

IMPROVING Home Economics

in Post-Primary Schools

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eti
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INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

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A number of quantitative terms are used in the report. In percentages, the terms correspond as follows:-

More than 90%	-	almost/nearly all
75%-90%	-	most
50%-74%	-	a majority
30%-49%	-	a significant minority
10%-29%	-	a minority
Less than 10%	-	very few/a small number.

INTRODUCTION

The findings in this paper are based on inspections of and visits to home economics departments in post-primary schools in Northern Ireland during the period 1996-2000.

1. Strengths

- 1.1 Most home economics departments are characterised by good relationships between the teachers and the pupils; there is a purposeful atmosphere in nearly all classrooms. A majority of the pupils are well-motivated and they work with interest and enjoyment, notably in lessons involving food practical activities. Almost all home economics teachers are supportive and encouraging of the pupils.
- 1.2 In a majority of departments, the head of department is effective, and co-operation and teamwork are well developed. In such departments, all of the teachers are involved in departmental management decisions, they engage regularly in self and departmental evaluation and they review systematically the department's policies and programmes of work. This good practice is enhanced further by the support of the school's senior management team for the development of home economics.
- 1.3 Teachers in almost all home economics departments have developed schemes of work that meet the requirements of the programmes of study including the objectives of the educational themes.
- 1.4 There are variations in the quality of teaching and learning and in the standards achieved in home economics. The quality of teaching in most schools is high; the teachers' objectives for lessons are clear and their expectations are suitable. The pupils benefit from a broad range of challenging tasks, and the standards they achieve are commensurate with their abilities. In such classes, there is sound development both of the pupils' knowledge and understanding of the subject, and their literacy, numeracy and communication skills. Practical tasks are approached in a methodical way, and materials and equipment are handled efficiently and safely. The pupils are taught to analyse information and engage competently in research and investigative activities. They record information in different ways using, as appropriate, their own words, graphs, charts or diagrams. They communicate their findings effectively and evaluate their own and one another's work. The teachers use a suitable range of teaching approaches and resources in line with the varying needs of the pupils, the nature of the tasks and the time available.
- 1.5 Arrangements for the assessment of the pupils' work are generally an integral part of the planning process within home economics departments. A majority of teachers monitor the pupils' work regularly

and consistently and give clear guidance, including oral and written comments, on the strengths and shortcomings in their work. In a majority of home economics departments the outcomes of assessment are used to enhance the performance of individual pupils and to influence future planning for learning.

- 1.6 There is almost always a high level of participation in staff development within home economics departments; most teachers take advantage of exceptional closure days to participate in external or school-based inservice training (INSET). For the most part, the teachers' involvement in INSET makes a positive impact on planning and on the work in class and, as a result, improves the quality of the pupils' learning experiences and outcomes.
- 1.7 In many departments, the teachers extend appropriately the pupils' learning beyond the classroom through, for example, visits to exhibitions, participation in competitions and the involvement in lessons of other professionals such as health visitors, doctors, nurses and cookery and appliance demonstrators.

2. Areas for Improvement

- 2.1 In a minority of home economics departments, leadership and teamwork are poor, departmental meetings tend to focus largely on administrative matters and the teachers do not address adequately issues relating to the curriculum or practice in teaching and learning.
- 2.2 In very few departments, the teachers plan on an individual rather than on a departmental basis and a small number are reluctant to work closely with their colleagues or co-operate in sharing ideas and classroom resources.
- 2.3 The quality of teaching is less effective in a small minority of departments in which there are individual teachers whose expectations of the pupils are too low. In these classes, an over-emphasis on teacher-directed approaches often results in the pupils being too reliant on the teacher.
- 2.4 A minority of teachers fail to take account of the need to develop not only the pupils' knowledge and understanding of home economics but also their literacy, numeracy and communication skills.
- 2.5 In a significant minority of departments, the teachers' assessment procedures are weak, the pupils' written work is not monitored consistently and the pupils get little helpful feedback.
- 2.6 In a minority of schools, deficiencies in equipment and resources limit the experiences that the teachers can provide for the pupils. This is particularly evident in departments in which there is no technical support

or where the allocation of time to the departmental technician is so limited that s/he is unable to support adequately the teaching of the subject.

3. Priorities for Action

Given the areas of weakness above, and to promote further improvement in the teaching and learning of home economics:

- 3.1 in a minority of departments, the practice should be reviewed to ensure that lessons are well-paced and sufficiently challenging and that the pupils are given more frequent opportunities to develop initiative and independence;
- 3.2 teachers in a minority of schools need to develop their assessment procedures and to make increased use of the outcomes of assessment both to enhance the performance of individual pupils and to influence future planning for learning;
- 3.3 there is a need for specialist support by all Education and Library Boards if all home economics teachers are to benefit from on-going advice and guidance and from school-based and external INSET;
- 3.4 in a significant minority of schools, where both the teaching of the home economics programme and the quality of the pupils' work is affected adversely, there is a need to improve timetabling arrangements and remedy accommodation and resource deficiencies.

CONCLUSION

Schools and the Inspectorate recognise the importance of self-evaluation as a basis for improvement and development. It is intended that this publication, and the publication 'Evaluating Home Economics', will support home economics teachers and departments in their evaluation and improvement of their teaching and of their pupils' learning and standards of achievement.

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