

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

**Subject Inspection of Home Economics
REPORT**

**Mount Carmel Secondary School
King's Inns Street, Dublin 1
Roll number: 60853T**

Date of inspection: 11 May 2010



**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 HOME ECONOMICS

SUBJECT INSPECTION REPORT

This report has been written following a subject inspection in Mount Carmel Secondary School, King's Inns Street, 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 two days during which the inspector visited classrooms and observed teaching and learning. The inspector interacted with students and teachers, examined students' work, and had discussions with the teachers. The inspector reviewed school planning documentation and teachers' written preparation. Following the evaluation visit, the inspector provided oral feedback on the outcomes of the evaluation to the principal and the subject teachers.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

Mount Carmel Secondary School is voluntary Catholic secondary school for girls under the trusteeship of the Religious Sisters of Charity. It is situated in the heart of the inner city in Dublin. The school is included in the Department of Education and Skills' School Support Programme under the Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) action plan for educational inclusion. The current enrolment is 299 students, half of whom come from outside of Ireland. Mount Carmel Secondary School seeks to provide for the diverse needs of its student population. In addition to the Junior Certificate and the Leaving Certificate, the school provides the Junior Certificate School Programme (JCSP), an optional Transition Year programme (TY) and the Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA).

Home Economics is one of a broad range of optional subjects on offer on the school's curriculum. Uptake of the subject in this school is very healthy. In both the junior cycle and the senior cycle the percentage of students choosing the subject is well above the national average. There is evidence to indicate that the arrangements for subject choice in junior cycle and in senior cycle ensure, as far as possible, that Home Economics is accessible to all students.

Subject provision and whole-school support for Home Economics is very good. Appropriate provision is made for the subject in all of the school's programmes. Teaching time allocated to classes is adequate and lesson periods for each class group are well spread out on the weekly timetable. Deployment of teachers in the home economics department is very good. The department is currently staffed by two fully qualified specialist and experienced teachers of Home Economics.

The specialist facilities for Home Economics comprise a kitchen and a sewing room. The kitchen has recently been refurbished under the Department of Education and Skills 'Summer Works Scheme'. The rooms are well maintained and well organised. The home economics department

has extended the learning space for the subject by using the wall space on the corridor outside of the classrooms. This area is used well to display subject-specific posters and students' project work. This creates a print-rich and stimulating atmosphere for the students. The corridor space is also used for the filing and storage of resources that are used to support teaching and learning. A selection of subject-specific resource books is available in both the kitchen and the sewing room. It is also very positive to note that a section of the school's library houses a further collection of home economics related books. This library, which is a most appealing and student-friendly learning space, has been developed as part of the *JCSP Demonstration Library Project*.

Information and communications technology (ICT) equipment is available in both specialist classrooms in the form of PCs, and printers. There is internet access in the classrooms and a portable data projector is available. Access to the computer room can be arranged by the teachers as necessary.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

There is an enthusiastic and well-organised approach to the organisation and planning of Home Economics in the school. The two home economics teachers work well together in a supportive and collaborative manner. The role of subject department co-ordinator is rotated. This is a good practice as it ensures a sharing of responsibilities and provides each teacher with opportunities to assume a leadership role in the development of the subject.

The minutes of subject department meetings provide evidence of some review and reflection. It is noted, for example, that the teachers have used the diagnostic window to focus on what is already working well and on what is not yet working well. This useful exercise can help establish priorities for the continued development of the subject in the school. As a result of this exercise the home economics department, with the support of senior management, is currently looking at how to enhance the availability of ICT equipment for Home Economics.

A subject plan has been developed for Home Economics. This plan provides a clear and comprehensive picture of how the subject is organised and delivered in the school. The home economics department has developed programmes of work for each year group. These programmes are syllabus-based and they provide a clear outline of the course content, including the relevant practical coursework to be covered on a week-by-week basis. Some of the course content in the textiles area has been expressed in terms of what students should be able to do on completion of a section. It is also noted that the course content for the hotel, catering and tourism module for students taking the LCA is written in the form of learning outcomes. This is a very good approach as it ensures that the focus is on the learners.

In order to build on the good work that is already underway, it is recommended that the home economics department further develop the programmes of work. Initially it would be useful to extend the practice evident in the textiles area so that there is a focus in the other syllabus topics on what students should know and be able to do in each year. The inclusion of methodologies and resources, and details of how students' progress will be assessed would bring added value to the programmes of work. This work could be done on a phased basis. In doing so, consideration should be given to recording the many very good everyday practices that take place routinely in lessons. This would ensure that the planning is informed by practice.

A very impressive feature of the subject planning for Home Economics in Mount Carmel Secondary School is the care and attention given to the preparation of resources to support teaching and learning. It is evident that the home economics teachers have a very clear understanding of the learning needs and the language needs of their students. Of particular note are the creative efforts made to support students for whom English is not their first language. Key words from different areas of the syllabuses are clearly written on the JCSP posters that are displayed in the classrooms. In the kitchen, photographs are displayed alongside the lists of equipment in each of the storage presses. Teachers have developed and tailored a range of handouts and worksheets to help students extend and apply the subject-specific and everyday vocabulary used in lessons.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

Four lessons were observed as part of this evaluation. These included practical lessons in food studies, and design and craftwork. The teachers planned the lessons very thoroughly. This attention to detail resulted in lessons that were well structured and appropriately pitched for the particular class groups. The pacing of the lessons was also suited to the level and ability of the students.

At the beginning of lessons teachers communicated the learning outcomes to the students. The planned learning outcomes were clearly presented in a very encouraging manner using student-friendly language. The learning outcomes were sometimes written on the whiteboard and key terms were underlined. The learning outcomes were also used throughout the lessons to check on and summarise learning and to help students realise what they had achieved.

In all lessons observed there was a developmental approach to learning. All new knowledge and skills were presented in the context of students' prior learning and good links were made with students' everyday experiences. This approach ensured a 'can-do' attitude to learning and it was effective in helping students gain confidence. This was particularly evident in the practical lessons.

The quality of teaching and learning observed during the evaluation of Home Economics was very good. The teachers used a range of methodologies and resources to help students engage with the lesson content and processes. Resources such as handouts and worksheets were differentiated to meet the wide range of abilities in classes. In particular, teachers were very cognisant of the language needs of students whose first language is not English. Teacher instruction was very clear and thorough in terms of the explanation of new concepts and in the demonstration of processes in the practical work. The teachers used a variety of strategies to ensure that students understood the vocabulary of the subject. There was a strong emphasis on helping them build on and use this vocabulary. This was challenging given the variety of levels in the various classes. For example, in one class group visited during the evaluation about two-thirds of the students came from six different countries outside of Ireland.

The practical lessons in food studies and design and craftwork were well managed with an appropriate focus on both teaching and learning. These lessons provided very good evidence of all the necessary elements of a well-planned and well-managed practical lesson. Appropriate emphasis was placed on training the students in the correct procedures for the operation of a practical lesson including the handling and use of equipment and appliances as well as the importance of maintaining high standards in health and safety. It is good that the design brief

process is used as a framework for the practical coursework in the junior cycle. There is scope to develop this further and in particular to pass more of the responsibility from the teachers onto the students, especially in the area of food studies.

In all of the practical lessons observed there was a very good focus on the development of skills. This was facilitated by a staged approach where clear instructions and the explanation and demonstration of key processes occurred at appropriate points in the lessons. The teachers named and emphasised each new skill for the students and linked it to skills previously acquired. The students were given tips for success and they were strongly encouraged to display their flair and creativity. Independent learning was fostered. Students were given feedback on their progress throughout the practical lessons and where necessary they were challenged to raise the standard. These are very good practices. Overall, the standard of practical skills displayed in food studies and in design and craftwork ranged from good to very good.

The level of engagement with classroom activities was optimal when students were involved individually or in small groups with practical activities. As much as possible, students should be facilitated to learn by doing, even in theory lessons. Consideration should be given to exploring this area further as part of subject planning.

Classroom management was excellent in all lessons. The good practice of taking the roll call at the beginning of lessons was noted. Student participation was encouraged and good use was made of praise to affirm students' efforts. There was a nice rapport between students and their teachers and a sense of ease and security among students in asking questions and in seeking clarification. This was facilitated by teacher movement throughout the classroom. Interaction with students and observation of classroom activities indicated a positive attitude towards Home Economics.

ASSESSMENT

Questioning was one of the main strategies used in lessons to check on understanding and on students' progress in the lessons. There were examples of the use of higher-order questions that challenged students to think as well as recall knowledge. There were some instances of the drawing out of knowledge through very effective questioning. It is recommended that greater emphasis be placed on the inclusion of higher-order questions in all lessons. This practice helps students develop their skills of analysis, application of knowledge and evaluation of information. Teachers should ensure that the questions posed in class are well spread amongst all class members so that the same students are not answering all the time.

The variety of assessment modes used in Home Economics in the school reflects the assessment objectives of the syllabuses. The assessment modes used include the regular assessment of students' practical skills. Currently in the formal in-house examinations, eighty percent of the total mark is awarded for the written paper and twenty percent of the total mark for assessment of students' practical skills. Consideration should be given to increasing the percentage of marks awarded for the practical components so that they are more in line with the percentage mark allocations of the certificate examinations. It is good to note that common tests are given, where feasible, in the in-house examinations at Christmas and the end of the summer term.

Observation of students' copybooks and folders indicated that homework is assigned and monitored on a regular basis. The good practice of having students work on past examination questions was also noted. This helps them prepare for the examination by developing proficiency

in essential skills such as the analysis, interpretation and application of knowledge. In discussion with the inspector during the evaluation teachers indicated that it is sometimes challenging to get students to complete the assigned homework. Consideration might be given to the process of continuous assessment in relation to homework and awarding a percentage of the final mark for the in-house examinations to this area.

There was some evidence of the provision of constructive comments with regard to progress made and areas for improvement in the monitoring of homework. There is scope to develop this area further. Formative assessment processes could also be used to encourage students to evaluate and improve their own work and, in turn, this has the potential to encourage them to take greater ownership of their homework and their learning.

Students are encouraged and supported to reach their full potential in Home Economics. Although students in the main achieve good results in the subject in the certificate examinations, the percentage of students taking higher level is lower than the national figures. While acknowledging the context of the school, it is recommended that teachers in collaboration with management explore how the numbers of students taking higher level can be improved. This should involve tracking and target setting so that, very gradually, the numbers will increase.

It is good to note that student achievement in Home Economics is acknowledged and celebrated in Mount Carmel Secondary School. This school is very attentive to using praise and affirmation in the confidence building process for its students.

SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The following are the main strengths identified in the evaluation:

- In Mount Carmel Secondary School the percentage of students choosing Home Economics is well above the national average.
- The minutes of subject department meetings provide evidence of some review and reflection.
- A very impressive feature of subject planning in Home Economics is the care and attention given to the preparation of resources to support teaching and learning. Of particular note are the creative efforts made to support students for whom English is not their first language.
- In the lessons observed teachers communicated the learning outcomes to students in a very encouraging manner using student-friendly language.
- The quality of teaching and learning observed during the evaluation was very good. All new knowledge and skills were presented in the context of students' prior learning. This approach ensured a 'can-do' attitude to learning and it was effective in helping students gain confidence.
- Students are encouraged and supported to reach their full potential in Home Economics. Student achievement in the subject is acknowledged and celebrated.

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

- The home economics department should further develop the programmes of work. Initially the focus should be on what students should know and be able to do in each year. The inclusion of methodologies and resources, and details of how students' progress will be assessed would bring added value to the programmes of work.
- Greater emphasis should be placed on the inclusion of higher-order questions in all lessons.
- Teachers should increase the use of constructive comments for students in the monitoring of homework.
- The subject department, in collaboration with management, should explore how the numbers of students taking higher level Home Economics in the certificate examinations can be improved.

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