An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

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

Castleblayney College
Castleblayney, Co. Monaghan
Roll number: 72190N

Date of inspection: 5 October 2011
REPORT ON
THE QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN MATERIALS TECHNOLOGY (WOOD) AND CONSTRUCTION STUDIES

INFORMATION ON THE INSPECTION

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MAIN FINDINGS

- The standard of teaching and learning observed during the inspection was good.
- Information and communication technology (ICT), subject theory and subject terminology were well integrated into lessons observed.
- The subject department has engaged in extensive continuing professional development (CPD).
- Students’ work is regularly monitored by the teacher.
- The subject department is well resourced. Time allocation is good and classes are evenly distributed across the week.
- The schemes of work for each year group need an increased level of detail.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

- To support the development of literacy levels in the school, new terminology and key words should be displayed prominently in the classroom.
- There should be an increase in the quantity and quality of written developmental feedback provided to students on their class work, portfolio work and homework.
- The subject department should develop a clear and transparent system which integrates the continuous assessment of practical projects and portfolio work with results awarded for end of term examinations.
- The schemes of work need to be developed to include proposed learning outcomes for each topic. Details should also be given on teaching resources available, methodologies to be used and planned methods of assessment on a topic by topic basis.
INTRODUCTION
Castleblayney College participates in the Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) action plan. It currently caters for 307 students: 169 boys and 138 girls. Materials Technology Wood (MTW) is offered as an optional subject in the Junior Certificate (JC) programme and Construction Studies (CS) is offered as an optional subject in both the Leaving Certificate (LC) programme and the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP). The Transition Year (TY) programme is optional in the school and contains a CS module.

TEACHING AND LEARNING
- All lessons observed had clear learning intentions which were shared orally with the students. To further build on this good practice, the proposed learning outcomes should be written on the chalkboard to be referred to during, and at the end of the lesson.
- Good classroom routines were evident. Little time was wasted during the setting up and clearing away of tools, work pieces and drawing equipment.
- Information and communication technology (ICT) was used effectively and was integrated smoothly into a CS lesson observed. Drawings and digital photographs were displayed to explain the construction of a fireplace and a visualiser was used to provide additional support to students.
- Questioning was well used to assess students’ understanding of key concepts, to improve the overall understanding of topics and to consolidate learning. Student responses were affirmed and developed further if necessary.
- Best health and safety practices were emphasised and observed of all lessons.
- The theoretical element of the subjects was discussed and revised whenever the opportunity arose.
- Teacher demonstrations of woodworking skills effectively scaffolded students’ learning. As is good practice, the terminology associated with the subjects was emphasised during these demonstrations.
- It is recommended, as a support for literacy, that new terminology encountered during a lesson be written and displayed on the chalkboard or some other suitable medium and that these words be recorded by students in their copybooks.
- A sample of students’ work was examined during the evaluation. In most instances, students’ drawings were of a good quality and appropriate levels of subject material were covered. This work was monitored regularly by the teacher.
- It is recommended that there be an increase in the quantity and quality of constructive and affirmative written feedback provided to students, in keeping with assessment for learning (AfL) principles. This would allow work of a high quality to be purposefully affirmed while also guiding improved answering.
- It is suggested that the subject department should make greater use of the marking schemes available from the State Examinations Commission when correcting student work, particularly from third-year and sixth-year students. This would heighten students’ awareness of the workings and weightings of such schemes.
To establish a clear and transparent system of assessment, it is recommended that marks allocated to practical work, portfolio work and Christmas and summer examinations be made clear to students. This would allow them to more accurately track their progress.

A good rapport between the students and the teacher encouraged a productive classroom atmosphere. Teacher movement around the classroom ensured that students were on task and engaged in lesson activities.

**Subject Provision and Whole School Support**

- First-year students make their choice of optional subjects prior to entry in September and may switch during the first term.
- As is good practice, students preparing to enter fifth year are offered an open choice of optional subjects with subject bands then generated to accommodate these choices.
- Time provision for the subjects is good with class periods well distributed across the week. All classes are of mixed ability and students sit certificate examinations at the level appropriate to their abilities and interests.
- The subject department has fully embraced opportunities for CPD by attending in-service training provided by the Technology Subjects Support Service (t4) as well as specific training on the use of the Solidworks software. In addition to this, whole-school CPD has recently been provided on strategies to promote literacy development across the curriculum.
- The classroom available for the teaching and learning of the subjects is well equipped, neat and tidy. Tool storage is well organised and examples of students’ project work are displayed.
- Safe operational areas (SOAs) need to be clearly marked around machines.
- A good range of standard warning signage is displayed in the classroom and this signage is supplemented by teacher-produced safe use rules for each machine.
- A safety audit of the room is carried out by the subject department using a risks and hazards checklist. These documents must be signed, dated and copied to management.

**Planning and Preparation**

- Subject department meetings are facilitated once per term. Minutes of the most recent meetings have been retained in the planning folder.
- Separate subject department plans have been developed for MTW and CS and these plans broadly follow the School Development Planning Initiative template. The planning folders are clear and well presented.
- The schemes of work within the plans need some development. They currently consist of a list of subject topics to be completed within a set timeframe.
- To improve the schemes of work, it is recommended that for each topic, student learning outcomes be identified, along with details on how the achievement of these learning outcomes could be assessed. Successful teaching methodologies that encourage active learning should be included as well as exact details on resources available for each topic.
- The skills needed to produce a written project portfolio are currently not developed until third year. During second year, students should be provided with experience of writing project portfolios in line with certificate examination requirements. This work should be done in tandem with practical project work.

- Students’ outcomes in the certificate examinations are analysed every year and compared to national norms. The majority of students follow the higher-level course and attainment at this level is good.

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.