

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

**Subject Inspection of Home Economics
REPORT**

**Loreto College
Cavan, County Cavan
Roll number: 61070P**

Date of inspection: 29 April 2010



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

REPORT
ON
THE QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN HOME ECONOMICS

SUBJECT INSPECTION REPORT

This report has been written following a subject inspection in Loreto College, Cavan. 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 principal. 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. The board of management of the school was given an opportunity to comment on the findings and recommendations of the report; the board chose to accept the report without response.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

Loreto College, Cavan was established in 1930. It is a Catholic girls' secondary school. The current enrolment is 688 students. In addition to the Junior Certificate and Leaving Certificate programmes, the school offers an optional Transition Year programme (TY) and the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP).

Home Economics has a high profile in Loreto College, Cavan. A very high percentage of the students in this school choose Home Economics for the Junior Certificate and the Leaving Certificate examinations. A taster programme for first-year students provides an opportunity to sample all optional subjects. This enables them make an informed choice of subjects for study in second year. It is very good that, in both the junior cycle and the senior cycle, subject option bands are formed based on students' preferences. It is also noted that, when students are choosing their subjects in second year and fifth year, Home Economics is offered in at least two subject option bands. These very good student-centred practices ensure that the subject is very accessible to all students. In transition year all students study two modules of Home Economics.

There is very good provision and whole-school support for Home Economics. Timetabling of the subject at all levels is very satisfactory and lesson periods are well spread throughout the week. Deployment of teachers in the home economics department is consistent with good practice. The department is currently staffed by five fully qualified specialist teachers of Home Economics; four of these teachers are permanent wholetime teachers. During this evaluation, two of the permanent teachers were on approved leave and they were replaced by two fully qualified home economics teachers.

Senior management is very supportive of and facilitates the continuing professional development (CPD) of teachers at whole staff level and at subject department level. Members of the home economics department are also very involved in a range of subject-related activities outside of the classroom. It is very evident that such involvement has a positive impact on the quality of teaching and learning in Home Economics in this school.

The home economics facilities comprise two kitchens and a sewing room. A general-purpose classroom is also available to the home economics department. All of the rooms are adjacent to each other. The facilities are maintained to a very high standard. One of the kitchens was added as part of an extension to the school in 2004 and the second kitchen has recently been refurbished under the Department of Education and Skills' 'Summer Works Scheme'. The teachers have created a stimulating learning environment in the classrooms. Notice boards on the corridor outside of the classrooms provide vibrant displays of students' work and images of the students at work. There is very good provision of and access to information and communications technology (ICT) equipment for Home Economics.

Careful attention is given to health and safety in Home Economics in Loreto College. The safety statement clearly identifies the potential hazards and the relevant controls and monitoring necessary in relation to all of the home economics classrooms. It is very positive to note that the relevant sections of the safety statement are prominently displayed in the kitchens and in the sewing room. Health and safety notices are also displayed at strategic locations in these classrooms.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

There is a very strong, enthusiastic and dedicated home economics department in this school. There is evidence of good collaboration and strong leadership amongst the team members. Currently the role of subject co-ordinator rotates amongst the home economics teachers. This is good practice as it provides each teacher with the opportunity to assume a leadership role in the development of the subject.

Minutes of subject department meetings indicate that there is a proactive, dynamic and organised approach to subject planning for Home Economics. A very comprehensive subject department plan has been developed. This includes details regarding the organisation, planning, teaching and assessment of the subject in the school. A significant section of the subject plan comprises well-developed programmes of work. These programmes are very practicable and easy to follow. They detail the theory and the associated practical work to be completed by each year group, including TY. These high quality programmes are greatly enhanced by the inclusion of learning outcomes, methodologies, resources and assessment modes for each topic.

The programmes of work illustrate a number of other very good practices. They are carefully designed to ensure a continuing focus on building on students' knowledge and skills. The desirable principles of the integration of related syllabus areas and the creation of opportunities for students to apply theoretical knowledge to the relevant practical processes are evident in the programmes of work. The design brief is properly used in the planning and implementation of all practical coursework in food studies, textiles and design and craftwork from first year through to third year. Revision plans are incorporated into the subject planning process. Planning for the home economics modules offered in TY is in line with the key principles of the transition year programme.

It is evident that the home economics department is cognisant of students' additional educational needs. Of particular note is the attention given to support students for whom English is not their first language. As part of this work, lists of subject-specific key terms have been translated into five languages. These are presented in tabular form, with accompanying illustrations, and are

displayed in each of the classrooms. Teachers have also accessed the support materials available on the website of the English Language Support Programme (www.elsp.ie).

The sourcing and development of a variety of creative and stimulating resources to support teaching and learning is given high priority in planning for Home Economics in this school. Skilful use has been made of ICT in this work. The resources have been customised effectively for specific year groups and some of the resources have been differentiated to meet the varying learning needs of the students. The school's impending plans to introduce the ePortal system will provide opportunities for the home economics department to store and share the resources in a very efficient and easily accessible form.

It is positive that the home economics department has adopted a reflective approach to subject planning and there is evidence of ongoing review of the programmes of work. In order to build on these very good practices the home economics department should consider how to develop a stronger classroom focus in subject planning. In doing so there is great potential for the less experienced members of the teaching team to benefit from the individual and collective expertise of their colleagues. It is therefore recommended that the home economics department should now engage in a more strategic process of self-evaluation perhaps focusing on an aspect of teaching and learning. This process should include the identification of specific targets, the development of an action plan and an indication of the timeframe and success criteria.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

Six lessons were observed as part of the evaluation. Given the time of year most of the practical coursework was completed hence the lessons observed were all theory lessons. All of these lessons were in line with the planned programme of work for the particular year group. The home economics teachers had planned very meticulously for the lessons. This attention to detail resulted in lessons that were focused, well structured and appropriately pitched. The teachers communicated the learning outcomes to the students at the beginning of lessons. This good practice was most effective when the learning outcomes were clearly explained to the students and were appropriately aligned to the methodologies and assessment strategies all through the lesson. All lessons proceeded at a good smart pace and consequently a realistic amount of work was completed during the allocated class periods.

Overall, the teaching and learning observed during this evaluation was high quality. It was also most positive to note that in some of the lessons the quality of teaching and learning was outstanding. There was a strong focus on teaching for understanding and learning in almost all lessons observed. Teacher instruction was very clear and accurate, key concepts were emphasised and, where relevant, lesson content was informed by up-to-date information. In almost all of the lessons, students were purposeful and were actively engaged in the learning process.

In the outstanding lessons, each student in the class was involved in a variety of learning experiences that ensured that she was at the heart of the learning process. Students worked independently, in pairs and as a whole class. The lessons included well-chosen strategies and carefully planned opportunities for the development of higher-order skills such as the application, analysis, synthesis and evaluation of information. Lesson content was developed by linking new material with prior learning, with recently completed practical activities and by the effective integration of related syllabus areas. The transitions between the stages and activities of these lessons were smooth and the balance between teacher instruction and student activity was excellent. In certain parts of these lessons the teacher very competently facilitated the learning. Of

particular note in a junior-cycle lesson was a peer-tutoring activity on additives, where students worked in pairs and the roles of tutor and student were rotated. At the end of this activity each student recorded the learning in a booklet. Each student had created her own booklet during the lesson. In a senior-cycle lesson on making a will, a clip from a TV programme was used most effectively as trigger material at the beginning of the lesson. In such lessons there was evidence of deep and high-quality learning for all students irrespective of their ability. The enthusiastic approach of the teachers was also effective in maintaining students' interest in the lesson activities. The teachers set high expectations for the students and the students responded accordingly.

In a small number of the lessons observed there was scope to engage students more fully in the classroom activities. In these lessons, the predominant methodology was lecture-style teaching, sometimes accompanied by PowerPoint slides, while students were passive for much of the time. It was difficult in these lessons to evaluate the quality of the learning. It is important in lessons that students are given time to process and assimilate new content throughout the lesson. It is also essential that the planning of lessons and the choice of teaching and learning strategies should take cognisance of the varying learning styles of the students. It is recommended that opportunities should be created in the home economics department to share and model some of the excellent practices observed in teaching and learning during this evaluation. This might be addressed as part of the self-evaluation recommended in Planning and Preparation above. It is suggested that peer shadowing might be included as part of the process.

The commitment of the teachers to the development of students' practical skills in textiles and design and craftwork is most praiseworthy. Observation of students' completed practical work in these areas in first year, second year and third year provided evidence of originality and creativity and of the very high standards achieved. The standard of skills displayed in the textiles and design and craftwork pieces observed ranged from very good to outstanding.

The home economics department devotes much time and energy to ensuring that students' experience of Home Economics extends beyond lessons. The wide range of co-curricular, cross-curricular and extracurricular activities planned by the teachers and supported by senior management contributes positively to students' enjoyment and learning in Home Economics.

In all lessons observed classroom management was excellent. Overall the learning activities were well managed. Teachers created a pleasant and supportive learning environment. Teaching and learning proceeded in a caring and respectful atmosphere where students were challenged, encouraged and affirmed. There was an emphasis on building self-confidence. Interaction with students and observation of classroom activities indicated their enthusiasm and enjoyment for the subject. It is good to note that student achievement in Home Economics is acknowledged and celebrated by the school community.

ASSESSMENT

In many of the lessons observed, assessment featured as an integral part of the teaching and learning process. This was most effective when the assessment was linked to the learning outcomes of the lesson and thus students were very aware of how their learning would be assessed. In one instance the homework task was assigned at the beginning of the lesson; it was clear that it had been carefully planned to complement the lesson activities.

There was good checking on and summarising of learning in most lessons. Questioning was used in all classes to check on previous knowledge, learning and understanding. Students' responses to questions indicated a very good level of knowledge and understanding. Some excellent questioning strategies involving higher-order thinking skills were noted. In such cases, the questions were well spread amongst the class members, there was evidence of differentiation and there was very good use of "wait-time" to allow students to think and to formulate their answers. Greater use should be made of these good questioning practices.

Common examination papers are used for the formal in-house examinations and this is good practice. It is very good to note that a range of appropriate assessment modes is used to appraise students' achievement in Home Economics. This includes the assessment of practical work and project work. An assessment mark that includes a percentage of the overall mark for each of the various components of the syllabus is a more accurate indicator of a student's ability in the subject. The assessment results are systematically recorded thus building a profile of students' progress and achievement in the subject over time. Results are communicated to parents and students on a regular basis each year and at parent-teacher meetings.

A review of a wide range of students' copybooks, folders, tests and coursework journals provided evidence of very good progress in their work. The folders were well organised and well maintained. Homework is assigned regularly and there was evidence that homework is monitored. There were some excellent examples of the provision of constructive feedback to students on both their written work and practical coursework. One such example involved the feedback given to second-year students on the standard achieved in the textiles practical work and the accompanying design brief. In addition to the mark and grade achieved, each student was provided with written feedback on the strengths and, where necessary, how she could improve. Similarly, third-year students were provided with a template for self-evaluation based on their performance in a mock practical examination.

Some of the home economics teachers have been actively involved in piloting assessment for learning in the school. The impact of this work was very evident during the evaluation. It is now timely for all members of the team to consider how these practices could support the assessment tools that they already use.

The students from Loreto College, Cavan achieve very impressive results in Home Economics in the certificate examinations. These results are very consistent from year to year. Almost all of the students in the school take Home Economics at higher level in these examinations. This is not surprising given the quality of teaching and learning observed during this evaluation.

SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The following are the main strengths identified in the evaluation:

- Home Economics has a high profile in the school and access to the subject is very good. A very high percentage of the students choose Home Economics.
- Subject provision and whole-school support for the subject is very good.
- There is a very strong, enthusiastic and dedicated home economics department. There is evidence of good collaboration and strong leadership amongst the team members.
- Subject planning is very advanced and it is characterised by very good planning practices.

- Overall, the teaching and learning observed was high quality. In some lessons the quality of teaching and learning was outstanding.
- Lessons included many good practices in relation to learning outcomes, methodologies, questioning and student engagement.
- In the outstanding lessons, each student in the class was involved in a variety of learning experiences that resulted in deep and high-quality learning irrespective of ability. These lessons provided carefully planned opportunities for the development of higher-order skills such as the application, analysis, synthesis and evaluation of information.
- There is a strong commitment to the development of students' practical skills in textiles and design and craftwork. The standard of students' skills displayed in these areas ranged from very good to outstanding.
- The learning environment was caring and respectful and students were challenged, encouraged and affirmed. Students displayed enthusiasm and a sense of enjoyment for the subject.
- In many of the lessons assessment featured as an integral part of the teaching and learning process.
- There were some excellent examples of the provision of constructive feedback to students on both their written work and practical coursework.
- The students from Loreto College, Cavan achieve very impressive results in Home Economics in the certificate examinations.

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

- Opportunities should be created in the home economics department to share and model some of the excellent practices observed in teaching and learning during this evaluation.

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