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

St Joseph’s Secondary School
Tulla, County Clare
Roll number: 62020F

Date of inspection: 25 March 2011
REPORT
ON
THE QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN CONSTRUCTION STUDIES AND MATERIALS TECHNOLOGY (WOOD)

INFORMATION ON THE INSPECTION

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<td><strong>Observation of teaching and learning during four class periods</strong></td>
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<td>• Review of relevant documents</td>
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INTRODUCTION
St Joseph’s is a voluntary Catholic secondary school under the trusteeship of CEIST Catholic Education an Irish Schools Trust. A broad curriculum is provided for girls and boys from Tulla and the neighbouring areas of East Clare. In addition to Construction Studies (CS) and Materials Technology (Wood) (MTW), the technologies are also represented in the curriculum by Design and Communication Technology (DCG) and Technical Graphics (TG). The school currently has an enrolment of 462 students.

TEACHING AND LEARNING
• Teaching of a very high standard was observed. In the practical lessons observed, the purpose, made clear from the outset, focused on the work to be completed. It is suggested, for further improvement, that the expected learning outcomes should also be shared with students, to be revisited at the end of the lesson. This approach should be used to further increase students’ awareness and their sense of responsibility for their own learning.
• Lesson content was appropriate to the students’ abilities and interests and was consistent with the relevant syllabuses and programmes of work. Material was presented at an appropriate pace and in suitable depth. Lessons on veneering and wood carving observed in MTW held the students’ interest very successfully.
• The work undertaken was influenced by the students’ creativity to an appropriate extent. Students, being encouraged to think independently, were given opportunities to be inventive in their work.
• Interaction between students and teachers was mutually respectful helping to maintain an appropriately relaxed and affirming atmosphere. The teachers displayed an enthusiasm that engendered a similar high level of interest and eagerness in their students. Well established classroom routines and effective classroom management, allied to clear teacher expectations and sensitive correction when required, ensured an environment favourable for learning. The teachers worked closely with individual students completing practical project work, affirming their efforts and furthering the aims of assessment for learning (AfL).
• Some good practice was observed in the support of numeracy development, as, when determining suitable positioning of a carving on a piece of lime wood, students were tasked with the calculation. This was effective in encouraging students to develop their numeracy skills. The subject department is encouraged to explore further strategies for the development of such basic numeracy skills with the aim of deploying these strategies in each lesson, where practicable.
• Strategies should also be developed further for the support of literacy. Common approaches for dealing with the introduction and reinforcement of new terminology and uses of language, many of which may already be in use in lessons, should be identified and deployed in all lessons. These approaches and strategies should include the active and collaborative use of keyword lists and posters by students.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT
• There is equitable provision for MTW in the Junior Certificate programme and for CS in the Leaving Certificate programme. In both cases the subjects are optional, initially being
freely chosen by students from the full list of subjects. Following this indication of students’ preferences, subject-option bands are devised providing the students, to the greatest extent possible, with their chosen options.

• Students and their parents are appropriately supported and advised in regard to subject choices. Open nights are provided prior to entry and at transfer to senior cycle, which include a tour of the woodwork room. Choices are discussed with parents at parent-teacher meetings. Students are advised by the guidance counsellor and the deputy principal and discussions are held with class groups.

• An element or module of CS should be introduced to the TY programme to broaden the students’ experience of the subject and to support them in making choices for senior-cycle.

• The allocation of teaching time for CS and MTW is suitably generous and effectively structured to provide for the completion of the relevant syllabuses. The timetable appropriately includes a double-period lesson for each class to facilitate the completion of practical project work. The weekly distribution of lesson times supports continuity of students’ contact with the subjects.

• Assessment of the subjects, consistent with whole-school policy, involves in-school examinations at Christmas, and in summer and mid-term tests. Continuous assessment of students’ work is also taken into account when reporting on their attainment. Further development of continuous assessment should focus on common, subject department-based procedures with regular feedback to students, perhaps by electronic means.

• The subjects are well provided for in terms of materials and other resources. Subject department planning is done in the context of an annual budget provided by the school. Development of information and communication technology (ICT) used in the teaching and learning of CS and MTW has advanced steadily. First-year students of MTW are introduced to the SolidWorks computer-aided design (CAD) software package. The recent acquisition and use of the document camera or visualiser, observed during the inspection, is indicative of the continuing proactive approach of the subject department in the ICT sphere.

• The subject department is also proactive in keeping abreast of developments in the teaching of CS and MTW and the teachers have availed of continuing professional development (CPD) opportunities including those provided for the introduction of new syllabuses in the technologies in recent years.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

• Subject-department planning is well structured. The role of coordinator rotates. The planning process has developed coherent and appropriate subject plans and programmes of work that are consistent with the syllabuses.

• Further development of the subject-department plan should include consideration of areas such as basic literacy and numeracy skills development and continuous assessment mentioned earlier in this report. It is urged that the agenda for meetings of the subject department normally emphasise teaching and learning related items.

• It is also recommended that a policy be developed covering the timing and completion of CS project coursework. The completion of project work in fifth year can be problematic. It is envisaged that the students are knowledgeable on the CS syllabus so that this
knowledge can be brought to bear on their chosen project brief. It is also desirable that architectural heritage type projects have a context related to elements of the course that the students have studied and are not limited to architectural model making alone.

• Planning for individual lessons and for the provision of equipment and materials was very good.

• Regular communication is maintained with parents by means of written school reports, parent-teacher meetings and the students’ journals.

The draft findings and recommendations arising out of this evaluation were discussed with the principal and the 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; a response was not received from the board.

*Published October 2011*