

**An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna**

**Department of Education and Skills**

**Subject Inspection of Home Economics  
REPORT**

**Saint Mary's Secondary School  
Macroom, County Cork  
Roll number: 62320R**

**Date of inspection: 31 January 2012**



**A N R O I N N | D E P A R T M E N T O F  
O I D E A C H A I S | E D U C A T I O N  
A G U S S C I L E A N N A | A N D S K I L L S**

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

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**INFORMATION ON THE INSPECTION**

<b>Dates of inspection</b>	30 and 31 January
<b>Inspection activities undertaken</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Review of relevant documents</li><li>• Discussion with principal and teachers</li><li>• Interaction with students</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Observation of teaching and learning during five class periods</li><li>• Examination of students' work</li><li>• Feedback to principal, deputy principal and teachers</li></ul>

**MAIN FINDINGS**

- The quality of teaching observed in lessons was excellent.
- Students demonstrated very good knowledge and well-developed practical food-studies skills.
- Teachers sought to make learning meaningful and relevant and to make lessons interesting and interactive.
- Classroom atmosphere was most positive.
- The uptake of Home Economics is high in the school, and provision for the subject by the school's management is commendable.
- A strong planning culture exists within the home economics department and this has enabled significant progress and development in teaching and students' learning.

**MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS**

- This highly-motivated subject department should further its exploration and application of best practice in the following areas: learning outcomes; assessment for learning; and cooperative learning.
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## **INTRODUCTION**

St. Mary's Secondary School is a Catholic voluntary secondary school for girls. Founded by the Mercy Sisters and now under the trusteeship of CEIST, the school has a current enrolment of 356 students. The curriculum offered in the school includes a compulsory Transition Year (TY) programme.

## **TEACHING AND LEARNING**

- The quality of teaching observed in lessons was excellent.
- Stimulating, and highly engaging lesson introductions, as well as carefully placed interventions, succeeded in raising interest levels and motivating students to participate and learn.
- Intended learning outcomes were openly shared with students as lessons commenced, and these were clearly focused on the knowledge and skills to be developed. Teachers are encouraged to continue to explore the theory and related strategies relevant to the incorporation of learning outcomes into their lesson delivery.
- Instruction was highly informed, very focused and appropriately pitched and paced. Teachers' awareness of contemporary lifestyle trends, with particular reference to those deemed more relevant to teenagers, added an extra dimension to their engagement with students. Teachers skilfully availed of opportunities to support the development of healthy attitudes and values in their students.
- Teachers sought to make learning meaningful and relevant for students. This was achieved by, for example, creating links between students' prior knowledge and the new topic being explored, and through a referencing of local, national and international facts and figures in the context of the subject matter under discussion.
- The inclusion of material and visual resources to support students' understanding and learning was a particularly strong feature of lessons observed. Lessons were supported by the incorporation of, for example, food samples, kitchen equipment, scientific models and electronic images.
- The teaching observed was highly student-centred, with students' participation facilitated in a variety of ways. It was clear from lessons that teachers seek to accommodate the preferred learning style of students, be that visual, auditory or kinaesthetic.
- On occasion, teachers incorporated tasks that required students to work in pairs or small groups. This approach is praised, as it promotes and supports cooperative learning opportunities for students. As some unexploited opportunities for incorporation of this approach were noted, it is suggested that cooperative learning, the theory and the related learning strategies, might prove an interesting area of further study for teachers.
- Information communication technology (ICT) was well utilised by teachers to support their presentation of lesson content. A bank of mobile laptops was seamlessly incorporated into one lesson as a resource designed to promote students independent research and learning.
- A clear emphasis on best practice in the areas of food preparation, cooking, hygiene, safety and resource management produced very positive outcomes in all practical food-studies lessons observed. The integration of theory and provision for students' evaluation

of their work were two other positive characteristics of these lessons. Students demonstrated well-developed practical food-studies skills.

- Teachers checked students' understanding and learning throughout lessons and also at lesson conclusion. To this end questioning was well utilised. Students demonstrated very good knowledge.
- In examination classes, there was an appropriate emphasis on examination questions, marking schemes and answering techniques.
- Classroom atmosphere was extremely positive. Students were very well behaved. Teacher-student rapport was mutually respectful but also warm and appropriately friendly. Students were interested and willing participants, and the more interactive the classroom strategy, the more obvious this was. Teachers were most affirming of students' contributions and efforts.
- In all lessons, work that was designed to consolidate classroom learning was assigned to students for completion at home. Periodically, this work encouraged the development of students' independent, research skills. Clear procedures for the assignment, monitoring and correcting of homework have been established within the home economics subject department, all of which have been formalised in a detailed, subject-specific, homework policy. The application of assessment for learning principles could be seen in teachers' monitoring of students' work. This is further encouraged.

#### **SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT**

- Home Economics is an extremely popular subject in the school, demonstrating very impressive uptake levels, which significantly exceed national norms.
- Management's support for the subject is commendable in each of the following key areas: curricular provision; equality of access to the subject for all students; timetabling; deployment of staff; and subject resourcing.
- It is positive too that overall support and provision for the subject is informed by management's ongoing engagement with the members of the home economics department, who are also proactive in seeking out what it is they deem desirable for their subject in the school.
- Management encourages and supports teachers' continuing professional development, a practice to which the home economics teachers have responded favourably.

#### **PLANNING AND PREPARATION**

- Sound planning structures and practices, in combination with a spirit of collegiality and an admirable degree of pro-activity amongst the home economics teachers, have led to the establishment of a strong planning culture within the subject department. This has enabled significant progress and development in teaching and students' learning in Home Economics.
- A comprehensive subject plan has been prepared. Some commendable features of this include: very good minutes of subject department meetings, which emphasise pedagogy as much as issues of a logistical and practical nature; a pattern of annual action planning; and the meaningful analysis of the outcomes of self-evaluation exercises.

- Programmes of work, which possess a number of positive features, have been prepared for all year groups. With a view to enhancing these already well-developed documents, teachers are encouraged to provide for the integration of learning outcomes and assessment modes.
- Considering the planning achievements of the department to date, but more significantly the strong working relationship that exists within the subject department, it is suggested that the teachers begin to engage with self-evaluation that is focused on classroom practice. To this end, it could be helpful to refer to the recently published *School Self-Evaluation – Draft Guidelines for Post-Primary Schools*, which are available to download from the website of the Department of Education and Skills.
- The quality of planning and preparation for lessons observed was of an exceptionally high standard.

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The draft findings and recommendations arising out of this evaluation were discussed with the principal, deputy principal and subject teachers at the conclusion of the evaluation.

The board of management of the school was given an opportunity to comment in writing on the findings and recommendations of the report, and the response of the board will be found in the appendix of this report.

# **Appendix**

**SCHOOL RESPONSE TO THE REPORT**

**Submitted by the Board of Management**

**Area 1 Observations on the content of the inspection report**

The Board of Management and staff are very pleased with this report and believe it reflects accurately the quality of teaching and learning within the Home Economics subject department in the school.

**Area 2 Follow-up actions planned or undertaken since the completion of the inspection activity to implement the findings and recommendations of the inspection.**

The Home Economics teachers continue to explore and apply best practice in the teaching of their subject.