



**An Roinn Oideachais agus Eolaíochta**

**Department of Education and Science**

**Subject Inspection of Home Economics  
REPORT**

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**Report on the Quality of Learning and Teaching in Home Economics**

**This Subject Inspection report**

This report has been written following a subject inspection in Leixlip Community School. 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 teacher. 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 deputy principal and relevant staff. The board of management was given an opportunity to comment in writing on the findings and recommendations of the report; a response was not received from the board.

**Subject Provision and Whole School Support**

Home Economics benefits from a good level of provision and whole-school support. Teaching time allocated to classes in both junior and senior cycle is good and in line with syllabus recommendations. All relevant documentation from the Department of Education and Science and the State Examinations Commission is promptly disseminated to the home economics department by the principal or the

examinations secretary.

As part of the school's engagement with school development planning, the process of formal subject department planning began this year. This is being facilitated by personnel from the School Development Planning Initiative (SDPI). It is commendable that management allocates regular formal planning time to facilitate subject department planning. Of particular note was the initiative that facilitated teachers from specific subject groupings to meet and discuss issues of common concern. Cross-curricular subject meetings provide an ideal forum where the collective expertise of the group can support and advise each other on areas of common interest such as teaching methodologies, classroom management, equipment provision as well as health and safety procedures. It is admirable that procedures are in place that allow senior management monitor and review the work of subject departments.

There is a strong commitment to continuous professional development (CPD) and this is facilitated and supported by management. The home economics department has attended the in-service training sessions provided by the Leaving Certificate Home Economics Support Service and is actively involved in the Association of Teachers of Home Economics and in the marking of the certificate examinations in junior and senior cycle. It is obvious that the experience gained has impacted very positively on the quality of learning and teaching of Home Economics in the school.

All classes in Home Economics are of mixed ability. Incoming first-year students choose their subjects prior to entering the school. The students select four optional subjects from a list of eight. Option pools are generated based on student preferences. For a limited period at the start of term, where feasible, students may change their option choices. They are advised and supported throughout this process by the guidance counsellor, subject teachers and the deputy principal. Student uptake of Home Economics in junior cycle is good and has remained steady, though evidence would suggest that the subject is traditionally chosen mainly by girls. In senior cycle, students identify their optional subjects from a list of sixteen subjects and once again option pools are generated from student choices. Uptake of Home Economics in senior cycle is not as good as in junior cycle, but recent figures have showed a slight increase in participation rates. The contextual factors that exist in relation to subject choice in the school are recognised. However, as the uptake of Home Economics appears largely dependent on the proportion of girls in each year group, strategies should be explored to promote Home Economics as an optional subject with appeal for all students, in order to maintain uptake and redress the gender imbalance.

The current deployment of teaching hours to Home Economics is presenting challenges for management with regard to the provision of Home Economics in the range senior cycle curricular programmes offered in Leixlip Community School. At present Home Economics is not included in the transition year or Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) programmes. Management is advised to explore strategies that would facilitate the re-introduction of Hotel, Catering and Tourism (HCT) to the LCA programme as an elective or a vocational specialism. This would allow students who took Home Economics for their Junior Certificate to progress into HCT. The re-introduction of Home Economics in the TY programme could also strengthen senior cycle uptake.

There are two specialist rooms for Home Economics in the school but currently only one of the rooms is used. The specialist room in use is well maintained, organised and resourced with an appropriate range of equipment to support the teaching and learning of Home Economics. There is no annual budget for Home Economics, but resources are allocated on the basis of teacher requisition. It was reported by the home economics department that management is very supportive of the department's needs with regard to the upgrading, maintenance and replacement of specialist equipment.

The home economics department was involved in the development of the school's health and safety policy. During the course of the evaluation it was noted that a high priority is placed on health and safety in terms of classroom routines and procedures. It is particularly praiseworthy that the health and safety rules are clearly displayed at each work unit in the kitchen. A health and safety policy for Home Economics is included in the department plan. This policy could be developed further to include procedures regarding the use of particular appliances and a maintenance schedule for appliances where necessary.

There is considerable interest in the potential of information and communications technology (ICT) to enhance the teaching and learning of Home Economics. It is admirable that this area is included in the long-term development plan for Home Economics. The home economics department has access to two ICT rooms. In addition, one kitchen will have a computer with internet access installed in the near future. It is recommended that the potential of ICT to enhance the learning and teaching of Home Economics be explored and developed. ICT is a useful tool to engage students in independent and guided research that is appropriate to the coursework requirements in Home Economics. It is also useful for the preparation and presentation of project work. There is a range of software packages available for use in Home Economics and some educational websites that are useful in the preparation of classroom resources. Useful website addresses are available on the Home Economics Support Service website at [www.homeeconomics.ie](http://www.homeeconomics.ie).

Good provision is made in Home Economics for students with special education needs. The particular requirements of students with special education needs are highlighted at year group meetings at the beginning of each academic year. This information allows coursework and homework in Home Economics to be tailored to meet individual student needs. There is close collaboration between the learning support department and the home economics department. Special needs assistants are present in classes as appropriate. It is laudable that the school provides the resources during the in-house and mock examinations that reflect the reasonable accommodation that candidates may expect in the certificate examinations. This good practice is very beneficial in helping students prepare for their certificate examinations.

## Planning and Preparation

There is a sense of a very committed subject department. The co-ordination of Home Economics forms part of a post of responsibility. While long-term planning has always been a feature of the home economics department, recent school initiatives in this area have resulted in considerable progress being made in the compilation of a subject department plan. This document outlines the aims and objectives of Home Economics, the resources available and policies in the area of health and safety, special education needs and assessment. The home economics department is advised to continue to develop this plan and update it on a regular basis. Particular

attention should be given at the next review stage to examining the effectiveness of the routines for senior cycle notebooks and copybooks.

Formal programmes of work have been drawn up for each year group. It is admirable that when the plans were devised some consultations took place with other subject departments in order to explore potential cross-curricular linkages. This is good practice and should be continued. All plans are time bound, are based on the content of the home economics syllabuses and comprise lists of theoretical and practical coursework content. Learning outcomes are included in some instances. In planning for junior cycle, it is very praiseworthy that the design brief process is introduced from first year. This provides excellent opportunities to develop students' skills over time, in the areas of investigation, problem solving, planning and evaluation. To develop this good work further, it is recommended that at the next review stage, and on a phased basis, the plans should be modified where necessary, to include an outline of expected knowledge and understanding that reflects the integrated approach recommended in the syllabuses, appropriate resources, teaching strategies and homework activities. The sequence of lessons in the Leaving Certificate plan should be based around the coursework assignments and particular emphasis placed on encouraging the appropriate integration of topics across the core areas of the syllabus. Further information on subject planning is available in the NCCA Guidelines for Teachers for the revised home economics Syllabus, from the Home Economics Support Service ([www.homeeconomics.ie](http://www.homeeconomics.ie)) and on the School Development Planning website; [www.sdpi.ie](http://www.sdpi.ie).

There is a very good range of resources available to support the teaching and learning of Home Economics. The home economics department has its own television and DVD player. In addition there is a variety of posters, educational packs, worksheets and handouts. There is a small resource library where reference books, cookery books, leaflets and magazines are stored for student and teacher use. The annual subscription cost for particular periodicals is covered by school funds. This is excellent practice as home economics coursework necessitates access to updated information. The resource library should continue to be expanded as resources permit.

From reviewing the home economics department plan, it is evident that cross-curricular planning is undertaken with other subjects such as Science, Business, Art, the link modules of the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme and Religion. This good practice is encouraged as a means of reinforcing student learning. Concurrent formal planning meetings provide an ideal forum to progress work in this regard.

In all the classes visited there was evidence of very good advance planning. Lessons were consistent with the long-term plan and included an appropriate range of resources such as handouts and worksheets.

## Teaching and Learning

High quality teaching and learning was evident in all the lessons observed. Each lesson was well structured, purposeful and paced at a level that was appropriate to student needs. The aims of each lesson were very clear and there was good continuity with prior learning through the checking of homework from previous lessons. The good practice of sharing the planned learning outcomes with students was noted in all lessons.

Students were challenged by lesson content and responded well to the range of teaching strategies used. Questioning techniques were used to good effect to recall and check student understanding. It is particularly commendable that the question strategies challenged students to link the topic being taught to related syllabus areas already covered. This good practice highlights the inter-relationships between topics and is in keeping with the rationale underpinning home economics syllabuses. On occasion, questioning strategies challenged students to think more deeply about the topic under discussion. This is good practice and its wider use is encouraged in order to promote higher order thinking skills.

Teacher explanation was very clear, accurate and contextualised and specific areas of the course that related to the topic being taught were integrated effectively into all lessons. This good practice is highly commendable and should be encouraged where possible as it aids understanding and reinforces learning. Good use was made of the blackboard to compile information and summarise key points. A range of strategies is employed effectively in Home Economics to encourage independent or collaborative learning. One particularly good example of this was observed in a lesson where half of the students worked independently to complete a practical food studies assignment as part of an end-of-year examination, while the other half of the class worked in pairs on tasks that helped them to prepare for their written examination. Such strategies can prove very effective in developing a sense of personal responsibility among students for their own learning, while pair and group work promote co-operative learning among students.

In a practical lesson observed, there was an appropriate balance between teacher instruction and student work. The lesson was based on a food studies assignment where students had to prepare, cook, serve and evaluate a dish that met the requirements of the brief. Students displayed a very high level of self-organisational skills, as evidenced by their level of advance preparation and planning for the class. They demonstrated a very good standard of culinary skills and sound safety and hygiene routines were evident. Good use was made of the relevant State Examinations Commission's marking scheme for monitoring student progress. This type of lesson is excellent preparation for the Junior Certificate food and culinary skills examination.

A very experienced and committed approach is taken to the teaching and learning of Home Economics. Planned learning activities were very effectively managed to ensure that students remained purposefully engaged throughout each lesson. The good practice of taking the roll call at the beginning of each class was noted. Seating was appropriately arranged so that students and teachers could move around the room. The atmosphere in the lessons observed was very positive and highly conducive to learning. Teacher movement around the room ensured that students had an opportunity to seek individual help and clarification in a supportive structure. Good use of directed questions provided opportunities to assess individual levels of student knowledge and understanding. Students appeared at ease in the classroom and displayed a sense of security in seeking clarification or assistance. Student effort was encouraged and affirmed at all times. Interaction with students indicated that they generally had a very good level of knowledge and understanding of the topics being studied.

## Assessment and Achievement

Ongoing monitoring of student progress takes place through class questioning, the observation of practical coursework and the regular assigning of homework activities. In addition, regular class tests and detailed monitoring of student notebooks ensure that thorough student profiles are assembled. These profiles are used to support student progress and provide advice on examination levels. It is particularly commendable that home economics students are encouraged to reach their full potential and to take the certificate examinations at the level that is most suited to their ability.

Systematic records of all assessment outcomes and coursework progress are kept by the class teacher. It was noted positively that procedures are also in place to inform parents or guardians on matters regarding the non-compliance with the coursework requirements in Home Economics.

Formal assessments are held for first-year second-year and fifth-year students at Christmas and in summer. Students preparing to sit the certificate examinations sit mock examinations in the second term. Reports are issued to parents or guardians twice yearly. Third-year and sixth-year students receive an additional assessment report in November. Feedback on student progress is also available at parent-teacher meetings.

The home economics department operate a commendable system in junior cycle assessment where students are awarded an aggregated mark for a written examination, a practical food studies examination, and an assessment of a textiles or design and craftwork project. The appropriate State Examinations Commission's marking schemes are used to assess each component. As this procedure mirrors the arrangements in place for the certificate examinations, it is a good indicator of students' performance in the subject. To develop this good practice further, it is recommended that inclusion of the food studies coursework journal be considered as an assessment component for the senior cycle in-house examinations.

Observation of student copybooks and folders generally indicated very good progression in their work. The system of note taking and managing class work evident in the junior cycle copies was particularly impressive. Consideration should be given to extending or amending this good practice for senior cycle classes to ensure that all class notes are stored in a systematic way. In line with whole-school policy, homework is assigned regularly. Examination of student copybooks during the course of the inspection indicated that excellent routines and practices are in place with regard to monitoring and annotating student homework copybooks and class notebooks. Useful teacher comments provided valuable feedback and affirmed work well done. This very good practice enhances learning by informing students about their own individual progress and highlights areas for improvement. Further information on Assessment for Learning (AFL) practices is available on the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) website at [www.ncca.ie](http://www.ncca.ie).

Observation of students' recent project work indicates a very high level of competence in the organisation and presentation of materials and in the appropriate craft and textile skills. The degree of student originality evident in the interpretation of the design brief is very commendable. Best practice was observed where the support folders included a detailed analysis of the task and where the evaluation was detailed and specific to the particular craft item. Observations made on the Leaving Certificate coursework journals indicated that students had successfully completed a number of coursework assignments; however, it is recommended that routines and procedures for the recording of assignments into the coursework journal be reviewed.

Students have a very positive attitude towards Home Economics in Leixlip Community School. Observation of classroom activities and interaction with students indicated a very high level of engagement with and genuine enjoyment of the subject. The home economics department is commended for their efforts in this regard.

## Summary of Main Findings and Recommendations

The following are the main strengths and areas for development identified in the evaluation:

- Home Economics is a popular subject among the female student cohort.
- Teaching time allocated to classes is in line with syllabus recommendations and requirements.
- The strong commitment to CPD has made a very positive contribution to the quality of teaching and learning in Home Economics.
- Subject department planning has begun and considerable progress has been made in the development of formal subject planning documentation. The programmes of work would benefit from further development.
- There is considerable interest in developing the potential of ICT to enhance the teaching and learning of Home Economics.
- The range of teaching strategies deployed ensured that students remained engaged throughout all the lessons observed.
- A variety of assessment modes is used to monitor student progress and all work is very carefully monitored.

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

- The potential of ICT to enhance the learning and teaching of Home Economics should be explored and developed.
- On a phased basis, all programmes of work should be developed to include an outline of expected knowledge and content that reflects the integrated approach recommended in the syllabuses, appropriate teaching strategies, resources and homework activities.
- Consideration should be given to extending the range of modes of assessment used for the senior in-house examinations.

Post-evaluation meetings were held with the teachers of Home Economics and with the deputy principal at the conclusion of the evaluation when the draft findings and recommendations of the evaluation were presented and discussed.