

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

**Subject Inspection of Home Economics
REPORT**

**Coolmine Community School
Coolmine, Dublin 15
Roll number: 913150**

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**AN ROINN | DEPARTMENT
OIDEACHAIS | OF EDUCATION
AGUS SCILEANNA | AND SKILLS**

REPORT
ON
THE QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN HOME ECONOMICS

SUBJECT INSPECTION REPORT

This report has been written following a subject inspection in Coolmine Community School, conducted as part of a whole-school evaluation. It presents the findings of an evaluation of the quality of teaching and learning in Home Economics and makes recommendations for the further development of the teaching of this subject in the school. The evaluation was conducted over three days during which the inspector visited classrooms and observed teaching and learning. The inspector interacted with students and examined students' work. The inspector reviewed school planning documentation. Following the evaluation visit, the inspector provided oral feedback on the outcomes of the evaluation to the principal.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

Home Economics is provided on all curriculum programmes in the school as an optional subject for students. Procedures are in place to support students in making informed subject choices. The first-year curriculum programme is designed as an exploratory year to provide students with a wide educational experience and school management deserves particular acknowledgement for its commitment to achieving this objective.

A subject-sampling programme operates in first year. From the perspective of Home Economics, it is recommended that the length and operation of this subject-sampling programme be reviewed for a number of reasons. First-year students study a total of eighteen subjects. To accommodate such a large number, there is reduced timetabled provision for most subjects. In the case of Home Economics, students attend the equivalent of three lessons per week, arranged as one double and one single class periods. This is not in line with syllabus guidelines. Best practice in the timetabling of Home Economics is where classes have the equivalent of four class periods per week. The resulting shortfall is impacting on syllabus implementation.

For the duration of the exploratory year students in first year are restricted to studying one optional subject from a grouping of Home Economics, Metalwork and Materials Technology (Wood). They must also study two modern European languages from a grouping of French, German and Spanish. Final decisions regarding subject choices for second year are taken in January of first year. This means that students study some subjects for a further four months having already decided that they do not wish to study these subjects for the Junior Certificate. Furthermore, students are not restricted to choosing only the subjects that they have sampled. This arrangement has resulted in a number of students taking up Home Economics in second year. The consequential loss of a full year of tuition time makes it very difficult to support the development of a high standard of practical and procedural skills and to facilitate deep levels of understanding of theoretical knowledge. Minutes of subject department meetings indicate that concerns around these arrangements impacting negatively on overall levels of student attainment have been identified and discussed. It is recommended therefore that serious consideration be

given to providing a shorter subject-sampling programme for just part of first year. Ideally, the programme should be devised in a manner that enables students to experience each of the optional subjects before they make their final choices.

Leaving Certificate option bands are generated from an initial survey of students' preferences. Home Economics is always made available on two option lines. This provides very good flexibility for students in accessing the subject.

Participation rates indicate that Home Economics is a fairly popular choice among Junior Certificate and Leaving Certificate students. However, the home economics team should explore further strategies to actively promote the subject as an attractive option for students of all abilities. There is some scope to do this, particularly among students of higher ability. It would prove useful to review the information provided to students when making subject selections and update the subject-specific information available on the school's website. The *Fact Sheet* on Junior Certificate Home Economics that is available on the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment website (www.ncca.ie) would prove a useful resource.

Timetabling arrangements, with the exception of first year, are in line with syllabus guidelines. The timetabled allocation provided for Leaving Certificate students is particularly good. In the current academic year class time for second-year students has been rearranged into one double and two single lessons. This is a better alternative to the previous practice of two doubles, as lessons can be spread more evenly across the week. It was noted that in some instances a double lesson, which is essential for practical food studies, is split by break time. It is recommended that this practice be avoided in the context of future timetabling. Uninterrupted double periods are necessary to enable students to develop essential time management skills in the area of culinary skills. This practice may also dissuade students opting for Home Economics if it restricts their ability to socialise with their peers during the school's daily break time.

Very good practice is evident in the deployment of staff to teach Home Economics. The team comprises three very committed subject specialists. There is very good continuity in teacher deployment to Junior and Leaving Certificate classes. Senior management is very supportive of staff involvement in continuing professional development (CPD) and there has been a good level of past engagement with relevant subject-specific in-service. The home economics team should continue to access relevant courses to support the implementation of home economics syllabuses. Information on in-service schedules is available from the Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST). A copy of the information supplied at each in-service course attended should be filed in a subject-specific CPD folder and stored in the home economics area. This would ensure that the information is easily accessible during subject planning meetings.

There are three specialist rooms comprising one textiles room and two kitchens. The kitchens are in significant need of refurbishment. The board of management is addressing this issue and has recently reapplied for funding under the summer works scheme operated by the Department of Education and Skills. The rooms are well equipped with additional resources to support student learning. Some dedicated information and communications technology (ICT) resources have been installed and there are plans to enhance further the ICT provision. This is a positive development. Systematic procedures support the maintenance and organisation of each specialist room.

High priority is given to health and safety. The home economics team has a food safety policy in operation and clear incident reporting procedures are in place. The draft revised whole-school health and safety statement includes a risk assessment and control template. It is recommended that the home economics team uses this template to develop a hazard analysis, risk assessment

and control procedures for the key pieces of specialist equipment used in the areas of textiles and food studies. Some very good practice was noted in the display of safety notices regarding the use of some specialist equipment in textiles and food studies practicals. Additional notices should be displayed in areas such as the work stations where the sewing machines are set up in the textiles room.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

Subject department structures are well established at whole-school level. It has been the tradition within the home economics department that the position of subject co-ordinator is part of the duties attached to an assistant principal post of responsibility. At the time of the evaluation no subject co-ordinator was in place due to the retirement and non-replacement of the post holder. There was evidence that the absence of a co-ordinator was beginning to impact negatively on the subject department planning process. It is suggested that the practice of aligning the role of subject co-ordinator to a post of responsibility be reviewed. It is more beneficial to rotate the position among the teaching team in order to build capacity and enable each teacher to assume a leadership role in the continuing development of the subject in the school.

Senior management facilitates formal planning meetings of the subject department three times per year. No records are being kept of planning meetings since the retirement of the subject co-ordinator. The absence of such records is a shortfall in the current planning process as it will present challenges in facilitating effective continuity between meetings.

A subject department plan was made available during the evaluation. It is obvious that a high level of collaborative practice and attention to detail is placed on matters relating to room maintenance and organisation. The manner by which the team reviews aspects of whole-school provision for Home Economic is illustrative of good self-evaluative practice. Some gaps are evident in the subject plan and some of the information is in need of updating. These should be addressed.

Collaborative planning for the teaching and learning of Home Economics is at a very early stage of development. The subject department plan reviewed during the evaluation provided details of a collaborative programme plan for first-year students only. This plan outlined the material to be covered only in terms of chapter and page number references to a textbook. In the subject folder there were no specific details of how lessons are sequenced in implementing the remainder of the Junior Certificate or Leaving Certificate syllabuses. Planning for other year groups is the remit of individual teachers, with a degree of common approach apparent. In some instances teachers have further developed programme plans for their own classes. These plans detail the work to be covered in terms of references to topic sub-headings, or chapters in a textbook. Some information on the practical coursework completed was also included.

To support high quality student learning a fresh approach to planning for teaching and learning is required. It is recommended that a collaborative programme of work be developed for both the Junior and Leaving Certificate syllabuses. Each programme plan should provide details of the work to be undertaken by students for each year of the relevant programme. Each plan should be presented as a series of lessons or thematic units of work that outlines students' expected knowledge and understanding for each topic in terms of learning outcomes. Particular attention should focus on ensuring that the lesson content of all plans is sequenced in a manner that reflects the integrated and incremental approach recommended in all home economics syllabuses. The

practical coursework to be completed over the duration of the each programme should be integrated into the sequence of lessons. Information on suitable teaching and learning strategies for each unit of work, assessment activities and resources should also be included over time.

Particular attention should be given to planning for the Junior Certificate practical coursework in the core textiles. The approach currently evident is not fully in keeping with syllabus guidelines and should be reviewed. In the revised plan the items made should facilitate student creativity and support the incremental development of procedural and practical skills. The good practice of getting students to complete stages of the design brief process in tandem with the items made was noted. There is a need to standardise the use of the strategy across the teaching team.

Programme planning for teaching and learning is an ongoing process. Therefore, it is recommended that each teacher should use the agreed plans as working documents. The agenda of planning meetings should routinely focus on the sharing of best practice in terms of teaching, learning and assessment strategies as well as suitable resources used. There is considerable expertise among the teaching team. Such professional dialogue should serve, therefore, to support the further enhancement of the plans as recommended and extend the range of teaching strategies used.

A very good range of reference books is available to support students' learning. Some progress has been made in integrating information and communications technology (ICT) into home economics lessons. It is recommended that the home economics team works in close collaboration with the school's E-learning team to exploit fully the potential of this resource in Home Economics.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

A variety of theoretical and practical lessons was observed during the evaluation. Good quality short-term planning was evident for all of the lessons observed. In some instances lesson plans were provided. These plans outlined the aims and objectives for the lesson and demonstrated its relevance to the teachers' overall programme plan for the class. Some very good advance preparation and selection of additional resources was evident. These included student handouts, overhead transparencies and visual resources. Of particular note was the careful preparation that was put into a senior-cycle lesson on cereals. In this instance the teacher had collected a wide range of cereals and cereal products in advance of the lesson. The subsequent handling and use of these products by the students facilitated the development of deep understanding of the key concepts of the lessons and supported high-quality learning outcomes.

In all instances the focus of the lesson was clear from the outset. Lessons were well structured and in most instances effectively paced. In the context of subject planning the need for a treble class period for TY students should be reviewed. It was evident from the lesson visited that students find it challenging to remain fully on task for this length of lesson. An alternative arrangement of one double and one single class period would prove less demanding in ensuring the students remained engaged for the duration of the lesson. The increased frequency of class contact time would also facilitate more effective continuity in teaching and learning.

At the start of a number of lessons the practice of sharing the learning intentions with students was noted. This strategy proved effective in setting the scene for the lesson and in ensuring that students understood the relevance of the content being studied. Best practice in the use of this

strategy was in lessons where the teachers revisited the planned learning intentions towards the end of the lesson. To enhance students' learning it is recommended that learning intentions be shared from the outset of all lessons. Time should be taken towards the end of each lesson to revisit the planned learning intentions. This would provide an opportunity to assess students' learning and would provide opportunities for the teacher to affirm effort and offer further clarifications where needed.

The home economics teachers displayed very good levels of subject knowledge. Explanations were clear and accurate, with very good links being established with previous learning. The teachers made deliberate efforts to link the new material being taught to students' own experiences. This is very good practice. Some good use was made of the classroom board or overhead projector to illustrate or summarise information. Best practice was observed in lessons where students recorded this information into their notebooks. This gave students time to process the information and allowed teachers to answer individual queries. Very good use of questioning was observed in lessons. Questioning strategies proved particularly effective in instances where there was a good balance of directed and open-style questioning to assess individual levels of students' learning.

Some very good attention was paid to students' literacy development by ensuring the students understood the meanings of the key terminology associated with the topic being taught. Some further consideration should be given to incorporating additional strategies into lessons to support students' literacy skills.

In some lessons very good attention was paid to ensuring that the range of teaching strategies used effectively supported the wide variety of student learning styles evident in classes. For instance, in one lesson very good use was made of a labelled diagram and samples of wheat products to illustrate the main parts of a cereal grain and the stages of the milling of wheat. In the same lesson students carried out a group practical task to investigate the effects of heat on a range of cereal products. Throughout this lesson the main points of information and key technical terms were repeated in a variety of ways to reinforce learning. The success of this lesson was due to the fact that the range of strategies used supported the visual, kinaesthetic and auditory learner. The group work exercise also facilitated effective collaboration among mixed-ability students. In other theoretical lessons observed there was scope to extend the range of strategies used to avoid an over-reliance on teacher-led activities and to support the active engagement of students. It is recommended that strategies to support a variety of learning styles be integrated into all lessons.

Students displayed good levels of practical and procedural skills, given their level of experience and ability. In each practical lesson observed good routines were evident and deliberate efforts were made by the teacher to integrate and apply relevant theoretical information. In a textiles lesson observed very good use was made of teacher resources to demonstrate stitches that students were going to use in completing the item.

In the practical food studies lessons observed there was a good balance between whole-class teaching and one-to-one teaching. However in some instances there was scope to use further spot demonstrations to demonstrate key food preparation, cooking and serving skills. In one of the practical food studies lessons students were preparing for an upcoming practical culinary skills examination. Interaction with students and observation of their written work for the task indicated that they found writing up the analysis, implementation and evaluation of a task challenging and a high level of teacher support was necessary. Therefore in developing the Junior Certificate programme plan it is recommended that strategies be explored to integrate the stages of the design brief process into planning for food studies practicals from first year through to third year. The

agreed strategies should support the incremental development of students' skills in the areas of task analysis, writing up time plans and carrying out evaluations from first year. Observation of some first-year notebooks indicated that very good strategies are used to support the development of students' evaluative skills. The further use of this very good practice is encouraged.

Classroom management was very good in all of the lessons observed. There was a very good rapport evident between students and teachers with a high level of mutual respect and co-operation apparent.

A range of childcare projects was observed during the evaluation. Some good levels of progress were evident. However some students would benefit from further advice and support to refine their skills in the research and development of a written project. It is recommended therefore that the chief examiners' reports and associated marking schemes published by the State Examinations Commission (SEC) be used to inform the development of such strategies. These resources could then be integrated into programme planning to support high quality learning. These publications are available on the SEC website (www.examinations.ie).

Very good progress was evident in the range of Leaving Certificate coursework journals observed during the evaluation. Very good routines are established to enable students to use the official journal on an ongoing basis.

There was some variation in the standard of organisation and maintenance of student notebooks observed during the evaluation. Some very good practice was evident, particularly in the use of graphic organisers to summarise information. Very good practice was also noted in instances where students were required to store all their evaluations and handouts from class. It is recommended that the home economics team establish agreed procedures and routines for the maintenance, organisation and use of notebooks for all classes. Students should be encouraged to retain the same notebook throughout the programme so that key points of information covered in lessons together with related handouts and worksheets can be stored for ease of reference and revision.

ASSESSMENT

Homework is regularly assigned in all classes. Observation of student copybooks indicated that the range of homework questions assigned places a good focus on checking students' recall and understanding of classroom learning. Care needs to be taken to avoid an over-reliance on short-answer style questions. All classes should be provided with opportunities to complete a range of long-answer style questions to support the development of students' higher-order skills such as the analysis, synthesis and crucial appraisal of information.

Observation of copybooks indicated some good practice in the monitoring of students' work, where effort was affirmed and constructive feedback given. This good practice enhances learning by informing students about their own individual progress, highlighting areas for improvement and assisting students to reach their full potential. However there is scope to review the strategies used by teachers to monitor students' progress. In a number of lessons observed students' homework was corrected by the teacher as part of the lesson. This is not always appropriate. To ensure that the completion of homework leads to effective student learning the effectiveness of this practice needs to be reviewed. There are occasions when it is appropriate to correct short-answer questions in class using a teacher-led discussion on the work completed. However it is

necessary that more careful monitoring of students' corrections to these questions be carried out by the teacher. In other instances, the nature of the work assigned requires a more detailed and thorough monitoring than class time allows. Examples include the monitoring of students' design brief sheets or long-answer style questions.

To enhance formative assessment in Home Economics it is recommended that the range of homework assigned to all classes be reviewed. The homework assigned should support all assessment objectives of the relevant syllabuses. Particular attention needs to focus on the development of students' higher-order skills. Further opportunities should be provided to students to complete a wider range of long-answer question styles typical of examination papers. The home economics team should agree how best to balance the amount of homework assigned with the provision of constructive feedback to individual students. Further Assessment for Learning (AfL) strategies could be explored with a view to including these as routine classroom practice. Further information on AfL is available on the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) website (www.ncca.ie).

Some good summative assessment practice is evident. Some students are awarded an aggregated mark for a written examination and an assessment of the relevant coursework components. At the time of the evaluation the extent to which this very good practice is standardised across classes was unclear. When setting the written papers for all in-house examinations, it is important to be mindful of the format and question styles typical of the certificate examination papers that students are aiming to take. The pitch of written papers should aim to challenge the complete range of students' abilities typical of a mixed-ability setting. Therefore, attention should focus on the inclusion of some questions that assess higher-order thinking skills such as the analysis, synthesis, application and evaluation of information.

Teachers maintain good records of student progress and agreed procedures are evident. A very good level of ongoing communication is maintained between the home economics team and parents regarding students' progress and specific coursework requirements.

It was evident from the department plan that the subject team reviews students' results in the certificate examinations. This information could be used more to inform planning for teaching and learning. While overall levels of attainment are generally good there is scope to examine student uptake of higher level and trends in the grades achieved. Therefore it is recommended that the home economics team carry out a more in-depth analysis of student attainment in the in-house and certificate examinations. This work should include a comparative analysis with national trends whilst at the same time taking school contextual factors into account. The analysis should encompass teacher reflection on where and why issues arise. Positive trends and good practice, as well as areas for development identified as a result of the reflection and analyses should be recorded and used to inform planning and extend good practice as appropriate.

SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The following are the main strengths identified in the evaluation:

- The manner by which the teaching team reviews aspects of whole-school provision for Home Economic is illustrative of good self-evaluative practice.

- Some very good advance preparation and selection of additional resources was evident for the lessons observed.
- The home economics teachers displayed very good levels of subject knowledge.
- Students displayed a very good level of practical and procedural skills, given their level of experience and ability.
- Classroom management was very good in all of the lessons observed.
- Very good progress was evident in the range of Leaving Certificate coursework journals observed during the evaluation.
- Some very good practice was evident, particularly in the use of graphic organisers to summarise information.
- Teachers maintain good records and agreed record-keeping procedures are evident.

As a means of building on these strengths and to address areas for development, the following key recommendations are made:

- The length and operation of the exploratory first-year programme should be reviewed.
- Collaborative programme plans that demonstrate an integrated, incremental and agreed approach to the teaching and learning should be developed for all home economics syllabuses.
- Further steps should be taken to integrate the stages of the design brief process into home economics lessons from first year through to third year.
- The strategies in use for assigning and monitoring of homework should be reviewed.

A post-evaluation meeting was held with the principal at the conclusion of the evaluation when the draft findings and recommendations of the evaluation were presented and discussed.

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