

**An Roinn Oideachais agus Eolaíochta
Department of Education and Science**

**Subject Inspection of Home Economics
REPORT**

**FCJ Secondary School,
Bunclody, County Wexford
Roll number: 63550Q**

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

This report has been written following a subject inspection in FCJ Secondary School, conducted as part of a whole-school evaluation. 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 one day 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.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

Home Economics is a well-established subject that enjoys a very good profile in FCJ Secondary School. It is commendable that the subject is an integral component of all of the curricular programmes available in the school.

As evident from the very good participation rates, Home Economics is a popular

optional subject at both Junior and Leaving Certificate level. First-year students select their optional subjects at pre-entry stage. The information evening that is held in the January prior to entry provides an ideal forum to discuss junior cycle curriculum choice. At this event specialist teachers provide information on the subjects that primary school pupils may not be familiar with. It is laudable that the home economics team drafted information for inclusion in the options booklet that is distributed on the night. An analysis of participation rates indicates that uptake of Home Economics is much higher among the female student cohort. While the contextual factors in relation to subject choice that exist in the school are recognised, it is recommended that strategies be explored to promote Home Economics as an optional subject with appeal for all students. One of the initiatives that the school could consider includes re-examining the subject option blocks. At present Junior Certificate Home Economics is available on option bands against combinations of Materials Technology Wood, Technology or Technical Graphics. This may be a contributing factor to the current gender imbalance. In the context of future curriculum planning, a short taster programme could be considered for incoming first-year students. Such an initiative would provide students with an opportunity to sample each optional subject and facilitate a more informed subject choice. The length of time given over to a taster programme should be considered carefully to ensure that students derive full benefit from the initiative while at the same time not impacting negatively on their progress through Junior Certificate syllabuses.

It is commendable that students taking the Transition Year (TY) programme study Home Economics. This well-planned module, which is based on the theme of healthy eating, also serves to inform subject choice at senior cycle. A student-centred approach is evident in the arrangements for the selection of Leaving Certificate subjects. An information evening is held for parents to provide advice on senior cycle 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 and TY students. Fifth-year home economics students also speak to the students. These laudable practices allow students who may not have studied Junior Certificate Home Economics to consider the possibility of taking the subject for the Leaving Certificate. 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. This is very good practice. Home Economics is always available on more than one band to facilitate as many students as possible.

All home economics classes are mixed ability. It was noted positively that students are encouraged to aim for high academic standards and to take Home Economics at the highest possible level in the certificate examinations. Participation rates at higher level in the certificate examinations are very good. It is commendable that the home economics team regularly analyses student outcomes as evidenced by results in the certificate examinations. This useful exercise informs reflective debate on the teaching and learning of Home Economics.

There is good whole school provision for Home Economics. Teaching time allocated to classes is in line with syllabus requirements. In general there is a good spread of lessons throughout the teaching week to facilitate effective continuity in teaching and learning. However, in instances where students have only two double lessons they

should not be timetabled on two consecutive days as this results in a gap of almost one week between lessons. It was noted during the course of the evaluation that one class group is timetabled for Home Economics during lunchtime. This practice may militate against students opting to study Home Economics as it restricts their ability to socialise with their peers during lunch time. While the factors that existed this year in relation to the preparation of the timetable are recognised, it is recommended that this practice be avoided in future timetabling.

There is a very good level of whole school support for Home Economics. The position of subject co-ordinator forms part of an assistant principal's post of responsibility and management facilitates collaborative planning on a regular basis throughout the academic year. The home economics teaching team comprises two subject specialists who display a very high level of commitment and enthusiasm for the continued development of the subject in the school. Teachers can gain experience in teaching the Junior Certificate, Leaving Certificate and TY programmes. This praiseworthy practice is encouraged to build capacity among team members. Management is supportive of continuous professional development (CPD) through facilitating teachers' release to attend cluster meetings and by payment of teachers' membership to the relevant professional bodies. There has been a very good level of engagement with relevant CPD among the home economics team. It is obvious that the experience gained has impacted very positively on the quality of learning and teaching of Home Economics in the school.

There are two well-maintained specialist rooms for Home Economics. Management is very supportive of requests made for additional equipment. The kitchen has been extensively refurbished and modernised to a very high standard. Management and the home economics team are commended for their commitment and efforts in the planning and design of such an excellent facility for the subject. There is a very good range of specialist equipment to support classroom learning. Agreed safety procedures are in place for each specialist room. Students are briefed on these procedures at the start of each academic year and safety notices are visible in each room. The signs in the textiles room illustrating the specific safety routines for using the irons are particularly laudable. To build on these good practices it is recommended that signs illustrating the specific safety routines when using the sewing machines also be displayed at appropriate locations in the room.

There is considerable interest among the home economics team in developing the potential of information and communication technology (ICT) to support classroom practice. Good use is made of the dedicated laptop and data projector to support students' learning in Home Economics. ICT is a very useful tool to facilitate students' engagement in the independent and guided research that is appropriate to the coursework requirements in Home Economics. The home economics team should explore the possibility of obtaining access to the school's computer room for the occasional lesson.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

Subject department planning is well established in Home Economics. Formal time is allocated for planning four times a year. One period of non-class contact time that has been timetabled concurrently is also used by the team for additional planning

meetings. Records are kept from each meeting and a copy is forwarded to the principal. This good practice facilitates continuity between meetings and ensures that a cohesive approach is taken to the continued development of the subject.

A very professional and systematic approach to subject planning is evident from the documentation made available during the course of the evaluation. Good use is made of the templates produced by the School Development Planning Initiative (SDPI) and the Home Economics Support Service (HESS) to inform planning. Parts of the templates are being used to provide an effective self-evaluative framework to facilitate an informed and pro-active approach to the organisation of Home Economics in the school. This is very good practice.

The subject plan, which is at an advanced stage of development, includes well-developed collaborative programmes of work for each year group. The plans are in keeping with the rationale underpinning home economics syllabuses and individual programme requirements. The teaching and learning strategies integrated into each programme effectively support the development of key skills underpinning the assessment objectives of Junior and Leaving Certificate Home Economics syllabuses. This level of advanced collaborative planning has facilitated smooth transitions when there has been a change of staff to ensure good continuity in teaching and learning.

It is particularly laudable that the template devised by the home economics coordinator to detail each programme of work includes a teacher reflection column and some good use of this column was evident. Over time the integrated approach in sequencing lesson content that is already evident in all plans should be further enhanced to promote integration across different core areas of each syllabus. The next stage of development of each programme of work should focus on including students' expected learning outcomes in terms of the knowledge, understanding and skills to be achieved. In order to facilitate this work, it is recommended that the teaching team use the reflection column of the current plans to note the key learning outcomes planned and achieved as each topic is taught. This level of individual reflection can then be analysed and used to develop a learning outcomes column in the collaborative programme plans.

The design brief process is planned as an integral component of the Junior Certificate Home Economics programme. Students are introduced to the stages of analysis, implementation and evaluation of tasks in food studies on a phased basis to promote the incremental development of skills. This is very good practice. Planning for the core textiles practical coursework is also praiseworthy. The items made provide ample opportunity for students to develop their creative skills as well as their manipulative skills in the areas of textile and craft. It is laudable that students complete an evaluation of the finished item. To enhance this good practice it is recommended that first-year students complete a simple design brief folder in tandem with the item. This will provide further opportunities to build up skills in research, analysis and implementation, as well as the evaluation of a task. This adjustment would provide students with a very solid foundation as they progress onto the design and craftwork option.

There is good collaboration between the learning support and the home economics

departments to support students of Home Economics who have additional educational needs.

There is a very good range of additional resources available to support the teaching and learning of Home Economics. The resources are filed systematically to facilitate ease of shared access among the teaching team. The annual subscription cost for particular periodicals is covered by school funds. This is very good practice, as coursework in Home Economics necessitates access to updated information. A reference library has been established in each specialist room. To foster a spirit of learner autonomy, the home economics department operates a lending service to students. This is excellent practice, especially when home economics syllabuses place a deliberate focus on independent learning in the completion of coursework.

One key feature of the home economics department is the fact that an array of support materials for home economics students has been developed by the teachers. This information is distributed in booklet format to home economics students in each year group. It is laudable that the materials are designed to accommodate the various learning styles evident in mixed-ability settings through the use of illustrations and activity based exercises. In compiling the range of activities a commendable emphasis is placed on the development of students' higher-order thinking skills. The diligence, commitment and enthusiasm of the home economics team in developing these resources are highly commended.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

Very good quality teaching and learning was evident in the range of theoretical and practical lessons observed. The quality of advance planning and preparation for individual lessons was very good. Resource materials such as worksheets, exemplar products, video material, overhead transparencies and textile samples were prepared in advance. The appropriateness of the resources chosen enhanced students' understanding and effectively supported good quality learning.

All lessons were well structured, and in most instances, paced at a level that was appropriate to students' needs. The overall aim for each lesson was shared with students. In a number of instances this strategy was enhanced by sharing specific learning outcomes for the topic with students from the outset of the lesson. These outcomes, which then scaffolded the lesson structure, enabled students to maintain a clear focus throughout the lesson and facilitated students' self-evaluation of the work covered in the lesson. This good practice is encouraged further.

In each lesson observed the home economics teacher displayed excellent subject knowledge and a commendable emphasis was placed on attention to detail in the explanations given during each lesson. Explanations of new subject matter were effectively linked to students' own experiences or prior knowledge to enhance learning. Questioning strategies were used to very good effect to assess students' understanding of lesson content. To support high quality learning a commendable emphasis was placed on attention to detail 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 very good practice helps students develop the necessary linguistic skills in preparation for the written

examinations.

Some very good use was made of ICT to enhance students' learning in the classroom. Very good use was made of the data projector and the laptop computer. Well-prepared Powerpoint presentations summarised information in a colourful and accessible format. One particularly good example of effective use of ICT was noted in a senior cycle lesson where a video clip was downloaded that effectively set the scene for the lesson by stimulating students' interest in the topic. To maximise students' learning from Power Point presentations, copies of the slides should be distributed to students to enable them to take down the additional points of information provided in the lesson.

Active learning was a central feature of home economics lessons. In one instance students had to evaluate the suitability of their classroom for a food premises. This well-planned group activity challenged students to reinforce and apply the knowledge already gained in the lesson. The fact that students have sufficient prior background information to complete the activity ensured that good learning outcomes were achieved. Such activities are recommended as they reflect the teaching strategies underpinning home economics syllabuses.

Some strategies observed to summarise lesson content and consolidate learning are particularly praiseworthy. One good strategy was where individual students had to explain one new piece of information that they had learned in the lesson. It was obvious that this strategy consolidated learning effectively and allowed the teacher to affirm student contributions and provide additional clarification on new points of information. In another 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 can efficiently and effectively highlight key points and inter-relationships between topics.

Very good teaching and learning was evident in the practical textiles lesson observed. It is commendable that students complete their design and craftwork folder as they make the craft item. Spot demonstrations were used to very good effect to allow students to model best practice in key textile processes. Students displayed a very high level of appropriate textiles and craft skills, and were competent in the use of a range of specialist equipment. A commendable emphasis is placed on student creativity and design in the interpretation of the design brief. This is excellent practice, especially when the assessment criteria for the design and craftwork option place a deliberate focus on students' originality and creativity in the interpretation of the design brief.

Classroom management was very good in all instances. A high level of mutual respect was evident in all the lessons observed. Students were encouraged to seek additional clarification or advice on the topics taught. Observation of and interaction with students indicated a very good level of knowledge and understanding of the topics under discussion. The learning environment of each specialist room was greatly enhanced by the displays of a range of appropriate educational posters that provided clear visual images to support high quality learning.

Students have a positive attitude towards Home Economics and demonstrate a

sense of pride in their work. Observation of classroom activities and interaction with students indicated a very high level of engagement and genuine enjoyment of the subject. This results in very good student learning outcomes being achieved.

ASSESSMENT

Students' progress in Home Economics is monitored on a regular basis. Formative assessment is carried out through oral questioning, student observation, homework assignments, quizzes and the assessment of practical and project work. Class tests are administered at regular intervals. All assessment outcomes and records of attendance are systematically recorded in teachers' journals. This good practice helps to build a profile of students' progress and achievement in the subject over time and provides a useful evidence base when providing advice on examination levels to students and parents.

The assessment policy that has been developed for Home Economics includes 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. Of particular note is the fact that the marks awarded for each part of a question are stated on the paper. 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. Students preparing for the Junior Certificate examination also complete a practical examination that is timetabled as part of 'mock' examinations. As these very good practices mirror the arrangements for the certificate examinations, the outcomes can be a reliable indicator of students' progress in Home Economics.

Student assessment in TY is based on a points system. It is recommended that the assessment criteria that are used to award points to home economics students be incorporated into the planning documentation. These criteria should be linked to the intended learning outcomes of each module and form the basis of the student feedback on monitored work. At the next review stage of the TY plan there is also some scope for additional formative assessment strategies.

Very good routines are evident in the completion, collation and storage of the examinable components of students' practical coursework. It is commendable that the home economics department sends out letters to parents highlighting the importance of the satisfactory completion of the practical coursework and detailing the arrangements for the management of candidates' work for submission to the State Examinations Commission.

Observation of students' copybooks indicated very good progress in their work. Homework is regularly assigned. It is evident that the range of homework activities assigned assists in the development of lower-order and higher-order thinking skills. Very good emphasis is also placed on the use of past examination papers throughout the junior and senior cycle programmes. Some very good practice was evident in the methods used to provide feedback on students' work. Useful teacher

comments in copybooks provided advice 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. An agreed homework policy is in place for Home Economics. This policy outlines the types of homework activities that are assigned to each year group. It is evident that this policy informs the specific homework activities that are included in each programme of work. To build on this very good practice it is recommended that the agreed strategies used by the team to monitor work and provide feedback to students also be documented in the homework policy.

SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The following are the main strengths identified in the evaluation:

- There is a very good level of whole-school support for Home Economics.
- There are two well-resourced and well-maintained specialist rooms for Home Economics.
- There is a very strong commitment to CPD evident among the home economics team.
- A very professional and systematic approach to subject planning is evident.
- The programmes of work are in keeping with the rationale underpinning home economics syllabuses and individual programme requirements.
- A range of support materials has been developed and is distributed in booklet format to home economics students.
- To foster a spirit of learner autonomy the home economics department operates a library lending service.
- Very good quality teaching and learning was observed. The appropriateness of the resources and teaching strategies chosen effectively supported good quality learning.
- Students have a positive attitude towards Home Economics and demonstrate a sense of pride in their work.
- Students' achievement in Home Economics is monitored regularly. Assessment outcomes are systematically recorded in teachers' journals.
- Students are encouraged to aim for high academic standards. Participation rates at higher level in the certificate examinations are very good.

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

- Strategies should be explored to promote Home Economics as an optional subject with appeal for all students.
- Each programme of work should be further developed to include students' expected learning outcomes. The integrated approach should be enhanced to promote integration across different core areas of each syllabus.
- Students should complete a simple design brief folder in tandem with the core textiles item made in first year.

- The assessment criteria used to award points to home economics students in TY should be incorporated into the planning documentation. These criteria should be linked to the intended learning outcomes of each module.

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.

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