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

St John Bosco Community College
Killadysert, County Clare
Roll number: 76075K

Date of inspection: 18 May 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

- The quality of teaching was very good.
- Effective learning was taking place.
- Supervision of students when using the band saw was insufficient.
- Appropriate systems are in place for the acquisition of materials and equipment.
- The subject plan represents a very good start on which to base further planning.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

- Further development of active methodologies should be used to further improve students’ learning.
- Greater vigilance should be exercised with regard to safe practices in the woodwork room.
INTRODUCTION

St John Bosco Community College, under the auspices of County Clare Vocational Education Committee (VEC), provides a range of technology subjects including Materials Technology (Wood) (MTW) in junior cycle and Construction Studies (CS) in senior cycle. The school has an enrolment of 211 students from the largely rural hinterland of Kildysart on the banks of the Shannon estuary. A Transition Year (TY) class was not formed in the current year but one is planned for the coming year. TY normally includes a module of CS. The board of management was given an opportunity to comment in writing on the findings and recommendations of the report; a response was not received from the board.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

- The aims of each of the lessons were shared with the students at the outset in a consistent, structured way making use of the data projector. This very good practice could be further improved by initially negotiating the expected learning outcomes with the students and by providing for a review of the outcomes achieved at the end of the lesson.

- Continuity with previous learning was maintained. The context of new material being introduced was made clear providing very good support for learning. The content of the lessons was in line with the respective syllabuses and the planned programmes of work.

- Well structured lessons were conducted at an appropriate pace. Lesson content was presented very competently. Demonstrations of practical skills were of a high standard. However, more opportunities should be created for students to participate more actively in their learning. Well structured group work in theory lessons should be used to encourage more collaboration between students who should then be enabled to share with the whole class.

- Learning was effective. Students were interested and fully engaged in classroom activities showing appropriate levels of knowledge and understanding of the subjects. Students approached the subjects with enthusiasm and inquisitiveness and on occasion made contributions that indicated a high level of engagement.

- The classroom was sensitively managed, contributing to the maintenance of a very positive atmosphere. The physical environment was also well maintained, neat and tidy with displays of appropriate subject-related visual materials. The environment was conducive to learning.

- Work set for students was appropriate to their range of abilities. The collaborative approach of the teacher and a special needs assistant was very effective in meeting a student’s needs while, crucially, also providing appropriate participation and challenge for the student.

- An appropriate emphasis is, generally, placed on health and safety with standard safety signage, classroom rules and appropriate posters displayed. More safe operational areas should be demarcated with instructional sign boards placed adjacent to them to clarify their purpose and the implications for movement in the room.

- Closer supervision should be provided for students who are allowed to use more hazardous machines such as the band saw. An individual risk assessment should be carried out by the teacher. Students should be required to get specific permission on each occasion that they use such machinery. Observance of the relevant safety precautions
should be confirmed by the teacher. The Department of Education and Skills’ publication *Review of Occupational Health and Safety in the Technologies in Post-primary Schools* should be consulted for further information.

- Formative assessment was an integral part of each of the lessons. Prepared assessment materials were used effectively, with students working in pairs and being affirmed for the answers they contributed. Skilled and effective questioning was a feature of the lessons.

- Subject-specific language and terminology was used appropriately and consistently in the lessons. As appropriate, the teacher explained new terms and made students aware of the importance of using specific terminology. In a lesson on afforestation, the related terms and key words were written on the blackboard to reinforce literacy development. To further strengthen the successful approaches being taken, it is recommended that key word posters or charts be used to provide a more permanent display. These should then be referred to in the following lessons to further reinforce learning.

**SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT**

- Provision for the subjects in the relevant curricular programmes is good. MTW is allocated four periods weekly, including one double-period lesson, in junior cycle. In senior cycle, CS is allocated five periods weekly, including two double-period lessons. The lessons are well distributed across the week. This timetabling facilitates completion of practical project work.

- Student access to the subjects in first year and in fifth year is provided by means of fixed option bands. It is recommended that an open choice should be provided as a first stage in devising the subject-option bands for each year cohort.

- Students’ progress in the subjects is formally assessed, in line with the whole-school policy, at Christmas and in summer. Continuous assessment is conducted on completion of each project in line with good assessment practice.

- The amalgamation of continuous assessment with in-house examination marks, a feature of the assessment procedure, should be formalised to a greater extent. Students should be made aware of their progress through the year and the likely impact on their formal results. A common continuous assessment procedure for the technology subjects should, where possible, be agreed and implemented to further strengthen aspects of assessment for learning.

- The subject department operates effectively in the acquisition of materials and equipment. Appropriate budgeting facilitates successful planning for resources.

**PLANNING AND PREPARATION**

- The subject plan represents a very good start on which to base further planning. Areas of the plan recommended for expansion include the sections on teaching methodologies, assessment and literacy and numeracy support. The teaching methodologies should, where possible, be linked to specific content.

- The development of a department of the technologies should be undertaken to facilitate joint planning in areas of common interest. Planning undertaken collaboratively should then be included in the separate subject plans.
• Planning for the lessons observed was very effective and included the use of a wide range of resources including digital resources and ICT equipment. Good use was being made of the overhead projector, notably in a CS theory lesson. While this was effective, it is suggested that the transparencies in use could be scanned for use with the data projector to increase their flexibility as a resource.

• Appropriate records are kept of students’ attendance and achievement. Parents are kept informed of the students' progress by means of school reports, the student journal and by the sharing of information at parent-teacher meetings.

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