

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

**Subject Inspection of Technical Graphics and
Design and Communication Graphics**

REPORT

**Bunclody Vocational College
Bunclody, Co. Wexford
Roll number: 71620H**

Date of inspection: 26 November 2009



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

REPORT
ON
THE QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN TECHNICAL GRAPHICS AND
DESIGN AND COMMUNICATION GRAPHICS

SUBJECT INSPECTION REPORT

This report has been written following a subject inspection in Bunclody Vocational College, conducted as part of a whole school evaluation. It presents the findings of an evaluation of the quality of teaching and learning in Technical Graphics (TG) and Design and Communication Graphics (DCG) and makes recommendations for the further development of the teaching of these subjects 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 the teachers and examined students' work. The inspector reviewed school planning documentation and the teachers' written preparation. Following the evaluation visit, the inspector provided oral feedback on the outcomes of the evaluation to the principal and deputy principal.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

Appropriate provision is made for TG and DCG at junior and senior cycle. This provision includes four periods during each year of the junior cycle, five periods in fifth year and six periods in sixth year. These class periods are generally distributed in an appropriate manner throughout the week and include both double and single periods, as is common practice.

The subjects receive a very good level of support; this support includes the provision of excellent facilities and the encouragement and facilitation of subject teachers to attend relevant continuing professional development (CPD) courses. This level of support is commended.

All members of the subject department are given the opportunity to teach both TG and DCG to the highest level on a rotational basis, and each member of the subject department also has teaching responsibilities within their other area of specialism. This good practice is commended.

The level of resources at the subject department's disposal is very good. These resources include excellent information and communication technology (ICT) equipment, good quality student drawing boards, appropriate storage facilities and a good variety of teaching aids.

All students have the opportunity to choose TG and DCG. At junior cycle students are given the option of choosing between TG and Home Economics. This fixed option band does not encourage girls to choose TG. To address this issue school management should consider providing students with a free choice of all optional subjects prior to forming optional subject bands.

To support students in making their optional subject choices a number of initiatives are in place. These initiatives include: an open day for students; providing subject specific information for students; and in some cases, an informal arrangement where students who are unsure of their subject choices are given the opportunity to sample subjects for a short period of time prior to choosing the preferred subjects. The TG and DCG subject department should continue and develop their efforts to ensure that all students are given appropriate exposure to the subjects prior to choosing their preferred optional subjects and are made fully aware of the various opportunities and positive outcomes that may accrue as a result of choosing TG and DCG.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

Subject department planning occurs during formal planning meetings facilitated by school management and through regular informal meetings of the department that occur on an ongoing basis. These meetings are convened by a subject department co-ordinator, a role that is rotated among all members of the subject department and records are maintained as is best practice. The subject department presented as a united group with a common vision for the development of the subject in the school. It is recommended that this group formalise this vision by identifying the main challenges facing the subject department and through structured planning, putting strategies and initiatives in place to achieve these identified goals. A number of areas for development that should be included in this strategic plan are examined in greater detail in the assessment section of this report.

A good quality subject plan is currently being developed by the subject department. This plan details the subject department's organisational framework while also detailing the curriculum content for both junior and senior cycle programmes. The curriculum content for DCG identifies student learning outcomes for each area of the syllabus and in addition to this, achievable timeframes are identified for the completion of specific areas of course content. It is suggested that the subject department use this curricular plan as an exemplar when revising the junior cycle TG curricular plan.

The subject department has accumulated over time a significant quantity of useful resources. These resources are easily accessible to all members of the graphics teaching team. To further develop planning in this area the subject department should endeavour to identify and collate the significant quantity of electronic resources developed in-house and by the Technology Subjects Support Service (t³). In doing so, the subject department could access these resources readily and possibly enable students to access relevant resources via the local area network (LAN) in the school or via hyperlinks directly from the school's website.

Teachers' preparation for lessons was very good in all instances. This preparation included student worksheets, teaching aids and models, ICT resources, prepared blackboard drawings and sketches and exemplar solutions. This high level of teacher planning and preparation is commended.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

All lessons observed had a clear learning intention. Best practice was observed where students were informed of the success criteria of lessons at the beginning. The content of all lessons was appropriate for all groups and suited to their particular stage in the various programmes.

All lessons were well organised and in almost all instances structured appropriately. In general, lessons consisted of an introduction, development of the topic, student activity and teacher circulation. This cycle was repeated as necessary. The subject department should consistently plan to use the final few minutes of lessons for the purposes of summation. In doing so, the key learning outcomes of lessons could be recapitulated and in the case of junior cycle lessons keywords could be revised to promote literacy among students following the Junior Certificate School Programme (JCSP).

In developing topics, teachers utilised a number of methodologies. These methodologies were in all cases appropriate to the topic at hand. One very good example included the use of poster prints to demonstrate the concept of axial symmetry. In addition to this strategy, teachers utilised sketching, parametric solid modelling, geometric models and student involvement during blackboard demonstrations to help students understand the various concepts that were being taught. The varied and successful use of such a diverse range of teaching methodologies is commended.

Questioning was used primarily at the beginning of lessons to reinforce prior learning. To further improve questioning strategies, teachers should consider implementing questioning techniques such as wait time, no hands and directing questions to individual students in an effort to avoid chorus answering among students.

Classroom management was excellent in all lessons observed. Students are allocated specific tasks at the beginning and end of lessons such as collecting equipment and organising materials. These devolved responsibilities help to develop a sense of ownership of the facilities and equipment among students. While student behaviour was very good in all lessons observed, the subject department should consider implementing seating plans in the classrooms. This could help to improve class dynamics, generate discussion and avoid the possibility of some students becoming isolated from their peers, especially in small class groups.

A positive, industrious and enabling atmosphere permeated all lessons observed. Members of the subject department and the students studying graphics are commended for the cultivation of such an environment.

The recent trend in relation to uptake of higher level and attainment at both levels among examination year students in both subjects in the certificate examinations is a cause for serious concern. The subject department has identified this problem through its detailed analysis of examination results and views this as an area for development. This relatively new subject department must now identify and implement strategies to address this situation. One possible initiative would be to monitor the chief examiner's reports in TG and DCG and ensure that any recommendations or suggestions made in these reports are implemented across the department.

ASSESSMENT

Formal in-school examinations are held at Christmas and summer in Bunclody Vocational College. In order to ascertain students' progress in a more meaningful way, the subject department must pay significantly more attention to the regular correction and monitoring of students' work and the provision of meaningful feedback to students in order to improve their understanding of key concepts and the presentation of their work.

Students in one lesson received very good levels of formative feedback on their learning. This feedback was administered on an individual and group basis. This good practice, which is in keeping with the principles of assessment for learning, should be developed throughout the subject department.

Students' journals showed little evidence of recording assigned homework. It is strongly recommended that the subject department makes a concerted effort to regularly assign homework, as outlined in the subject department's own homework policy. Homework exercises should be planned to consolidate class work and should help students to develop their independent learning skills.

Good records of progress were presented during the inspection pertaining to students in the JCSP. These profiling records are very beneficial to students. However the decision to include all junior cycle students in the JCSP should be reviewed, as not all of the students may need the scaffolding that learning targets and statements provide. In addition to this, by involving all students in the programme the overall benefits to students suited to the programme may diminish as the learning targets and statements may not be seen as tailored to their specific needs and abilities.

SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The following are the main strengths identified in the evaluation:

- Support from senior management for graphics subjects in Bunclody Vocational College is very good.
- The specialist graphics room is well-equipped and provides a suitable teaching and learning environment for teachers and students.
- The subject department is currently in the process of developing a good quality subject plan for TG and DCG.
- Teachers' preparation for lessons was very good.
- A wide variety of appropriate teaching methodologies was employed in all lessons observed.

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

- The subject department, in collaboration with the senior management team, should develop a strategic plan aimed specifically at improving student uptake of higher level and attainment in TG and DCG.
- The subject department should take a more proactive role in regularly monitoring and correcting students' portfolio work, thereby enabling them to provide students with meaningful formative feedback.
- Homework should be assigned to all students on a regular basis.

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

Published February 2011.