

An Roinn Oideachais agus Eolaíochta

Department of Education and Science

**Subject Inspection of Home Economics
REPORT**

**Scoil Dara
Kilcock, County Kildare
Roll number: 61691B**

Date of inspection: 7 October 2008



**REPORT
ON
THE QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN HOME ECONOMICS**

SUBJECT INSPECTION REPORT

This report has been written following a subject inspection in Scoil Dara. 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 subject teachers. The board of management of the school was given an opportunity to comment on the findings and recommendations of the report; a response was not received from the board.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

Home Economics enjoys a high profile in Scoil Dara. The subject contributes positively to all curricular programmes. Uptake of junior cycle and senior cycle Home Economics is very good.

Home Economics is an optional subject. The school adopts a very student-centred approach to subject choice. First-year students participate in a short taster programme. This commendable practice assists students in making informed subject choices. Deliberate efforts are made to involve parents in the process. The information evening that is held for the parents of incoming first-year students provides an ideal forum to discuss junior cycle curriculum provision. It is commendable that the home economics team drafted an information leaflet for inclusion in the options booklet to outline the benefits of taking Junior Certificate Home Economics. An information evening is also held for third-year parents to provide advice on programme and subject choices. It is particularly commendable that the home economics co-ordinator makes a presentation on Leaving Certificate Home Economics to all third year students. This laudable practice allows students who may not have studied Junior Certificate Home Economics to consider the possibility of taking the subject for the Leaving Certificate. Junior and senior cycle option bands are generated based on an initial survey of students' preferences and every effort is made to accommodate students in their selection. Home Economics is always available on more than one junior and senior cycle option band in order to facilitate as many students as possible.

It is commendable that students taking the Transition Year (TY) programme take a module in Home Economics. This well-planned module also serves to inform subject choice at senior cycle. The length of the module in any year is determined by the number of students in TY. At the time of the evaluation there was still some lack of clarity regarding the actual length of the module for this year. It is recommended that this information be provided to the home economics team prior to the commencement of the academic year to assist subject planning. Hotel Catering and Tourism is a vibrant vocational specialism in the LCA programme. This allows students to build on the knowledge and skills acquired in Junior Certificate Home Economics.

Teaching time allocated to junior and senior cycle Home Economics is in line with syllabus recommendations. In general there is a good spread of classes across the week to facilitate effective continuity in teaching and learning. However, in the case of classes who have two double periods it is recommended that the lessons should not be distributed over two consecutive days as it results in a gap of almost one week between lessons. In the context of future curricular planning, consideration could be given to an alternative arrangement of junior cycle class time into one double and two singles lessons and one double and three single periods in Leaving Certificate Home Economics, to maximise continuity in teaching and learning. However, as Home Economics is part of option bands this re-arrangement would have to be undertaken in consultation with other subject groupings.

The home economics team comprises four subject specialists. The team demonstrates a high level of enthusiasm and commitment for the continued development of Home Economics in the school. There is a very good level of engagement with continuous professional development (CPD) courses. This is effectively facilitated by management. This commendable practice impacts positively on the quality of teaching and learning. There is very good deployment of specialist staff in Home Economics. A conscious effort is made, where feasible, to ensure continuity when allocating teachers to classes. Teachers can gain experience in teaching the Junior Certificate, TY, Leaving Certificate and LCA programmes. This praiseworthy practice builds capacity among team members. It was noted during the course of the evaluation that one class is shared between two teachers. This is not ideal practice as the teaching of Home Economics requires the integrated application of all the related core disciplines as well as the integrated delivery and application of relevant practical coursework components. Such an approach is very difficult in instances where two teachers share a class. It is recommended that this practice be avoided in future timetabling.

There are three well-resourced specialist rooms for Home Economics. A proactive approach is being adopted to the maintenance of each room. This is evidenced by the manner in which the older kitchen is being upgraded on a phased basis. The work stations and available storage space in this room remain in need of refurbishment. This project should be pursued when resources permit. There is a good range of additional resources to support home economics lessons. An annual budget is allocated to the home economics department. This good practice facilitates effective planning for the provision of additional resources.

There is considerable interest among the home economics team in developing the potential of information and communication technology (ICT) to enhance classroom practices. At present there is a computer in each of the specialist rooms but they are used solely for administration purposes. ICT is a very useful tool to enable students engage in independent and guided research that is appropriate to the coursework requirements in Home Economics. Furthermore, there are software packages available for use in home economics lessons and many educational websites that are useful in the preparation of classroom resources. Therefore it is recommended that the home economics team develop a plan that demonstrates concrete strategies for utilising ICT in the teaching and learning of Home Economics. This plan will be useful in establishing resource needs that can be met over time, as funding becomes available. Possible strategies could include obtaining access to one of the school's computer suites for the occasional home economics lesson. This would be very beneficial when students are carrying out research as part of Leaving Certificate food studies tasks or LCA key assignments. As each specialist room has a computer, and in the context of the annual department budget, consideration could also be given to the purchase of a data projector for at least one of the specialist rooms.

Health and safety is given high priority in Home Economics. The whole-school health and safety policy identifies the hazards, assesses the level of risk and identifies appropriate control measures for the kitchens. To build on this good practice it is recommended that similar information is listed to take account of practical lessons in the textiles room. It is commendable that staff regularly discuss health and safety issues as part of the agenda of staff meetings. Safety notices are displayed in the kitchen. To enhance these good practices, signs illustrating specific safety routines for using specialist equipment such as the sewing machines and irons should also be displayed at appropriate locations in the textiles room.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

Subject department planning is on-going in Scoil Dara. Management facilitates subject planning meetings on a regular basis throughout the academic year. The deputy principal held a meeting of all subject coordinators at the beginning of the current school year to agree the role profile for a subject coordinator and establish priorities for the development and review of a number of whole-school policies. This commendable strategy should prove effective in enabling work at subject department level to feed into whole-school policy formation and review, and should result in a cohesive approach to school planning.

Many collegial practices underpin the work of the home economics team. It was decided recently to rotate the position of subject coordinator among the team. This laudable initiative will assist in sharing the workload attached to this voluntary position and allow each member of the team assume a leadership role for the continued development of Home Economics in the school. An agenda and records for each meeting are kept in the subject plan. This laudable practice facilitates continuity between meetings.

A good range of additional resources such as worksheets, resource packs, DVDs and reference books is available to support the teaching and learning of Home Economics. A catalogue of these resources could be compiled and included in the subject department plan. This practice could assist ease of shared access to resources as well as identify any areas of the course that need enhanced resources. As many additional worksheets and revision tests are ICT-generated it is recommended that consideration be given to creating an electronic resource folder on the school server.

Good progress is being made in the development of programmes of work for each curriculum programme. Most of the plans are ICT generated. This very good practice is commended as plans can then be amended quite easily. It is laudable that a specific home economics programme of work that includes suitable resource material has been developed for the first-year taster programme. In general the topics and teaching strategies incorporated into the taster programme effectively provide students with opportunities to sample a good variety of the related disciplines in Home Economics. However, consideration should be given to reviewing the textiles component of the taster module, given the length of time available.

There is a very good template used for the common Junior and Leaving Certificate programmes of work. This template should continue to be used as each plan is further developed. From reviewing the Junior Certificate document there was some good integration of food studies topics. This good practice should be further developed particularly across different core areas of the syllabus. At the next review stage it is recommended that planning for the core textiles component of the syllabus be reviewed. The item made should be based on a simple gender-

neutral task and should assist in developing key manipulative skills in the area of textiles. In addition the task should give scope to develop the creativity and imagination of students. The task developed and items made should be determined by agreed learning outcomes. Students should complete a simple design brief folder in tandem with the item made. This would provide opportunities to build up skills in the analysis, implementation and evaluation of a task. This reviewed approach to core textiles would enhance students' basic skills before they progress onto the design and craftwork option. Good progress is being made in the development of a common programme of work for the Leaving Certificate programme. At the next review stage it is recommended that the pace at which the coursework assignments are completed is reviewed to promote further integration of relevant theoretical knowledge with the coursework component.

Planning by its nature is an on-going process that will always demonstrate room for further advancement and review. Over time therefore, and on a phased basis, all programmes of work should outline learning objectives for each topic to indicate the knowledge, understanding and skills that students should achieve. The lesson content of all plans should be time bound and sequenced in a manner that further enhances an integrated and incremental approach to the development of students' knowledge, understanding and skills. It was apparent during the evaluation that there is some variation on how individual teachers implement the common plans. Therefore in order to assist the next stage of planning it is recommended that the teaching team now use the common programmes as working documents. Each teacher should record the actual time taken to complete topics and note any adjustments made to the sequence of topics to enhance integration and promote a developmental approach to students' learning. This information will be very useful in informing the on-going monitoring and advancement of programme plans

A very good range of student learning outcomes has been incorporated in the TY home economics plan. The range of teaching and learning strategies incorporated into the plan is underpinned by the rationale and aims of the TY programme. This is good practice.

Very good planning for students with additional education needs is evident in Home Economics. There is very good collaboration with the learning support team and the English as an additional language (EAL) co-ordinator. A good range of co-curricular activities extends students' learning outside the classroom. These commendable practices assist students' understanding and enhance their enjoyment of the subject.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

There was very good quality teaching and learning evident in all of the lessons observed. The level of advance preparation and planning was exemplary. Resource materials such as worksheets, exemplar food products and packaging, as well as DVD material and overhead transparencies were prepared in advance. The appropriateness of the resources chosen effectively supported students' learning. Some commendable use of ICT was evident in the preparation of resource materials.

All home economics classes are mixed ability. An inclusive learning environment was evident in all lessons. Deliberate efforts were made to accommodate students with additional educational needs. Two examples merit particular attention. Differentiated worksheets were designed for one lesson. The learning outcomes in terms of students' knowledge and understanding of both worksheets were similar but the question style and language used was suitably differentiated to accommodate the range of student abilities in the class. In another lesson a worksheet was

specifically designed to meet the needs of a newcomer student. Through collaboration with the EAL coordinator, the home economics teacher was enabled to design a differentiated worksheet that addressed the specific language needs of the student. This very good practice supports high quality student learning. All lessons were well structured and generally well paced. There was a commendable emphasis placed on the integration and application of relevant theoretical knowledge and practical skills. This good practice is in keeping with the rationale of home economics syllabuses.

All lessons had a clear focus. In a number of instances key learning outcomes were discussed with students at the start of the lesson. This very good practice is encouraged to enable students to focus on their own learning and facilitate self-evaluation. This is one on the key principles underpinning *assessment for learning* (AfL). Further information on AfL is available on the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment website at www.ncca.ie.

In all instances the class teacher displayed a high level of competence in the subject area. At all times teacher instruction was very clear and accurate with a commendable focus on attention to detail in the explanations given and in the quality of answers accepted from students. Very good attention was paid to ensuring the students understood and used terminology appropriate to the topic being taught. This is good practice.

A number of strategies were used to challenge students to remain actively engaged with lessons. Questioning strategies were used in all lessons to assess levels of re-call and understanding of knowledge. It is particularly laudable that higher-order questions were used to enable students to make links with other topics or to analyse and apply the information being discussed. This is very good practice. Best practice was evident in instances where questions were frequently directed to individual students to assess levels of prior learning and monitor individual student progress. The effective use of pair work was noted in one lesson. This strategy proved very effective in encouraging students to share ideas and apply the key concepts of the lesson. The plenary session that followed this work allowed the teacher to assess individual levels of learning and clarify any issues that arose. Further use of similar strategies is encouraged as part of a lesson to help students reinforce learning or analyse, evaluate and apply the key concepts and skills of the lesson.

Very good strategies were used to enhance students' understanding of the lesson content and to assist learning. Deliberate efforts were made to link new subject matter with previous learning. In addition, exemplar food products, teacher handouts and overhead transparencies were effectively used to illustrate and explain key points of information. Good use was made of the classroom board and text books to summarise key points of information for students. In one lesson, mind maps were used to good effect to summarise key points of information. The further use of mind maps should be considered as they enable key points and interrelationships between topics to be efficiently and effectively highlighted. Lesson content was effectively summarised through group quizzes, recall questions or self-evaluation of work.

Very good routines were evident in practical food studies lessons. In all cases there was an appropriate balance between teacher instruction and student work. The preparation, cooking and serving of dishes were effectively staged through spot demonstrations to illustrate the key food preparation and cooking processes and to reinforce the application of scientific principles to practical skills. This typifies best practice in the teaching of practical food studies. Students had a very good standard of culinary skills and sound safety and hygiene routines were evident. In one practical observed, the lesson was based on a task and students were required to complete task sheets in advance. This is very good practice. To enhance students' learning in practical food

studies lessons, it is recommended, where feasible, that the evaluation stage be incorporated into the lesson. Students who are finished early can proceed with this stage and can finish it for homework. Furthermore, the practice of pacing the preparation, cooking and serving of a dish across two practical lessons should be minimised. It is preferable that students complete the entire dish in one lesson to enable them to develop essential time management skills in preparation for the food and culinary skills examination.

Classroom management was excellent in all the lessons observed. All classroom interactions were characterised by a high level of mutual respect. The careful management of the planned learning activities ensured that students remained purposefully engaged throughout all lessons. Student contributions to all lessons was warmly encouraged and affirmed. The practice of the teacher moving around the room during lessons ensured that students had an additional opportunity to seek individual help and clarification in a supportive structure.

Observation of and interactions with students indicated that they had a very good understanding of the key concepts of each lesson. Observation of a range of students' design and craftwork projects indicated very good levels of creativity and originality in the designs chosen. Best practice was evident in instances where the item made demonstrated a very good level of complexity in the chosen craft skills. The chief examiners' reports and associated marking schemes issued by the State Examinations Commission are very useful for further guidance and advice on the Junior Certificate and Leaving Certificate coursework components. These documents are available at www.examinations.ie.

ASSESSMENT

A range of assessment modes is used to monitor student achievement in Home Economics and to provide feedback on a regular basis. These include oral questioning, written assignments and end of topic tests, as well as the monitoring of project and practical work. There was some very good practice evident in the assigning and monitoring of written homework activities. Particularly good practice was evident in instances where students were assigned a range of different written assignments that not only assessed recall and understanding of information but also promoted the development of higher-order skills such as the analysis, synthesis, application and evaluation of information. Some very good practice was evident in the methods used to provide feedback on students' work. Useful teacher comments in copybooks provided valuable feedback to students on their progress and affirmed work well done. In the case of students preparing for the certificate examinations, very careful attention was paid to ensuring that students developed good techniques in answering examination questions. These good practices are encouraged to enhance students' learning by informing them about their own progress and assisting them in reaching their full potential. The development of a whole-school homework policy has been identified as a priority for school development planning. To complement this initiative, it is recommended that the home economics team review the range of homework assigned to each year group to ensure that students participating in all curricular programmes have regular opportunities to complete a range of written homework exercises which can be monitored on a regular basis.

The home economics team operate a commendable system of summative assessment. Common papers and associated marking schemes are drafted where feasible. It is commendable that the style and format of the written papers are based on the relevant certificate examinations. The marks awarded for each part of every question is stated on all papers. This has the advantage of training students in the interpretation of marking schemes and in other examination techniques

such as timing and depth of treatment required. Grades awarded to students at key times of the year comprise an aggregate mark which reflects students' achievement in the relevant practical coursework components. This good practice mirrors the arrangements for the certificate examinations and can be a reliable indicator of students' progress in Home Economics.

Project work is a feature of the TY module for Home Economics. This is a commendable strategy to encourage both independent and co-operative learning. The assessment criteria used for school-based projects should be included in the TY plan. These criteria should be linked to the intended learning outcomes of each project. During the course of the evaluation it was noted that the completion of key assignments in LCA is primarily based around student workbooks. To enhance the learning opportunities presented by key assignments, it is recommended that the procedures relating to the completion, monitoring and storage of key assignments be reviewed.

Students are challenged to reach their full potential and to take the certificate examination at the highest level possible. Participation rates at higher level in the Junior and Leaving Certificate examinations are very good. Very good records of students' progress and attendance are retained by the class teacher. This information provides a useful evidence base when advising students on the appropriate levels for the certificate examinations.

SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The following are the main strengths identified in the evaluation:

- Home Economics enjoys a high profile in Scoil Dara. The subject contributes positively to all curricular programmes.
- The school adopts a very student-centred approach to subject choice. Deliberate efforts are made to involve parents in the process.
- Teaching time allocated to junior and senior cycle Home Economics is in line with syllabus recommendations.
- The home economics team demonstrates a high level of enthusiasm and commitment for the continued development of Home Economics in the school.
- There is very good deployment of specialist staff in Home Economics. There is a very good level of engagement with CPD.
- Health and safety is given high priority in Home Economics.
- Subject department planning is on-going in Scoil Dara. Management facilitates subject planning meetings on a regular basis throughout the academic year.
- Good progress is being made in the development of programmes of work for each curriculum programme.
- An inclusive learning environment was evident in all lessons. Deliberate efforts were made to accommodate students with additional educational needs.
- Teacher instruction was very clear and accurate with a commendable focus on attention to detail in the explanations given and in the quality of answers accepted from students.
- A range of assessment modes is used to monitor student achievement in Home Economics and to provide feedback on a regular basis.
- Grades awarded to students at key times of the year comprise an aggregate mark which reflects students' achievement in the relevant practical coursework components.
- Students are challenged to reach their full potential and to take the certificate examination at the highest level possible.

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

- The home economics team should develop a plan that demonstrates concrete strategies for utilising ICT in the teaching and learning of Home Economics.
- Planning for the core textiles component of the Junior Certificate syllabus should be reviewed.
- The teaching team should use the common programmes as working documents and note any amendments made. This information should inform the on-going monitoring and advancement of programme plans
- Homework assigned to each year group should be reviewed to ensure that students participating in all curricular programmes have regular opportunities to complete a range of written homework exercises which can be monitored on a regular basis.

Post-evaluation meetings were 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.