

**An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna**

**Department of Education and Skills**

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

**Loreto Community School  
Milford, Co. Donegal  
Roll number: 91500J**

**Date of inspection: 11 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**

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**INFORMATION ON THE INSPECTION**

<b>Date of inspection</b>	11 October 2011
<b>Inspection activities undertaken</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Review of relevant documents</li><li>• Discussion with principal and teachers</li><li>• Interaction with students</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Observation of teaching and learning during six class periods</li><li>• Examination of students' work</li><li>• Feedback to principal and teachers</li></ul>

**MAIN FINDINGS**

- In all lessons observed, teaching and learning was of a high quality.
- All activities were well planned and organised which ensured that the learning environment was appropriately ordered.
- The subject department is well resourced.
- Teachers used information and communication technology (ICT) very effectively to stimulate student interest and to support student learning.
- The subject department has amassed a wide range of electronic resources to aid in the teaching and learning of the subjects.
- The teachers have engaged in extensive continuing professional development (CPD).

**MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS**

- Homework should be allocated more frequently to all year groups.
  - More frequent feedback should be provided to students on their class work, portfolio work and homework in keeping with assessment for learning (AfL) principles.
  - A clearer and more transparent system should be developed to integrate marks awarded from continuous assessment of students' practical and portfolio work with results from end of term examinations.
  - The schemes of work, within the subject plans, need development. Each topic to be covered should document information on student learning outcomes, teaching methodologies and methods of assessment.
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## **INTRODUCTION**

Loreto Community School currently caters for 758 students: 392 boys and 366 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) and the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP). A year-long CS module forms part of the school's optional Transition Year (TY) programme.

## **TEACHING AND LEARNING**

- All lessons observed had clear aims and objectives and these were shared with the class at the beginning of the lesson. To further build on this good practice, the proposed learning outcomes could be written on the whiteboard and ticked off as each is achieved. They could also be used at the end of the lesson to assist reflection on the progress made.
- Appropriate routines were evident in all lessons visited. Such routines ensure that little time is lost and that the learning environment is well managed and safe.
- During the course of the inspection the quality of teaching and learning was very good.
- The effective use of questioning helped to revise previous learning, to focus students' attention and to advance understanding of concepts.
- The classroom atmosphere was at all times calm and productive and this was facilitated by the very good teacher-student rapport.
- Good use was made of information and communication technology (ICT) to motivate students and support their learning.
- It is suggested that there be an increased use of the whiteboard to model the drawing of building details. The process of incrementally building up such drawings during the lesson would provide additional support for students.
- There is a strong emphasis on the development of sketching skills across all year groups. This is good practice as it forms an integral part of the assessment of these subjects in certificate examinations.
- In two lessons observed, new terminology encountered was written on the whiteboard. Students were also provided with blank key-words sheets on which to record such words. This strategy provides good support for the development of literacy.
- Demonstrations were initially given to whole-class groups with further attention given to small groups and individuals as the need arose. This method is commended as it ensures that targeted support is being delivered.
- Best health and safety practices were modelled during teacher demonstrations.
- Deliberate efforts were made by the teachers to integrate relevant theoretical information into lessons.
- From observation of students' journals and copybooks it was clear that the frequency of homework given to students varies across year groups. Homework supports the work students do in school and should be assigned to all year groups on a regular basis.
- It is recommended that there be an increase in the quantity and quality of constructive and affirmative written feedback provided to students. In addition to the correction of errors,

teachers should provide written feedback on the quality of answers, diagrams and annotations.

- The subject department combines the marks awarded for continuous assessment of practical projects and scaled drawings with marks awarded for written examinations at Christmas and summer. It is recommended that this system be made more transparent. Students should be kept aware of the continuous assessment marks they have accumulated as the year progresses.

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

- The school provides a year-long sampling programme of optional subjects for its first-year students. This results in an inadequate overall time allocation for the teaching and learning of MTW over the three years of the junior cycle. It is suggested that shortening the sampling period would reduce this difficulty.
- Students are given an open choice of optional subjects for both junior and senior cycles. Subject bands are subsequently developed based on students' preferences. This is commendable practice as it prioritises the needs of students.
- All members of the department have attended extensive in-service training provided by the Technology Subjects Support Service (t4). They have also attended additional training during their own time.
- The two rooms used for the teaching and learning of the subjects are well equipped, neat and tidy. Some students' practical project work is displayed with photographic exhibits of other project work outside one of the rooms. The subject department should seek additional ways to display students' work.
- As resources become available, the school should actively seek to purchase a visualiser for the subject department. Such a teaching aid can be used to very good effect when teaching scaled building details and freehand sketching.
- Safe operational areas (SOAs) need to be clearly marked around all machines.
- A regular safety audit of the room is carried out by the subject department with the safety checklists signed, dated and copied to management.

#### **PLANNING AND PREPARATION**

- Short term planning for lessons was very good. Detailed lesson plans were presented and all required resources had been prepared in advance.
- The subject has a co-ordinator in place and formal subject planning meetings are held once per term. Minutes of these meetings are retained and copied to management.
- Subject department planning follows the School Development Planning Initiative template and is well progressed.
- The schemes of work document topics to be covered each term and include brief details on the resources available to aid teaching. It is recommended that these programmes of work be developed to include learning outcomes for each topic. Teaching methodologies that encourage active learning should be included along with information on how the learning outcomes are to be assessed.

- The subject department has built up an impressive range of electronic resource material to assist in the teaching of the subjects and these materials should be catalogued and referenced in the schemes of work.

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

The board of management 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**

The Board of Management accept the report fully. They wish to express their thanks to the Inspector for the manner in which he carried out the inspection. There was no doubt that he was in the school to assist the relevant staff in improving Teaching and Learning in their subject area. The Board welcomed the positive nature of the report; the positive recognition of the many good practices which are already in place and the “high quality of the teaching and learning” in the subject. All the recommendations are accepted and many are in the process of being implemented. The inspection was a very positive and constructive process for all concerned.

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

To date the following actions have been implemented:

- The Schemes of Work have been revised, as suggested, and they now include a breakdown of specific marks for each component of the Assessment. Specific Learning Outcomes have been included.
- Homework is now given in every theory lesson and specific tasks are allocated for practical classes.
- More Assessment for Learning is being put into practice.
- The aims of the lessons are outlined on the whiteboard at the beginning of class and are ticked off as they are completed.
- Student work will be displayed on the website.
- Visualisers have been purchased for the Department.
- Safe operational areas have been marked around all machines.
- Resources have been catalogued to a Central Resource Drive.

The period of Sampling subjects is reviewed annually taking into account timetable and resource constraints.