Subject Inspection of Home Economics
REPORT

Scoil Ruain
Killenaule, Thurles, County Tipperary
Roll number: 72430H

Date of inspection: 25 January 2012
REPORT
ON
THE QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN HOME ECONOMICS

INFORMATION ON THE INSPECTION

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dates of inspection</th>
<th>24 and 25 January</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Inspection activities undertaken</td>
<td>Observation of teaching and learning during nine class periods</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Review of relevant documents</td>
<td>• Examination of students’ work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Discussion with principal, deputy principal and teachers</td>
<td>• Feedback to principal, deputy principal and teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Interaction with students</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

MAIN FINDINGS

• The quality of teaching and learning was very good, with much exemplary teaching practice observed.

• Teachers’ presentation style was inclusive of student voice and activity, with co-operative learning also facilitated in each lesson.

• Attention was paid to the development of students’ literacy levels in home economics lessons.

• Review and recapitulation were well provided for at lesson outset and over the course of lesson delivery; however, more time should be devoted to this at lesson conclusion.

• Home Economics is well provided for and supported at a whole-school level.

• The existence of good planning structures and processes has led to good planning outcomes.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

• Teachers should further explore the theory of cooperative learning, with a view to including other co-operative learning strategies in their teaching.

• Teachers are encouraged to further develop their approaches to assessment with a particular emphasis on assessment for learning, peer assessment and self-assessment.

• Teachers should begin to consider how self-evaluation might be implemented at classroom level.
INTRODUCTION

Scoil Ruain is a co-educational, multi-denominational second-level school, under the auspices of South Tipperary Vocational Education Committee (VEC). It serves a largely rural student population and is involved in the Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) action plan. The school has a current enrolment of 328 students. It offers a comprehensive curriculum, including an optional Transition Year (TY) programme.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

• The quality of teaching and learning observed in lessons was very good, with much exemplary teaching practice noted.

• Best practice was where the learning intentions for lessons were clearly identified and shared with students. Particular credit was given when this information was presented to students with a focus on knowledge, skills and, as relevant, values to be developed. This approach is further encouraged.

• Lessons were content rich, and instruction was clear with thorough explanations provided to students.

• Teachers’ presentation style was inclusive of student voice and activity, which led to the creation of student-centred classrooms. The three main learning styles, namely visual, auditory and kinaesthetic, were effectively provided for in all lessons.

• Co-operative learning was facilitated in each lesson. Teachers are encouraged to further explore this theory of learning, with a view to including other co-operative learning strategies in their teaching.

• As required, teachers differentiated instruction for students, on a one-to-one or small group basis, and in a discrete but effective manner.

• Teachers made effective use of questioning. A striking feature of teachers’ work in this area was their comfortableness with the concept and practice of ‘wait time’, allowing time for students to think about and answer questions posed to them. Teachers were also adept at prompting students who either had difficulty answering or who needed to further develop an answer. This approach resulted in an enhanced learning experience for students.

• In practical food-studies lessons, best practice was where a strong emphasis was placed on each of the following: the development or refinement of students’ skills; the application of good cooking principles; effective time management; and resource management.

• Review and recapitulation, features of effective teaching which focus on student learning, were well provided for in lessons, both at lesson outset and over the course of lesson delivery. However, they were less well provided for at lesson conclusion. This is identified therefore as an area for development.

• Reflecting the current whole-school emphasis on literacy, attention was paid to the development of students’ literacy levels in home economics lessons, including those of students for whom English is an additional language. This is praised and further advocated.
• Classroom atmosphere was very positive, with students responding very favourably to teacher direction and instruction.

• Good practices are being employed by teachers in the area of assessment. These are consistent with syllabus requirements and take account of certificate examinations. Teachers are encouraged to explore this area further with an emphasis on assessment for learning, peer assessment and self-assessment.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

• Home Economics is offered on each of the school’s curricular programmes and overall it is a popular subject that demonstrates healthy uptake levels.

• While uptake of the subject amongst the male student cohort is low, measures seeking to address this are being explored. Two recently introduced initiatives demonstrate a growing consciousness in the school in relation to the equality of access to Home Economics for all students. Initiatives taken include the provision of a pre-entry, sampler sessions for prospective sixth-class students and a half-year taster programme in first year. Consideration is also being given to the restructuring of the first-year subject-bands in light of the possible contribution of the existing bands to gender stereotyping. The degree of pro-activity reflected here is most positive.

• The subject is appropriately timetabled in line with syllabus suggestions, sometimes generously so. Management’s desire to reinstate, as resources permit, an additional single period in Hotel Catering Tourism, is acknowledged and advocated.

• The school’s home economics kitchen, now thirty years in existence, has been very well maintained. Management hopes to modernise the facilities in the near future, and is currently working with the subject department in the development of a refurbishment plan. This plan should include provision for new flooring. Minor modifications ought to be made to the classroom used for the delivery of the textile component of the junior certificate programme, as this would support teachers in the planning, organisation, management and safe delivery of this key aspect of the syllabus.

• A well-constructed, subject-specific, health and safety statement has been developed. It is recommended that this be updated annually, and that it provide also for the room where textile work is taught.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

• The existence of good planning structures and processes has led to good planning outcomes, as demonstrated in the wealth of meaningful planning documentation that has been collated by the members of the subject department.

• Well-developed programmes of work have been prepared for each year group. It is suggested that the accompanying ‘curricular content’ documents or ‘outline programmes of work’ be reviewed. It is suggested that they should provide, at a glance, clear information on the topics to be covered on a term-by-term basis with each year group, in relation to theory and all other aspects of the syllabus, for example and as relevant, practical food-studies or journal work. Ideally too, these should be framed within a series of general learning outcomes.
The subject department is well placed to begin to explore the implementation of self-evaluation practices at classroom level. The Department of Education and Skill’s recently published School Self-Evaluation – Draft Guidelines for Post-Primary Schools will guide and support this work.

Planning for lessons observed was of a very high quality, with a wide range and number of carefully selected resources identified and prepared for use in the delivery of lesson content.

The draft findings and recommendations arising out of this evaluation were discussed with the principal and subject teacher 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, May 2012