

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

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

**Coláiste na Sceilge
Cahersiveen, County Kerry
Roll number: 76068N**

Date of inspection: 12 October 2011



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**

INFORMATION ON THE INSPECTION

Date of inspection	12 October 2011
Inspection activities undertaken <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Review of relevant documents• Discussion with principal and teachers• Interaction with students	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Observation of teaching and learning during six class periods• Examination of students' work• Feedback to principal and teachers

MAIN FINDINGS

- Effective strategies for cooperative learning are being developed by teachers and are used in practical lessons.
- There is clear evidence of good reflective practice in the further development of effective teaching and learning.
- The focus on design is a strength and should be further developed by providing structured opportunities for students to record their decision making from the outset.
- Whole-school support of the subjects is very good and includes optimum timetabling and a budget for materials.
- The subject department is engaged, with management, in developing appropriate measures to further improve gender balance in the subjects.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

- The effective teaching methodologies and strategies being used in lessons should be detailed in the subject department plan and linked to specific subject content where possible.
 - The subject department should agree a joint approach to continuous assessment of students' work and provide structured feedback to the students to encourage further learning.
-

INTRODUCTION

Coláiste na Sceilge is a co-educational Community College, under the trusteeship of Kerry Education Service (KES) and the Presentation Sisters, located in Cahersiveen, close to Gaeltacht Uíbh Ráthaigh in South Kerry. The school currently has an enrolment of 530 students. A broad range of technology subjects is offered, with Construction Studies (CS) in Transition Year (TY) and in Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) in addition to established Leaving Certificate. The school includes an *aonad lán Ghaeilge* whose students have access to Materials Technology (Wood) (MTW) and CS within mainstream classes.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

- The quality of teaching was very good in all lessons and some excellent innovative practice was observed. In one practical lesson, while the teacher demonstrated practical skills, students were prompted to confer briefly in pairs before answering questions. This provided valuable added opportunities for all students to reflect on and test their answers prior to a selected student being asked for a reply.
- A range of effective teaching methods was used. A good balance was maintained between well-paced, teacher-led phases in lessons and phases of student collaboration and activity.
- Clear goals were set for each lesson. These were written on the chalkboard by each teacher in a consistent way that supported students' learning. Lessons were well structured and sufficient time was provided for review and reinforcement. Questioning was used effectively.
- The innovation in teaching methods observed was linked to continuing professional development (CPD) for all staff being provided under the auspices of KES. Teachers were reflective in their practice and a good degree of consistency was observed in teaching approaches.
- Students showed effective learning by their responses to teachers' questions and when engaged in conversation regarding their work. The positive atmosphere observed was based on good interpersonal relations. The tone was suitably informal encouraging students' engagement. Teachers displayed obvious enthusiasm for the subjects. Effective classroom-management routines supported order and efficiency in a good learning environment.
- Progress was carefully monitored by the teachers who worked with individual students providing balanced affirmation and assessment. This helped achieve effective assessment for learning.
- Displays of students' work and subject-related posters, including safety posters, further enhanced the learning environment. Further development should include more subject-related materials such as standard sections of walls, floors and roofs of domestic dwellings.
- Lists of subject-related terms were observed in one classroom visited. However, the active use of such supports was not observed in the course of lessons. The subject department should agree how support for literacy can best become an integrated part of each lesson and adopt common literacy support practices to achieve this.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- The option to study MTW or CS is provided respectively in junior cycle and senior cycle and in each curricular programme in the school. The timetable allocation is sufficient to cover the syllabuses. Each class is provided with suitable mix of double and single-period lessons to facilitate the teaching of practical and theory aspects of the syllabuses.
- Transparent and effective procedures facilitate students' choice of subjects and subject option bands are based on preferences expressed by students. Students joining the school in first year and those progressing to fifth year are well supported in making subject choices. The school has an active approach to further development of these supports including actions to improve gender balance in subject choice. The provision of a six-week trial of optional subjects to first-year students is being explored.
- There are well defined procedures for the assessment of students' progress encompassing in-house mid-term and end-of-term tests. Consideration should be given to a written policy to describe the present successful assessment procedures in the context of learning outcomes and the educational experience of students.
- A budget is provided for teaching resources, class materials and consumables and this supports the subject department in effective planning. The teachers of MTW and CS have been facilitated in engaging in CPD in the technologies including that provided by T⁴, the Technology Subjects Support Service.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

- The subject department is actively involved in structured subject department planning. The role of subject co-ordinator is rotated annually. Formal meetings are held each term and planning takes place continuously in less formal settings. Outcomes of formal meetings are recorded in the subject department plan. Areas of teaching and learning are considered and, commendably, this is viewed by the teachers as a key aspect of planning for the subjects.
- The written subject department plan is well advanced and includes common programmes of work for each year in each subject. Further development of the plan should include a focus on teaching methods, particularly those which are currently being enhanced and developed by the department. It is recommended that these teaching methods be then linked to specific programme content.
- Design is dealt with well, particularly in the MTW section of the subject plan. Further development of this aspect of teaching the syllabus should focus on encouraging students to record and contextualise their design decisions from the outset. A common approach to achieving this outcome should be agreed and implemented whenever students engage in design, from early in first year.
- The coherence and quality of the observed lessons evidenced good lesson planning by individual teachers. Lesson content was in line with syllabus requirements. Teaching resources, including a good range of digital resources, had been appropriately selected and were used effectively.
- Teachers keep records of students' attendance and progress. Progress is being made in implementing a computer system for monitoring attendance, behaviour and attainment. It

is envisaged that coursework results for MTW and CS will be available for parents on this system. At present students' journals, school reports and parent-teacher meetings are used to inform parents of students' progress.

- The subject department should agree a joint approach to the ongoing assessment of students' work. Assessments of practical, written and drawn work, including design, should be weighted in a manner similar to the certificate examinations. The system of assessment should then be clarified for all students, and they should be given regular feedback on their progress, to further encourage learning.
-

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 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.

Appendix

SCHOOL RESPONSE TO THE REPORT

Submitted by the Board of Management

Area 1 Observations on the content of the inspection report

We are happy to see the positive affirmations of very good teaching and learning: setting of clear goals, use of co-operative learning strategies, effective assessment for learning and the effective use of digital resources as well as a positive atmosphere and good interpersonal relations.

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

Re a joint approach to continuous assessment of students work in line with certificate guidelines this was the subject of staff discussion within a co-operative learning frame work at a recent staff meeting and the following was agreed. Each department are to complete the attached document outlining clearly the content and percentage to be awarded for each assessment in the course of the school year. The total for the four assessments is to be 100% and the final summer text will make up 50 to 60% of this total. Parents will receive assessments at the end of October, December, March and June.

Staff have been made aware of the importance of establishing a clear link between content and the methodologies employed as part of their subject department planning.

The integration of literacy in the lesson was a further subject for staff discussion in a co-operative learning setting at a recent staff meeting engendering some very practical proposals. The integration of literacy is of course at the kernel of our planning for our literacy and numeracy strategy.