

**AN ROINN OIDEACHAIS AGUS EOLAÍOCHTA
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND SCIENCE**

Subject Inspection Report

on

the Quality of Learning and Teaching

in

HOME ECONOMICS

**Ashbourne Community School
Ashbourne
Co Meath**

20 OCTOBER 2005



AN ROINN OIDEACHAIS AGUS EOLAÍOCHTA | DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

SCHOOL DATA

Name of school	Ashbourne Community School, Ashbourne, Co Meath
School number	91495T
Chairperson of BOM	John Fanning
Principal	Áine O'Sullivan
School contact details	Phone: 01-8353066 Fax: 01-8353083 e-mail: admin@ashcom.ie website: www.ashcom.ie
School enrolment	Total: 918 (447 girls, 471 boys)
Curriculum provision	Junior Certificate Transition Year Leaving Certificate (Established) Leaving Certificate Applied Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme

SUBJECT DATA

Subject inspected	Home Economics
Junior Cycle provision in subject	First year: 3 class groups, 71 students (56 girls, 15 boys) Second year: 4 class groups, 83 students (60 girls, 23 boys) Third year: 7 class groups, 85 students (73 girls, 12 boys)
Senior Cycle provision in subject	Transition year: 3 class groups, 70 students (32 girls, 38 boys) Leaving Certificate year 1: 2 class groups, 47 students (42 girls, 5 boys) Leaving Certificate year 2: 2 class groups, 33 students (28 girls, 5 boys) Leaving Certificate Applied year 1: 1 class group, 13 students (6 girls, 7 boys) Leaving Certificate Applied year 2: 1 class group, 14 students (4 girls, 10 boys)

INFORMATION ON THE INSPECTION

Date of inspection	20 October 2005
Focus of inspection	Junior cycle and senior cycle Home Economics
Number of teachers of subject	3
Number of teachers visited	3
Number of class periods observed	6
Inspection activities undertaken	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interview with principal • Interview with home economics teachers • Examination of relevant school documentation • Interaction with students • Examination of students' recent and current project work, coursework journals, folders and copies • Inspection of the following classes <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Junior Certificate, 1st year. Theory (single). ○ Leaving Certificate, year 2. Theory (double). ○ Junior Certificate, 2nd year. Practical (double). ○ Visited two 3rd year classes to observe students working on Design and Craftwork. • Feedback session and discussion with home economics teachers and principal 	

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

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

Home Economics has a high profile in Ashbourne Community School. It is a well-established and vibrant subject on the curriculum. Currently 45% of the total school population study the subject; this includes all of the students in the Transition Year Programme (TYP) and in the Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA). In TYP it is offered in the form of a ten-week module based in the food studies area, whereas *Hotel, Catering and Tourism* is one of the vocational specialisms taken by students in LCA.

Home Economics is an optional subject in junior cycle and it is selected at this level by an average of 45% of students; a figure that is well above the national average. In senior cycle, 27% of the current student population has chosen the subject. This figure, which is in line with the national average, is being closely monitored in the school. The school is to be commended for promoting the subject to all students and for encouraging gender balance particularly in Home Economics. It is noted that currently there are 50 boys (21% of those taking the subject) studying Home Economics in junior cycle and ten boys have chosen it as a subject for Leaving Certificate.

The subject benefits from an excellent level of provision and whole school support and timetabled provision for classes is adequate and in line with syllabus recommendations. Class periods are generally well dispersed throughout the week thus ensuring that students gain maximum benefit from the class contact time in terms of continuity in teaching and learning. The school is to be commended for its approach to supporting students with special educational needs in Home Economics by the provision of extra class contact time for these students.

Management is very supportive of collaborative planning and the excellent practice of facilitating formal subject planning meetings once a term, as part of school development planning, is a commendable initiative.

There are three specialist home economics rooms comprising of two kitchens and one dress design room. The rooms are very well maintained and organised, and well resourced with an appropriate range of equipment necessary for the effective delivery of the subject. The dress design room has recently been networked with a view to equipping it with some computers. Teachers and students have opportunities for timetabled access to two networked computer rooms. Students are encouraged to use Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) to research practical coursework assignments and for the presentation of project work. There is no annual budget for Home Economics, but resources are allocated on the basis of teacher requisition. Management is extremely supportive of requests made for the ongoing replacement and updating of equipment.

There is a general school policy on health and safety that incorporates the health and safety issues relevant to Home Economics. It is commendable that the home economics department was consulted in the formulation of this policy.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

Until this year the co-ordination of Home Economics was a post of responsibility in the school. However, due to recent staff changes in the department, co-ordination of the subject is now carried out on a rotating basis. This is a commendable approach, as two of the three home economics teachers have been appointed since September and this will ensure shared responsibility among the team. It is very striking that in such a short time working together there is a sense of a very strong united team with a commitment to collaboration in the organisation and planning of the subject.

As part of subject development planning a very comprehensive Home Economics policy has been developed. The policy is grounded in the schools' mission statement and includes the results of a *SCOT analysis* used in the review of Home Economics in the school. It includes the aims and objectives of the subject, key learning skills and teaching strategies, policies and procedures in relation to class organisation, textbooks, practical work, health and safety, and students with special educational needs. The policy also includes an analysis of students' performance in Home Economics in the State Examinations, the minutes of subject planning meetings and the programmes of work for the different year groups. The home economics department is to be congratulated on the development of this policy.

Long-term subject planning is at an advanced stage. Common programmes of work have been agreed for all year groups. The programmes are based on the syllabus and outline the content to be covered on a term-by-term basis. The good practice of individual teachers keeping personal records of work covered was noted. The practice of monitoring, reviewing and evaluating the plans is well established in the department. This is an excellent approach to planning that is in line with curricular requirements; it promotes progression in teaching and learning and ensures that the programmes of work are constantly being reviewed and tailored to meet the varying needs of students, thus enhancing learning. It is also commendable that course content, and project work particularly in junior cycle, is specially tailored to the needs of students with special educational needs. In planning for junior cycle the excellent practice of introducing the design brief in tandem with craftwork is very commendable.

In order to further develop and enhance the excellent approach to subject planning that is already underway it is recommended that the programmes of work should outline the learning outcomes in terms of expected knowledge and skills. The plans should reflect the integrated approach recommended in the syllabi including the integration of the relevant food studies practical coursework with related theory. The inclusion of relevant resources and methodologies as well as opportunities for revision and assessment would also enhance the programmes of work. This task could be carried out on a phased basis, beginning, for example, with one senior and one junior year group each year.

It is notable that some informal cross-curricular planning takes place, particularly in the TYP and LCA, in relation to the timing and teaching of specific topics that have common elements. Students' learning is extended beyond the classroom through a range of planned activities such as cookery demonstrations and visits to outside agencies for specific syllabus areas. This practice is to be commended as it broadens students' knowledge and experience and ultimate enjoyment of the subject.

It is commendable that planning for resources to support teaching and learning is a key element of subject planning for Home Economics in the school. The teachers have gathered a variety of support materials including videos, charts, reference books and educational packs. In addition,

they have developed a wide range of teaching aids and materials including overhead transparencies, word-processed worksheets and notes on a variety of syllabus topics for both junior and senior cycle.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

The quality of the short-term planning for all of the classes visited was excellent. Lessons had clear aims and there was evidence of good continuity with previous lessons by linking with, and building on, students' prior knowledge and experience, and by appropriate reference to course areas related to the topic being taught. There were some nice examples of linking the lesson content to the everyday experiences of the students. The good practice of sharing the planned learning outcomes for the lesson with the students was observed in some cases. Lessons were well structured and sequenced and proceeded at a good smart pace resulting in a realistic amount of work being completed in the allocated class time. Homework was well linked to the work completed in class. It is recommended that opportunities be used at the end of class time to summarise learning and check understanding, particularly where double periods are allocated for theory classes.

Teacher instruction was very clear, competent and accurate and teachers worked very hard to ensure that students understood the concepts and processes being taught. Textbooks were used appropriately to reinforce learning and highlight key points in the lessons. Students responded well to the range of teaching styles and strategies employed. There were some good examples of the use of active learning methodologies that were appropriate to students' needs and abilities and which resulted in an appropriate balance between teacher input and student activity. As well as teacher instruction and spot demonstration good use was also made of the overhead projector, whiteboard, worksheets, handouts, questioning and visualisation. In a junior class observed there was an effective example of actively engaging students in their learning where they were asked how they would explain what they had just learned on food poisoning to a group of younger children. This was a very good method of checking students' understanding of a challenging topic. In order to avoid an over-emphasis on teacher input, where students remain passive, it is recommended that active learning methodologies should be further explored and incorporated into lessons where appropriate. Consideration might be given to the increased and regular incorporation of activities such as, for example, brainstorming, worksheets, investigative and experimental exercises, group work, class discussions, surveys and quizzes. These strategies encourage students to actively engage in the lesson and allow for the sharing of ideas, the expression of opinions, the development of critical thinking skills and the personalisation of the lesson content. Active learning also encourages independent and collaborative learning which is a key focus of both the junior and senior Home Economics syllabi.

Questioning was used very effectively to engage students in the learning activity and to check understanding and previous knowledge. Students' responses indicated a good knowledge of previous subject matter. In the senior class in particular there were very good examples of the use of higher order questioning as well as challenging students to develop the skills of analysis and application of knowledge. This very commendable practice conforms to the principles of *teaching for understanding* and helps students develop the higher order thinking skills that underpin some of the assessment objectives of the home economics syllabi. In addition to extending students' understanding, the development of such skills is also good preparation for the written examination, particularly in senior cycle. Opportunities were well used to link lesson content to the styles of examination questions and to the assessment criteria of the formal examinations.

In all classes visited classroom management was excellent and a pleasant and positive atmosphere prevailed. The firm purposeful approach employed by teachers ensured that the lessons progressed in an atmosphere that was highly conducive to learning. There was a very good rapport and a high level of mutual respect between teachers and students. Student participation was warmly welcomed and encouraged and effective use was made of student affirmation. The physical environment of the classrooms is attractive and stimulating and is enhanced through the display of a variety of educational posters and students' project work.

Students engaged readily with the classroom activities and they were purposeful in their work. They were encouraged to work independently and collaboratively. Interaction with students indicated that they had a good knowledge of the lesson content and they understood the key principles underlying the processes in the practical work. In the practical food studies class observed students demonstrated a good range of skills. Significant emphasis was placed on the development of culinary skills and on the key concepts of hygiene and safety. Clearly established work practices were adhered to during the class.

ASSESSMENT AND ACHIEVEMENT

A range of assessment modes is used to assess student competence and progress. These include oral questioning, written assignments, topic tests, term tests, project work and formal examinations. The practice of assessing students' practical and project work in junior cycle as a component of the end-of-year examinations is commendable as it reflects the assessment objectives of the syllabi. An aggregate mark that includes all components of the examination provides a more accurate indicator of the student's ability in the subject and it ensures that students have adequate experience in examination techniques and feedback on their progress. Assessment results are systematically recorded in teachers' journals. This good practice helps to build a profile of students' progress and achievement in the subject over a period of time. The school has an agreed assessment policy and it is commendable that the home economics department uses common assessments for in-house examinations. Results are communicated to parents and students on a regular basis each year and at parent-teacher meetings. School management undertakes an analysis of student outcomes in the State Examinations and in recent years, the results achieved by students in Home Economics have been above or in line with the national norms.

There was evidence of good practice with regard to the regular setting, checking and monitoring of homework. Observation of students' copybooks, coursework journals and practical work indicated very good progress in their work. Student copybooks illustrated a number of good examples of the desirable practice of annotation including some very good examples of *assessment for learning* practices. Useful teacher comments provided valuable feedback to students on their progress and affirmed work well done. This good practice is to be commended and it is recommended that it be further developed and used where possible so that students can benefit from feedback on their progress and use it to enhance their own learning. Further information on *assessment for learning* is available on the NCCA website (www.ncca.ie).

A visit to two third year classes where students were completing their project work in the area of design and craftwork provided evidence of students' engagement, enthusiasm, motivation, a high level of industry and an appreciation of their progress all at the same time. It was wonderful to observe students actively demonstrate a very high, and in some cases exceptional, standard of craft skills. The level of creativity and originality displayed was also individual to each student. Students' enjoyment and sense of pride in their work was remarkable.

SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Following a review of planning documents, classroom evaluation and discussions with the Principal and the teachers, the following strengths are noted in the organisation, learning and teaching of Home Economics in the school:

- Home Economics is a well-established subject that benefits from an excellent level of provision and whole school support.
- There is a strong commitment to collaboration from all concerned with the organisation and planning of the subject and a very comprehensive Home Economics policy has been developed.
- Programmes of work have been agreed for all year groups and they are monitored and reviewed on an ongoing basis.
- The quality of the short-term planning was excellent. Lessons were well structured and sequenced and proceeded at a good smart pace.
- Teacher instruction was very clear, competent and accurate and students responded well to the range of teaching styles and strategies employed.
- Students were challenged to develop higher order thinking skills such as analysis and application of knowledge.
- The firm purposeful approach of teachers ensured that the lessons progressed in an atmosphere that was highly conducive to learning.
- Students had a good knowledge of the lesson content. They understood the key principles underlying the processes in the practical coursework and they demonstrated a good range of practical skills.
- Some good examples of *assessment for learning* practices were evident in the marking of students' work.
- While working on the design and craftwork projects students demonstrated enthusiasm, motivation, a high level of industry and an appreciation of their progress as well as a high standard of craft skills, creativity and a sense of pride in their work.

As a means of building on these strengths, the following recommendations are made to all concerned in the planning and provision of Home Economics in Ashbourne Community School:

- Incorporating learning outcomes, resources, methodologies and opportunities for revision and assessment, as well as the integration of relevant syllabus areas and practical coursework would further enhance the programmes of work.
- Opportunities should be used at the end of lessons to summarise learning and check understanding, particularly in double theory classes.
- Active learning methodologies should be further explored and incorporated into lessons where appropriate.
- The further development of *assessment for learning* practices would benefit students by providing them with feedback on their progress.

Signature: Nora Friel
Nora Friel
Post-Primary Inspector

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