

- Specific learning outcomes should be shared with students at the outset and reviewed at the end of lessons.
- Procedures for continuous assessment should be further clarified in the subject plans and for students.
- The role of subject department coordinator should be rotated among the teachers.
- The subject plan should link implementation of teaching methodologies to specific programme content.
INTRODUCTION
St Anne’s Community College, is a co-educational vocational school under the auspices of County Clare Vocational Education Committee with an enrolment of 515 students. The school has strong links to the local community, and the broad range of subjects provided caters very well for the technologies. Metalwork and Technical Graphics are provided in the junior cycle in addition to MTW while Engineering and Design and Communication Graphics complement CS in senior cycle. All students in the school’s optional Transition Year (TY) programme study a module of CS.

TEACHING AND LEARNING
• The quality of teaching observed ranged from good to very good. Varied teaching methodologies provided students with good educational experiences. Theory elements were well integrated with practical content. This was observed in one lesson when students collaborated to consider the characteristics of a number of woodwork saws and then used the tenon saw and later the coping saw.
• Students were encouraged to reflect on their learning. On one occasion students in pairs swapped work pieces and each exchanged one positive observation on the other student’s piece. This led to a whole-class discussion which encouraged students to reflect constructively on their own and their peers’ work.
• Students were given a clear indication of lesson content at the outset of each lesson. This good practice helped to prepare students for learning. Further development should involve a more specific statement of the learning outcomes that students should expect, followed by a review at the end of the lesson. This approach would provide students with further opportunities for reflective learning, identified as an aim in the subject department plan.
• Well established routines for everyday tasks, such as distribution of tools and materials and the organisation of group work, supported effective classroom management. The well-ordered learning environment facilitated easy interaction between students and teachers and an atmosphere that was conducive to learning. Correction, though rarely needed, was sensitive and appropriate.
• The use of keyword lists was a common feature of lessons. Formally referred to in some lessons, a keyword list was always prominently displayed. Further development of this good practice in literacy support might involve students in actively compiling the lists on occasion.
• Assessment was an integral part of the teaching observed, with strategies ranging from teacher-led questioning to student-based reflection and sharing. Questioning was generally well structured and differentiated to provide a meaningful indication of students’ learning. In a few cases questions were general when they should have been directed to an individual student to derive full benefit. Questions should be carefully framed and delivered in all cases.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT
• MTW and CS are provided as optional subjects in each curricular programme with all students studying a module of CS in the optional TY. This is very good provision. In line with good practice subject option bands are generated for each year cohort based on the
choices expressed by the students. A range of supports for students and parents provide
good access to information and support for informed subject choice.

- The timetable supports effective teaching of the subjects. All classes benefit from at least
  one double-period lesson per week to facilitate completion of practical project work.
  Lessons are distributed appropriately to maintain students’ contact with the subjects.

- Continuous assessment of students’ work is recorded and is included in results at
  Christmas and in summer. It is recommended that the procedures being used for
  continuous assessment be further clarified and included in the subject department plan.
  The division of marks for design, theory and practical elements should be clearly stated.
  Students should be given regular feedback on their individual progress.

- The woodwork room was well organised and a range of safety posters and other subject-
  related materials enhanced the learning environment. The recommendation of an earlier
  inspection report regarding provision for dust extraction has been met. Good attention is
  paid to matters of health and safety. Safe operational areas are marked. However, the
  position of these should be reviewed in some cases to ensure adequate space for the
  machine operator.

- Effective procedures are in place for the acquisition of resources and teaching materials.
  The information and communication technology (ICT) resources available for the
  teaching of the subjects are good. Very effective use of the document camera or visualiser
  for the teaching of freehand sketching skills was observed. The teachers keep their
  specialist skills current by availing of continuing professional development.

**PLANNING AND PREPARATION**

- Subject department planning is well established. While the teachers work collaboratively
  in line with good planning practice, currently there is no named subject coordinator.
  Acknowledging that this arrangement has been effective until now, a slightly increased
  level of formality would aid the further development of the subject department.

- Since subject planning meetings are attended by all the teachers of the technologies, it is
  suggested that a common subject department plan for the technologies should be
  developed with a section for each subject. Perhaps common areas, such as procedures for
  continuous assessment, could be shared by the three technology subject areas.
  Consideration should then be given to rotating the role of coordinator of the technologies
  among the teachers of these subjects, for example on an annual basis.

- The subject plans for MTW and CS are well developed and contain records of subject
  meetings in line with good practice. Further development should provide clear links
  between specific programme content and teaching methodologies. This information is
  best presented in a concise form, perhaps as a table, with columns for content,
  methodology, resources, assessment and learning outcomes.

- Planning for teaching resources, materials and equipment is collaborative and effective.
  Teachers’ individual preparation and planning for lessons is of a high standard. Teachers
  keep accurate records of students’ attendance and progress and these are shared with
  parents at parent-teacher meetings.

- Planning with regard to health and safety is effective at subject department level and is
  linked to a comprehensive whole-school health and safety statement and plan. It is urged
  that the relevant guidelines and risk assessment templates now available from the Health
and Safety Authority be consulted with regard to future regular safety audits of the woodwork room. These audits should be part of regular reviews to be recorded and dated in the health and safety documentation.

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