

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

**Subject Inspection of Construction Studies and
Materials Technology (Wood)
REPORT**

**Portumna Community School
Portumna, County Galway
Roll number: 914130**

Date of inspection: 20 May 2014



**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 CONSTRUCTION STUDIES
AND MATERIALS TECHNOLOGY (WOOD)

INFORMATION ON THE INSPECTION

Date of inspection	20 May 2014
Inspection activities undertaken <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Review of relevant documents• Discussion with deputy principal and teachers• Interaction with students	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Observation of teaching and learning during five class periods• Examination of students' work• Feedback to deputy principal and teachers

MAIN FINDINGS

- Teaching was of a very high standard.
- Very good practice was seen in providing for the additional educational needs of students within lessons.
- Good provision is made for students' choice and access to the subjects.
- Students' introduction to the use of computer-aided design software in first year supports the use of information and communication technology (ICT) for learning.
- Good procedures are in place for subject department planning.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

- The development of students' oracy skills should be supported further.
 - The close collaboration between the teachers of the technology subjects should be used to move towards a department of the technologies with a co-ordinator in rotation.
 - Detailed information on the modes of assessment in use should be included within the subject plan and shared with students to further support their learning.
 - The programmes of work in the subject plan should be revised to make their content more easily accessible.
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INTRODUCTION

Portumna Community School provides for the post-primary educational needs of girls and boys from the town of Portumna and neighbouring rural areas. The wide curriculum includes a full range of technology subjects in each educational programme and cycle. The school operates under the joint patronage of Galway and Roscommon Education and Training Board and the Roman Catholic diocese of Clonfert. While the optional Transition Year programme did not take place in the current year, it is usually offered to all students and school management reported that sufficient applications had been received to resume the programme in the coming year.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

- Teaching was of a very high standard. Coherently structured lessons included sharing of planned learning aims and regular transitions between activities were provided. Positive and affirming supervision of students' work was an integral part of teaching. Concluding plenary phases provided very effective reinforcement of learning.
- A suitably wide range of teaching methodologies was used to provide for the varied needs of students and to teach different aspects of the subjects effectively. Practical skills were taught mainly by means of teacher demonstration followed by student work conducted under close supervision and, where needed, additional support. This was very effective.
- In one lesson, where students were supported by two special needs assistants, the teaching was of notably high quality. Very good classroom management, pacing of the lesson and differentiation to suit individual abilities ensured very good learning outcomes for these students whose additional educational needs were considerable. Support for the development of numeracy skills was of a particularly high standard in this lesson. It was suggested, here and generally in the inspection, that supports for literacy, including specifically support for the development students' oracy skills, should be progressed further.
- The atmosphere in lessons was calm, positive and encouraging throughout. Very good interpersonal relationships supported effective learning. Teachers maintained close contact with students, assessing their progress, often by means of skilled questioning, and providing constant affirmation and encouragement.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- The teaching time allocated to the subjects in junior cycle and senior cycle was appropriate for the completion of the respective syllabuses. Double period lessons were included in the timetables of each class group to facilitate practical skills development. The subjects were well accommodated in terms of teaching spaces and resources.
- Materials Technology (Wood) (MTW) or Construction Studies (CS) were provided in each curricular programme as optional subjects. The subject-option bands are devised annually to provide, to the greatest extent possible within school resources, for the preferences expressed by students from the full list of optional subjects. In junior cycle students make their choices before entry.
- Despite the arrangements that are in place for student access to the subjects, the proportion of girls having chosen to study MTW was comparatively low, particularly in first year, while no girls were studying CS. Consideration should be given to measures

that might encourage more girls to choose to study these subjects such as providing opportunities for all in-coming first-year students to experience the full range of subjects prior to making choices.

- The subject department follows whole-school policy regarding assessment. The department's approach is not documented but there is a clear understanding of the procedures followed. Practice in relation to formal assessment is good. It is advised, however, that the detail of the assessment procedures, including the breakdown of marks for theory, design work and realisation, should be included in the written subject department plan and shared with the students. Students should then be given regular feedback on their achievement to enhance their sense of responsibility for their own learning.
- The introduction of students to the use of ICT for graphics and design in first year is a strength and shows effective use of resources. This has been supported by the teachers' active participation in opportunities for continuing professional development (CPD).

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

- Good practice was observed in subject planning and the existing written subject department plan provides a very good basis for further development. Minutes are kept of subject meetings which are shared with the principal. It is advised that copies of these minutes should be appended to the subject plan.
- Although there is no co-ordinator appointed, there is close collaboration between the two teachers. It is suggested, however, that the development of an overarching department including all of the technology subjects should be considered. This should be used to discuss areas of common interest such as suitable pedagogy and modes of assessment. A co-ordinator of such a department of the technologies should then be appointed for a fixed period and the role should rotate.
- Good practice was seen in the common development of programmes of work. These programmes should be further improved by following a tabular layout to make the content more easily accessed and reviewed with columns covering areas such as content or topic, teaching resources, teaching methodology and mode of assessment.
- There were very good signs of innovation in the use of ICT including the use of a tablet computer to keep a photographic record of students' work and the document camera or *visualiser* being used to display the marking out of work in real time.
- Each lesson benefited from careful and consistent individual preparation by the teachers. Planning had clearly been linked to self-evaluation and students' needs were met to a very high standard as a result.
- Recording and reporting procedures within the school and for parents are good. The range of opportunities for reporting to parents include the usual school reports, parent-teacher meetings and student journals. Reporting is enhanced by the use of a tablet computer app. This is a further indicator of the high professional values of the subject department which is leading to further improvement as opportunities are presented.

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