Subject Inspection of Materials Technology (Wood) and Construction Studies

REPORT

The Donahies Community School
Streamville Road, Dublin 13
Roll number: 91318U

Date of inspection: 22 March 2011
REPORT
ON
THE QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN MATERIALS TECHNOLOGY (WOOD) AND CONSTRUCTION STUDIES

INFORMATION ON THE INSPECTION

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date of inspection</th>
<th>22 March 2011</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Inspection activities undertaken</strong></td>
<td><strong>• Observation of teaching and learning during four class periods</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Review of relevant documents</td>
<td>• Examination of students’ work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Discussion with principal and teachers</td>
<td>• Feedback to principal and teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Interaction with students</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

MAIN FINDINGS

- The teaching and learning in all lessons observed during the inspection were very good.
- Supports for literacy have been developed in the form of a key words booklet for MTW and the display of student-produced labelled posters showing some hand tools and their parts.
- The subjects are popular in the school and are well supported through the provision of time and resources.
- The room available for the teaching of the subjects has recently been remodelled and work is progressing on making it an interesting and stimulating learning environment for students.
- Planning for the subjects is very well progressed and includes detailed schemes of work for all year groups.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

- As a further support for the development of literacy levels in the school, new terminology and key words should be displayed prominently in the classroom. Furthermore, the provision of literacy supports should be extended to students studying Construction Studies (CS) at senior cycle.
- The development of skills in producing a project portfolio, in line with certificate examination requirements, should be developed with first year and second-year students in tandem with practical project work.
- More written feedback should be provided to students on their class work, portfolio work and homework in keeping with assessment for learning (AfL) principles.
INTRODUCTION
The Donahies Community School participates in the Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) action plan. It currently caters for 502 students: 263 boys and 239 girls. Materials Technology (Wood) is offered as an optional subject in the Junior Certificate (JC) programme and CS is offered as an optional subject in both the Leaving Certificate (LC) and the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP). The optional Transition Year contains a ten-week module on graphics and construction. 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.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

- Each of the lessons observed was well structured with the aim of the lesson being made explicit from the outset. Lessons were well paced and had good links to previous learning.
- In one theory lesson observed, information and communication technology (ICT) was used effectively to present clear, concise notes and diagrams.
- Demonstrations were well used, allowing the teacher to model the proper execution of woodworking processes and associated skills. Instructions delivered were clear with safety issues were stressed at all times.
- The terminology associated with MTW and CS was used and emphasised during lessons. It is recommended, as a support for literacy, that new terminology encountered during a lesson be written and displayed on the whiteboard or some other suitable medium and that these words be recorded by students in their copybooks.
- A variety of individual and group questions, including higher order questions was used during lessons. Question and answer sessions were well managed and assisted in focusing students’ attention and supporting their learning.
- The skills needed to produce a written project portfolio are currently not developed until third year. It is recommended that students gain experience in writing project portfolios, in line with certificate examination requirements, during first year and second year and that this should be done in tandem with practical project work.
- Textbooks were not overly relied on during the lessons evaluated. Rather, they were used as a resource for the completion of class and homework tasks.
- From observation of students’ journals it was clear that homework is allocated and corrected regularly. It is recommended that there be an increase in the quantity and quality of constructive and affirmative written feedback provided to students on this work, in keeping with AfL principles.
- Results from theoretical examinations are combined with marks awarded for practical work. This is good practice and is in keeping with the aims of the syllabuses.
- There was a good classroom atmosphere in the lessons observed which was fostered by a genuine rapport between the students and the teacher.
**SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT**

- First-year students sample their optional subjects before being asked to make their choices. This forms a good support for students, allowing them to base their choices on their experiences and aptitude for the subjects.
- Uptake of the subjects is strong in the school.
- Senior-cycle students are given an open choice of available optional subjects. Optional subject bands are then devised based on students’ preferences, as is good practice.
- Support is provided for students and parents at times of transition through the provision of information evenings, individual interviews, talks from subject teachers and a subject choice booklet.
- Time provision for the subjects is good with lessons well distributed across the week.
- Considerable work has been carried out recently on the remodelling of the woodwork room. The room is now more spacious with good storage space.
- The subject department is commended for its involvement in cross-curricular activities such as the Make a Book project and the making of sets for the school’s drama and talent shows.
- Formal assessments are held at mid-term, Christmas and summer with “mock” examinations held for third-year and sixth-year students in the spring. Reports are sent home after each such assessment and one parent-teacher meeting is held annually for each year group.
- The teacher has attended the programme of continuing professional development (CPD) available through the Technology Subjects Support Service (t4). Extensive whole-school CPD has also been provided including training on supporting Special Educational Needs (SEN) students and improving student achievement at the top level.
- A regular safety audit of the room should be carried out by the subject department with the safety checklists signed, dated and copied to management.

**PLANNING AND PREPARATION**

- The subject has a co-ordinator in place and formal subject planning meetings are held, three times per year. Minutes of meetings are retained and copied to management.
- Separate planning folders were presented for MTW, CS and the TY module. Planning is very well progressed.
- The schemes of work contain details on student learning outcomes for each topic, as well as details on teaching methodology and assessment. To further improve on this good work it is suggested that the resources available for the teaching of each topic be listed. This will assist in the cataloguing of the resources available as well as identifying subject topics where more resources need to be developed.
- The MTW planning folder contains a key-words booklet to support the development of students’ literacy levels. This is a commendable initiative which should be extended to senior-cycle students.
- Currently scaled drawing is taught in a block session of approximately four to six weeks duration. Prior to this, students use freehand sketching to graphically represent building
details. When developing the scheme of work for CS, a greater emphasis should be placed on the production of scaled drawing details. The monitoring of such drawings should form part of the continuous assessment model used by the subject department.

- Safe operational areas (SOAs) had been clearly marked. Safety signage was displayed including safe use rules beside each machine and there was adequate personal protection equipment (PPE) available for students.

- The results from state examinations are not currently analysed and compared to national norms. Such an analysis should be undertaken to help identify trends in students’ performances, to monitor the uptake of higher level and to inform future planning in the subjects.

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

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