



# Looking at Home Economics

Teaching and Learning in Post-Primary Schools



PROMOTING THE QUALITY OF LEARNING

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## Foreword

Home Economics is an applied, multi-disciplinary subject that provides students with a wide range of learning experiences and the knowledge, understanding and skills necessary for living as individuals and as members of a family. The integration and application of theoretical knowledge combined with the development of practical skills are at the core of Home Economics.

This report, *Looking at Home Economics*, is one of a series of composite reports prepared by the Inspectorate. It presents an analysis of the findings of subject inspections in fifty post-primary schools under the headings: the quality of subject provision, the quality of planning and preparation, the quality of teaching and learning, and the quality of assessment.

It is of note that the report highlights and commends the teaching methodologies used in many lessons and it comments very favourably on the quality of short-term planning and preparation undertaken by teachers. In addition, the range and high standard of students' project work for the Junior Certificate examination receives very favourable comment. These are just some of the facts in the report that strongly suggest that teaching and learning in

Home Economics are of a high standard in the majority of schools. In building on these strengths the report advises that teachers and schools should focus on issues such as ensuring that students receive regular feedback on their homework to help improve their learning and expanding the range of questions used in lessons to support students in the development of higher-order thinking skills.

I am confident that teachers and school managements will find much useful advice in the report and that it will encourage self-evaluation by home economics teachers by providing practical recommendations to assist ongoing school improvement. The report should also be of interest to those involved in educating and supporting teachers of Home Economics, and all who have an interest in the subject.



**Eamon Stack**  
Chief Inspector





# Chapter 1

## Introduction



## 1.1 Background to this report

This report is based on an analysis of the findings of subject inspection reports on the quality of teaching and learning in Home Economics in fifty post-primary schools. The subject inspections were conducted between February 2006 and April 2007, and all the reports were published on the web site of the Department of Education and Science. The inspectors visited 185 classes and observed 269 lessons taught by 110 teachers. The classes visited ranged from first year to sixth year. In more than a third of the classes, students were engaged in practical coursework activities involving food studies, textiles, and design and craftwork. The subject inspections encompassed all the following programmes: Junior Certificate, Junior Certificate School Programme (JCSP), Transition Year (TY) programme, Leaving Certificate (Established), Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP), and Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA).

The following table gives an overview of the fifty schools by category and gender.

Schools by category			
	Voluntary secondary schools	27	54%
	Vocational Education Committee (VEC) schools	15	30%
	Community and comprehensive schools	8	16%
	Total	50	100%

Schools by gender			
	Co-educational schools	30	60%
	Single-sex schools	20	40%
	Total	50	100%

## 1.2 Structure and purpose of this report

*Looking at Home Economics* is a composite report based on the subject inspection reports issued to schools following inspections. Like the subject inspection reports on which it is based, this composite report analyses and comments on:

- the quality of schools' provision for Home Economics
- the quality of teachers' and subject departments' planning
- the quality of teaching and learning
- the quality of assessment of students' development and progress.

This publication is intended as a resource for teachers, school authorities and policy-makers and aims to promote best practice in teaching and learning in Home Economics.

### 1.3 Home Economics in the post-primary curriculum

Home Economics is usually offered as an optional subject in all the programmes in post-primary schools. The subject has undergone significant changes in the last few years.

A revised Junior Certificate syllabus was introduced in 1991 and was first examined in the Junior Certificate in 1994. All students must choose the five core areas of study and one optional study selected from a choice of three. There are three assessment components for Home Economics in the Junior Certificate. In addition to the terminal written examination, the project in the chosen optional study has a mark allocation of 15% and the practical examination in food and culinary skills is worth 35% for those taking the subject at the higher level or 45% for those choosing the ordinary level. The Junior Certificate Home Economics syllabus is under consideration within the Junior Cycle Review currently being conducted by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) as part of a rebalancing process for Junior Certificate subjects.

A revised syllabus for Leaving Certificate Home Economics was introduced in schools in September 2002 and was first examined in the Leaving Certificate of 2004. The syllabus,

named Home Economics Scientific and Social, replaced the two former syllabuses: Home Economics (General) and Home Economics (Scientific and Social). The revised syllabus incorporates the best aspects of both syllabuses through the adoption of a core and electives structure. All students must study the mandatory core as well as one of three electives. A noteworthy feature of the revised syllabus is the formal assessment of the practical coursework components. Of the final mark allocation in the Leaving Certificate, 20% is for the mandatory food studies practical coursework and a further 10% for the practical coursework in the textiles, fashion and design elective.

Hotel, Catering and Tourism (HCT) was first introduced in schools as part of the LCA in 1995 and was examined for the first time in 1997. A revised HCT syllabus was introduced in September 2000 and was first examined in 2002. In the LCA, students may choose HCT as one of two vocational specialisms to be taken over the two-year cycle. The terminal written examination for HCT as a vocational specialism has a mark allocation of 50% while the remaining 50% of the total mark is allocated to the practical performance test based on an assignment brief. HCT may also be studied as one of four electives of half a year's duration each.





# Chapter 2

The quality of subject provision and whole-school support

## 2.1 Students' access to Home Economics

Home Economics is now included on the curriculum in more than 80% of post-primary schools. While only 13% of all-boys' schools offer Home Economics at present as part of their curriculum, it is encouraging to note that this figure has increased from 8% in the last ten years (O'Connor, 2007 and Department of Education and Science, 1998).

Students' access to Home Economics was described as excellent in 28% of the reports, in a further 50% it was good, while in the remainder there was scope for development. It was evident that practice varied somewhat regarding the support that students received when choosing subjects for the Junior Certificate. Fewer than half the schools in the sample offered first-year students a taster programme that allowed them to sample a range of subjects before making final choices. It was disappointing to note in a few reports that where a taster programme was not in operation, students were required to choose their optional subjects before entering or immediately on entering the school, sometimes with no information on the implications of choice of subject. The inspectors advised that schools should review such practices and, where it was not in operation, that serious consideration be given to the introduction of a taster programme.

It was noted that taster programmes varied in length from one day to one year. One report advised as follows:

The school should assess the length of time allocated to the taster programme to ensure that students have adequate time to derive full benefit from the initiative while at the same time not allowing it to have a negative impact on progress through the Junior Certificate syllabus.

The inspectors noted that access to Home Economics was often restricted by gender and sometimes by ability. Restricted access to the subject was noted in just over one-third of the reports. Where there was a pattern of gender imbalance, Home Economics was offered against what were perceived traditionally as male subjects, such as Materials Technology (Wood) or Engineering. In other cases, students had to choose between Home Economics and Science, or between Home Economics and a modern language. In a small number of schools only students who were following the JCSP were allowed to study Home Economics in the junior cycle. These practices are undesirable, as they restrict students' access to the subject. In all of these cases the groups (or bands or blocks) of subjects from which students had to choose one subject were set in advance and did not vary much from year to year. Typical recommendations included:

The school development planning process should be used as a vehicle to examine and ensure equality of access to Home Economics in all programmes, for all students, regardless of gender or ability.

Schools in which best practice was evident in the junior cycle and senior cycle offered students open preference forms for choosing subjects and varied their subject option bands from year to year based on students' preferences.

It was encouraging to note that in most cases, students were challenged to reach their full potential and where possible take Home Economics at the highest level in the certificate examinations. However, in a few instances the inspectors noted that while students achieved a very good outcome in the certificate examinations, participation rates at the higher level were sometimes low. In such cases there was scope for the subject department, in conjunction with the management and parents, to explore strategies to reverse this trend, thus raising students' expectations and achievement.

### Features of good practice

- Students' access to Home Economics was excellent in 28% of schools
- In most cases students took Home Economics at the higher level in the certificate examinations

### Concerns

- Fewer than half the schools offered a taster programme
- Restricted access to the subject was noted in 36% of the reports

## 2.2 Timetabling and deployment of teachers

The time allocated for Home Economics was in line with the syllabuses' recommendations in almost all the schools visited. Best practice was evident when sufficient time was allocated to the subject at all levels, one double period per week was available in each year group for the development of practical skills, and the lesson periods were well spread throughout the week to ensure that students gained maximum benefit from the class contact time. One report advised:

In order to create an additional opportunity for class contact time in the week, it is recommended that where two double periods are allocated to classes in junior and senior cycles, consideration should be given to splitting one of the double periods into two single periods on different days.

Where a taster programme was offered in first year, a few reports noted the unsatisfactory practice of providing only one single period per week for Home Economics. Schools should note that at least one double period is essential in a taster programme, so that students have adequate opportunity to explore the practical elements of the syllabus.

In a small number of instances the inspectors noted that the total time allocation for some year groups was distributed over two consecutive days in each week. This resulted in a

very long interval between the last home economics lesson in the week and the first lesson of the following week. This practice is unsatisfactory, and in the interests of continuity and effective progress in teaching and learning it should be avoided. Another issue of concern noted in reports was the practice of timetabling double periods over break times and lunchtimes. This practice was not conducive to the smooth operation of practical lessons.

In almost all instances the teachers teaching Home Economics had a recognised qualification in the subject. Best practice was noted when all teachers had the opportunity to teach the subject at all levels and in all programmes and when teachers retained their class groups through all years of the junior cycle or senior cycle programmes. Most of the reports described the teachers who were encountered in the course of the subject inspections as very experienced, dedicated, and highly committed.

However, the deployment of teachers was unsatisfactory in a few schools. In such cases teachers who were not subject specialists were employed to teach the subject, either full-time or as substitutes. This resulted in essential aspects of the syllabuses being omitted, the absence of the recommended integrated approach that is central to teaching and learning in Home Economics, the ineffective management of practical

lessons, or an inadequate emphasis on the development of students' skills in the coursework components of the syllabuses. Consequently, students' progress in theory and in practical work was hindered.

### Features of good practice

- In almost all schools the time allocation for Home Economics was in line with the recommendations of the syllabuses
- Almost all teachers had a recognised qualification in Home Economics
- Most teachers were very experienced and highly committed

### Concerns

- In a small number of schools the total time allocation was confined to two consecutive days each week
- Double lessons were timetabled over break time and lunchtime in a few cases
- In a few schools, teachers who were not subject specialists were employed to teach the subject

## 2.3 Facilities and resources

Adequate and well-maintained specialist facilities are essential prerequisites for meeting the extensive requirements of the practical coursework components in Home Economics for all junior cycle and senior cycle programmes. The inspectors commended the many efforts made to create a pleasant and well-organised learning environment.

The facilities for Home Economics were described as varying from good to excellent in 62% of the reports, while 22% of the facilities were described as being in need of improvement. In a further 16% of the schools visited, the home economics kitchens in particular were considered to be in need of significant improvement.

The main concerns related to kitchens that dated from the 1950s and 1960s. As those kitchens were smaller than the present recommended size of 100 square metres, the space available for working and safe movement during practical lessons was restricted. The inspectors noted an insufficient number of sinks and cookers, limited worktop and storage space, and the lack of a safe supply of hot water on tap. Some of the kitchen units were also in need of repair or replacement. The lack of adequate ventilation systems, poor-quality floor covering and the absence of isolation switches

for gas and electricity were also noted in a few reports. Such facilities presented significant challenges for teachers and students.

Inspectors reported that school managements provided funding to subject departments for upgrading and replacement of small equipment either through requisition or through the provision of an annual budget. Best practice was evident where a few subject departments operated a maintenance schedule that included an annual audit of equipment and appliances in the specialist rooms. The inspectors recommended that all schools use a maintenance schedule to facilitate the upgrading, replacement and maintenance of equipment as necessary.

In some schools the specialist room for Home Economics was a dual-purpose room that accommodated theoretical lessons as well as practical lessons in food studies, textiles, and design and craftwork. In a few instances the inspectors noted that schools did not always use the storage room, which is provided as part of the dual-purpose room in accordance with the Department of Education and Science plan, for the intended purpose. This facility is necessary to allow for the safe storage of the textile equipment when not in use and the completed project work for the certificate examinations.



### Features of good practice

- There were adequate and well-maintained home economics facilities in the majority of schools
- A few subject departments operated a maintenance schedule

### Concerns

- More than a third of the facilities were in need of improvement
- A few schools did not use the storage room for the intended purpose

## 2.4 Health and safety

In addition to creating a safe working environment in the classroom, one of the aims of Home Economics is to facilitate students in appreciating

the importance of safe and hygienic practices in the home and elsewhere and the fact that safety awareness should be an integral part of life in the use of food, materials and equipment (Department of Education and Science, 2001, p.4).

In the majority of schools the home economics department was involved in the development of a subject-specific safety policy in line with the school's health and safety policy. Typical comments by inspectors included:

The health and safety policy for Home Economics included hazard identification, risk assessment and an outline of the specific safety controls to be applied with regard to specific equipment in kitchens and textile rooms.

Other examples of good practice included the display of health and safety messages in strategic positions in specialist rooms, the high priority given to health and safety in classroom routines and procedures, and the active management of health and safety during practical lessons. These good practices were evident in almost all lessons.

Particular risks for students and staff members are associated with dual-purpose rooms. These include carrying and lifting heavy sewing machines onto desks, potential hazards with trailing flexes, and the use of pins and needles in areas of food preparation. The subject-specific health and safety policy should include clear routines for accommodating all lesson types where dual-purpose rooms are in use. However, the inspectors found this practice in place in only a very few cases and strongly advised schools to address this issue.

### Features of good practice

- A subject-specific health and safety policy had been developed in the majority of schools
- Almost all lessons were conducted with careful regard for health and safety

### Concerns

- Very few health and safety policies included clear routines for all lesson types





# Chapter 3

The quality of planning and preparation

### 3.1 The home economics department

The inspectors found well-established and well-organised subject departments in most of the schools visited. There were many examples of good collaboration, with a generous sharing of knowledge, ideas, experience and expertise in the areas of curriculum organisation and planning.

While traditionally the position of co-ordinator was the responsibility of the senior teacher and more recently part of the duties of a post-holder, this trend is changing. The evidence collected suggests that in the majority of cases the role of co-ordinator is likely to be rotated voluntarily among team members. This commendable approach ensures a more even distribution of the workload and provides an opportunity for all members of the team to assume a leadership role in the continuing development of Home Economics in the school.

The inspectors remarked on the positive relations between subject departments and the senior management in most cases. The support of the management for the continuing professional development (CPD) of teachers was commended in the majority of reports. In particular, the provision of generic CPD at the whole-staff level was noted. This included such themes as differentiation and co-operative learning. The

inspectors noted an increasing tendency for individual home economics teachers to gain additional qualifications, sometimes in their own time, in such areas as information and communication technology (ICT) and special educational needs. The added value of such qualifications for classroom practice was noted.

Fewer than half the teachers in the schools visited had attended the network meetings organised by the Home Economics Support Service. The inspectors noted that there was much variation from school to school, and even within schools, in teachers' levels of engagement with subject-specific CPD since the conclusion of the intensive phase of in-service training for the revised Leaving Certificate syllabus. Nonetheless, discussions with subject departments showed that they would welcome further support in a range of syllabus areas. The inspectors recommended that the identification of subject-specific CPD be included as part of collaborative subject planning.

The level of engagement with the Association of Teachers of Home Economics (ATHE) was also low, and it was disappointing to discover that very few of the teachers who were met in the course of the subject inspections were members of the ATHE. The more active involvement of teachers with the subject association and with teachers' professional networks is to be encouraged.

### Features of good practice

- Most schools had well-established subject departments
- In the majority of cases the role of co-ordinator was rotated among the teachers
- School managements facilitated teachers' participation in CPD in the majority of cases

### Concerns

- Fewer than half the teachers had attended the network meetings organised by the Home Economics Support Service
- The level of engagement with the subject association was low

## 3.2 Subject planning

### 3.2.1 The subject plan

The home economics teachers were commended for the significant amount of work and commitment involved in planning for their subject. Minutes of meetings provided evidence of an active and collaborative approach to planning.

Some reports commended the fact that there was a long-term plan for the development of the subject in the school. Best practice was evident when an analysis of strengths, challenges and opportunities was used to review and evaluate progress and identify areas for development in the subject. This practice would suggest that a number of home economics departments have begun the process of self-evaluation.

In almost all the schools a home economics policy document, more commonly called a subject plan, had been developed. This document was based on templates from the School Development Planning Initiative (SDPI) and the Home Economics Support Service. Where schools' planning was of a very good standard, the subject plan was specifically tailored for the school as part of a continuing review process. These subject plans usually included details of classroom organisation and seating, procedures for practical lessons,

health and safety, homework and assessment policies, textbooks, course materials, teaching methodologies, and resources. An agreed list of the topics to be covered by each year group was also included in almost all the subject plans. The inspectors were happy to note an increasing tendency to use the syllabus, as opposed to a textbook, to determine the content to be covered. The continuing analysis and tracking of students' performance in the certificate examinations was a commendable feature noted in a small number of subject plans. The inspectors' reports stressed the potential of this good practice to inform planning for teaching and learning.

The inspectors expressed some concern that planning was viewed as an end in itself rather than a process for facilitating good teaching and learning. A majority of reports, for example, noted that a large number of planning documents had been generated. On a few occasions numerous planning documents were presented that bore little resemblance to everyday practice. Accordingly, subject departments were advised to consider the rationale of planning.

The planning process should provide opportunities for teachers to share ideas and approaches to the teaching of various topics and thus foster discussions with regard to improving students' understanding and learning. The subject plan should provide guidance to the subject department and

ensure a common approach to the teaching of Home Economics.

### 3.2.2 Teachers' individual planning

The inspectors reported that in almost all the schools, the subject departments and individual teachers provided schemes of work that were at various stages of development in the planning process. These schemes expanded on the agreed list of topics in the subject plan referred to above.

Almost half the reports provided evidence of schemes of work that were of a high quality. In a small number of reports in which schemes were considered excellent, some common features were evident. In such instances the schemes of work:

- were coherent and included all areas of each syllabus
- demonstrated a developmental framework within which all topics, including the practical coursework, were sequenced in a logical manner, term by term, for each year group and programme
- reflected the integrated approach recommended in the syllabuses, including the appropriate integration of practical and project work with the relevant theory
- indicated time allocations for topics relative to the syllabus structure
- outlined the learning objectives for each topic in terms of knowledge, understanding, and skills

- referred to relevant teaching methodologies and resources to facilitate teaching and learning
- made provision for homework, assessment and revision throughout the cycle.

In most cases excellent use was made of ICT in generating and updating the schemes of work, some of which were presented clearly in tabular form. Other examples of good practice observed by the inspectors included the recording of progress of work in teachers' journals, including the content covered and the time taken to complete topics, the use of check-lists from the *Home Economics Leaving Certificate Guidelines for Teachers* (NCCA, 2002), and some excellent examples of reflective practice by teachers. However, these activities were often documented aside from the schemes of work. The inspectors advised that the schemes of work be used as working documents to inform daily teaching and learning. One report suggested:

The records of the work completed to date and the examples of reflective practice, both of which are recorded in the teacher's journal, should be married with the schemes of work. This would then provide opportunities to monitor, review and update the schemes of work on an ongoing basis.

In a small number of reports the inspectors recommended that the planning of the practical aspects of the syllabuses,

particularly in the area of food and culinary skills, should be reviewed in order to ensure an incremental approach to the development of students' practical skills. The reports advised that practical lessons in food and culinary skills, and particularly the choice of dishes, should provide students with adequate opportunities to develop their culinary skills to an appropriate level as they progress from year to year and from the junior cycle to senior cycle.

The inspectors were disappointed to note that the textile skills section of the Junior Certificate syllabus (which is a core area of study), and in particular, the section dealing with the construction of a simple item of clothing, was not planned in the majority of schools. A typical recommendation was as follows:

The issue with regard to the omission of the core textile skills section should be addressed in order to comply with syllabus requirements, to ensure that students have the opportunity to experience all core areas of the syllabus over the three-year cycle and to support them in preparation for the Junior Certificate.

Inspectors also noted that schools did not always adapt learning targets to suit each year group in the junior cycle when planning for Home Economics in the JCSP. In a few instances there was limited evidence of the use of learning targets and statements for Home Economics in the JCSP.



While a number of thoughtful and well-planned home economics modules were integrated in the TY programme in schools, reports suggested that, in keeping with the rationale of TY, the modules should avoid an over-reliance on course content from the Leaving Certificate syllabus. The sharing of ideas and opinions among members of the subject department as well as some consultation with students should inform the planning of a creative and stimulating TY programme for Home Economics.

### 3.2.3 The design process

Most of the practical coursework in Home Economics at all levels requires students to follow the design brief process. Rather than focusing entirely on the finished product, students are given an assignment, a task or a brief and are expected to work through the design brief process, which involves the stages of analysis and research, preparation and planning, implementation, and evaluation.

In the majority of the reports there was evidence of a lack of attention to planning for the integration of the design brief process with the relevant practical coursework. The inspectors advised that very careful attention be given to the sequencing of theory with the associated practical work to maximise the integration of theoretical knowledge with the practical skills.

In the junior cycle, reports noted that in the majority of schools the design brief was completed after the implementation of the practical work in food and culinary skills, design and craftwork, and in textiles, rather than concurrently with the coursework. This practice is unsatisfactory. It causes much confusion for students and hinders their understanding of, and ability to apply, the design process to the practical coursework.

Similarly, the inspectors noted that in most instances at senior cycle students were given little choice in the selection of dishes for the food studies practical coursework assignments for the Leaving Certificate, and dishes were usually completed before the written work. In a small number of instances the very undesirable practice of completing all the practical work before any written work was noted. Such practices, in both the junior cycle and senior cycle, should be discontinued. They do not promote individuality in the selection of products or dishes, and consequently it is difficult for students to ensure individuality in their written work for the certificate examinations. Schools should carefully note the following recommendation:

The design process should be planned as a key feature of all of the practical coursework and relevant project work from an early stage in junior cycle and senior cycle. This will ensure that students become competent with the process and can build

on the skills of investigation, problem solving, planning and evaluation on a phased basis.

### Features of good practice

- A subject plan had been developed in almost all schools
- The majority of reports noted the substantial planning documents that teachers had generated
- Almost all teachers presented individual schemes of work that were based on the subject plan
- A small number of the schemes of work were excellent, and almost half were of a high quality
- In most instances excellent use was made of ICT in the planning process

### Concerns

- In a few instances the planning documents bore little resemblance to everyday practice
- The core textile skills section of the Junior Certificate syllabus was not planned in the majority of schools
- The majority of reports noted a lack of attention to planning for the integration of the design brief process with the relevant practical coursework

## 3.3 Planning for the inclusion of all students

Home economics classes are generally of mixed ability. In a small number of reports in which excellent practice was noted it was clear to the inspectors that planning for the inclusion of all students was given high priority at the whole-school level. This was evidenced, for example, by continuing whole-staff in-service education on a range of topics related to inclusion and to specific educational needs. Teachers in these schools were also very aware of the specific needs of the students in their classrooms, and there was very good liaison with the learning-support and resource teachers.

The inspectors acknowledged the demands on teachers in planning for the inclusion of all students, and in the majority of reports teachers were commended for the efforts made in this regard. One report noted:

Examples of good practice include a proactive approach to the planning for, and incorporation of, a range of differentiated teaching strategies and the preparation of specially customised and well-illustrated resource materials with a focus on a visual approach to teaching and learning.

The inspectors considered that there was scope for development in planning for the inclusion of all students in fewer than half the reports. While planning was apparent in

those cases, it was not always in keeping with classroom practices.

Discussions with subject departments in the course of the evaluations showed a desire for support in such areas as mixed-ability teaching and particularly in the area of differentiation with regard to planning, the development of resources, teaching strategies, and assessment in Home Economics. Schools should draw on the support available from the Home Economics Support Service, the Second Level Support Service and the Special Education Support Service in this regard. Other useful resources for teachers include *Guidelines for Teachers of Students with General Learning Disabilities* (NCCA, 2002), *Guidelines for Teachers of Students with Mild General Learning Disabilities: Post-Primary* (NCCA, 2002), and *Inclusion of Students with Special Educational Needs: Post-Primary Guidelines* (Department of Education and Science, 2007).

A notable feature of many of the classes visited was the increasing numbers of “newcomer” students. One report noted that planning took cognisance of both the varying needs and the cultural contribution of students from an increasing number of countries from around the world.

The publication entitled *Intercultural Education in the Post-Primary School* (NCCA, 2006) and particularly the section describing opportunities for intercultural education in Home Economics is a resource that teachers might find useful.

### Features of good practice

- Excellent practice was noted in planning for the inclusion of all students in a small number of schools
- The majority of reports praised the efforts of teachers in customising teaching strategies and resources to meet students’ learning needs

### Concerns

- Planning for inclusion was not in keeping with classroom practices in fewer than half the schools

### 3.4 Co-curricular, extracurricular and cross-curricular planning

Teachers were praised highly in the majority of reports for the efforts made to extend learning in Home Economics beyond the syllabus and the classroom. Home economics departments had also established links with individuals and organisations in their local communities. Typical comments included:

The organisation and planning of a wide range of co-curricular and extracurricular activities provided students with opportunities to support and reinforce learning as well as broaden their experience and enjoyment of the subject.

Most reports provided examples of cross-curricular links, albeit informal ones, between Home Economics and such subjects as Science, Biology, Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE), Business, and Geography, mainly in relation to the timing and teaching of specific topics that had common elements. Some well-established links between subject departments also extended to the sharing of resources. In particular, reports commended some excellent examples of co-curricular activities for Home Economics in such programmes as TY, JCSP, LCA, and LCVP.

### 3.5 Planning for resources

A very significant feature of the planning and preparation for Home Economics was the emphasis placed on planning for resources. In almost all instances a wide range of commercial resources, including charts, leaflets, educational packs, audio-visual materials, publications, and reference books, had been collected by teachers.

The quality of the resources developed by the home economics teachers was praised highly in the majority of the reports. This included the development of a range of Irish-medium resources to facilitate teaching and learning in Irish-medium schools. It was obvious that skilful use had been made of ICT in the development of many of the resources. Best practice was evident when the resources were effectively tailored for specific year groups and when appropriate attention was given to differentiation to accommodate the varying learning styles evident in mixed-ability classes. Typical comments from inspectors' reports included:

Teachers are to be commended for the time, dedication, planning, creativity and skill involved in the development of what was considered an excellent and impressive bank of resources to support teaching and learning.

The collaborative approach apparent in home economics departments extended to the sharing of resources, and this good practice was highly commended. The inspectors noted the attention given to the filing of materials, such as hand-outs and worksheets, according to the relevant syllabus topics. There were a few very good examples of cataloguing all the resources available for Home Economics. This good practice should be extended to all schools so that each member of the home economics team has a record of what is available. The use of an electronic database would be the most efficient way to do this. This process could also be used, as part of future planning, to identify areas of need with regard to resources.

In a small number of schools a small library of well-chosen reference books was available in one or more of the specialist rooms to facilitate students in the process of independent research. However, in more than a few instances it was noted that teachers provided reference books and recipe books to students from their own personal collections. A recommendation in one such report advised as follows:

As part of the collaborative approach, and as school finances allow, the subject department should begin and maintain the process of developing a resource library of essential reference books for Home Economics.

Teachers' professional networks and the forum on the web site of the Home Economics Support Service ([www.homeeconomics.ie](http://www.homeeconomics.ie)) offer opportunities for home economics teachers to develop and share resources. This potential should be explored and exploited.

### Features of good practice

- Teachers were praised highly in the majority of reports for their efforts to extend learning beyond the syllabus and the classroom
- The quality of resources developed by the home economics teachers was the focus of high praise in the majority of schools



# Chapter 4

The quality of teaching and learning

## 4.1 Lessons

The inspectors described the quality of the short-term planning and preparation for lessons as excellent in the majority of reports. In such cases it was noted that the lessons were focused and had aims and objectives that were in keeping with the aims and objectives of the syllabus. The majority of lessons were well structured and sequenced, appropriately paced, and generally suited to the levels and abilities of the students. This approach resulted in the completion of a realistic amount of work, balanced with an emphasis on teaching for understanding.

The inspectors had concerns regarding the pacing of lessons in a few instances. The desire to cover a large amount of theory sometimes resulted in a lecture-style lesson, with the students as passive recipients. It is recommended that in planning, careful attention should be given to the pacing of lessons and especially to the amount of content to be introduced. Students need sufficient time to assimilate new concepts to ensure understanding and optimal learning.

In fewer than half the reports the inspectors noted the very good practice of sharing the planned learning outcomes with students at the beginning of lessons. This excellent practice provided a structure for lessons, ensured that the focus was on learning as well as on teaching, and conferred

responsibility to students for what they needed to understand or be able to do at the end of the lesson. Inspectors frequently recommended that:

Clearly defined learning outcomes should be shared with the students at the beginning of all lessons. Additionally, a return to the learning outcomes at the end of the lesson to summarise lesson content and consolidate learning could facilitate students' self-assessment of their own progress.

Teachers used a range of very good strategies to build on students' prior knowledge, experience, and skills. These strategies included oral questioning and references to work previously covered as well as the effective integration of related syllabus areas. Lessons also provided many good examples of linking learning to students' everyday experiences.

### Features of good practice

- The quality of the short-term planning and preparation was excellent for the majority of lessons
- The majority of lessons were well structured
- Planned learning outcomes were shared with students in fewer than half the reports

### Concerns

- The pace was too fast in a few lessons in an effort to cover too much content



## 4.2 Teaching methodologies

Effective to excellent practice with regard to the choice and use of teaching methodologies was reported in more than 75% of the inspections. The inspectors witnessed some very effective use of such strategies as brainstorming, pair work, group work, practical and project work, problem-solving activities, research by students, interview and survey methods, discussion, and co-operative learning. The use of pair work and small-group activities promoted peer collaboration and peer tutoring. In some of the group work students were provided with opportunities for critical analysis, evaluation, and the application of knowledge. These higher-order thinking skills underpin some of the assessment objectives of the home economics syllabuses. Typical comments included:

This admirable student-centred approach resulted in a good balance between teacher input and student activity and accommodated the variety of learning styles evident in this mixed-ability class. The creative use of mnemonics and anagrams helped students to remember difficult concepts.

Learning was further aided by the use of such resources as hand-outs, work sheets, cloze tests, leaflets, reference books, newspaper and magazine articles, pie charts, flow-charts, graphs, photographs, product samples, 3-D models, diagrams, posters, case studies, questionnaires, crosswords, overhead transparencies, video, and DVDs. These examples

provide very good evidence of the extensive efforts that many teachers made to ensure that learning was visual, active, experimental, and by discovery. The occasional use of mind maps served as a helpful tool for students in summarising information. The potential of mind maps, as an alternative to long sentences of text, should be further explored as a visual tool for note-taking, to summarise essential points, and to assist students in linking the topic being taught with their previous learning.

In most instances, teaching was clear and accurate. Most lessons revealed some good practices with regard to the development, understanding and reinforcement of essential concepts and subject-specific vocabulary.

The majority of reports noted effective use of textbooks to consolidate learning and appropriate use of the whiteboard and the overhead projector to explain and summarise essential points. Best practice was evident when students were then given sufficient time to record the information in their copybooks. However, in a few instances students were required to transcribe large amounts of text directly from the overhead projector into their copybooks, although the information was taken verbatim from students' textbooks. This practice is not conducive to effective teaching and learning and should be discontinued.



The availability of and access to ICT and its careful integration in teaching and learning has the potential to broaden and enhance students' learning experiences. The home economics syllabuses promote the development of independent research by students, particularly in the practical and project work components of the syllabuses. In the majority of reports the inspectors commented favourably on the efforts made by schools and teachers to encourage and facilitate students in the use of ICT for research and the presentation of their work. One report noted:

In the computer room, senior cycle students were researching a food studies practical coursework assignment. This activity was well monitored by the teacher and there was a good focus on independent learning.

Although timetabled access to computer rooms was available for home economics classes in most of the schools, this was often limited because of the whole-school demands on the facilities. While the majority of home economics classrooms were networked and had access to broadband, only a few were equipped with computers or laptops, printers, and a data projector. Discussions with teachers revealed a willingness to integrate ICT in teaching and learning. However, this willingness was often hindered by the lack of hardware, lack of expertise, or limitations regarding access.

The inspectors advised that schools should develop a plan for the integration of ICT in the teaching and learning of Home Economics. This should include the identification of resource needs, planning for room-based ICT facilities and some attention to the provision of training for teachers as required.

It was disappointing to note that in a fifth of the reports the inspectors considered that there was scope for development in the use of teaching methodologies. This was evident where teachers read material from the textbook, the overhead projector or from a PowerPoint presentation, with limited checking on understanding or learning and with minimal engagement by students. The inspectors recommended that in such instances attention be given to exploring and including a wider range of active learning methodologies. In particular, the emphasis when planning should be on how best to use methodologies to engage students actively in lessons, to meet the intended learning outcomes, and to foster independent learning. Opportunities to share good practice in relation to the effective use of such methodologies should be considered as part of subject planning.

A number of reports indicated that there was some scope for development in the planning and use of group work as a teaching methodology. In the organising and management of group work, consideration should always be given to such

questions as “What and how will the students learn from their involvement in this activity?” Best practice was observed in group work when the activity was time-bound, group members were nominated to the principal roles to complete their task, and there was a reporting-back phase, followed by effective processing of the feedback to ensure that learning had occurred.

In fewer than half the reports very conscious efforts were made in lessons to differentiate the material to cater for the diverse learning needs of students. Given that almost all home economics classes are of mixed ability, it is recommended that further consideration be given to the effective use of differentiation in lessons.

### Features of good practice

- A variety of well-chosen and well-used methodologies and resources was used in most lessons
- Teachers made extensive efforts to ensure that learning was visual, active, experimental, and by discovery
- Teaching was clear and accurate in most cases
- Most lessons revealed some good practices with regard to the development and reinforcement of essential concepts and subject-specific vocabulary
- Textbooks were effectively used in the majority of lessons
- The majority of reports noted the efforts made to encourage and facilitate students in the use of ICT for research and the presentation of their work

### Concerns

- The integration of ICT in teaching and learning was often hindered by lack of hardware, lack of expertise, or limited access to ICT facilities
- There was scope for development in the use of teaching methodologies in 20% of lessons
- In more than half the lessons no attention was given to differentiating the material to cater for the diverse needs of the learners

## 4.3 Questioning

Questioning was one of the most frequently used strategies for checking and facilitating learning. However, evidence in the reports suggested that the quality and effectiveness of questioning strategies varied somewhat between, and even within, schools. In the majority of lessons, lower-order questions were used almost exclusively. Reports cited best practice when lessons contained a range of questioning strategies. In addition to closed and lower-order questions that concentrated exclusively on the recall of knowledge, some lessons included provision for the use of open questions, where the students were challenged to analyse, interpret, evaluate and apply information from the lesson. It was clear to the inspectors that there is scope for development in this area. A typical recommendation was:

More emphasis should be placed on the inclusion and development of higher-order questions in all lessons, so that students at all levels are challenged to a greater extent.

In the majority of instances, when a question was posed the teacher usually directed the question at a particular student. This practice was preferable to global questioning, which often encouraged students to respond with chorus answering. This practice should be discouraged, as the correct answer often gets lost in a sea of muffled responses, and it

makes it very difficult to determine individual understanding and learning. It is always important to ensure that questions are well distributed among all members of the class. Attention to the types and styles of questions will facilitate the process of differentiation in mixed-ability classes by encouraging the active participation of all students. Reports also drew attention to some good practice with regard to “wait-time” following the asking of a question. One report noted:

The use of “wait-time” was important to ensure that students had adequate time to reflect on and formulate their answer.

In situations where students were finding it difficult to answer a question posed, teachers in the main were very encouraging and assisted them in responding, thereby avoiding any embarrassment on the part of the student. In lessons where there was active engagement by the students with the learning process they were more inclined, and were encouraged by their teachers, to ask questions, many of which were of the higher-order variety, to check their own understanding. This enriched the learning process and is to be encouraged.

### Features of good practice

- Some lessons included provision for the use of open-style questions to encourage the development of higher-order thinking skills
- Questions were posed and then directed at a specific student in the majority of lessons
- There was some good use of “wait-time”

### Concerns

- The quality and effectiveness of questioning strategies were variable between and within schools
- In the majority of lessons too many lower-order questions were used

## 4.4 Practical coursework

The design brief process is integral to much of the practical coursework and project work. (This is discussed in section 3.2.3 above).

The organising and implementation of all aspects of the practical coursework were described as excellent in a third of the reports. Where practice was excellent, the standard of students' skills was generally very high. Students were challenged and encouraged to build on their skills, and creativity and originality were fostered and encouraged.

The inspectors noted examples of excellent practice in the practical food studies lessons, where there was a clear emphasis on the development of students' practical skills. Best practice was evident when the focus was on teaching and learning and not just on the completion of a dish, and when the relevant theoretical knowledge was integrated with the practical processes. The inspectors often noted that

the development of students' practical skills was facilitated by a staged approach where clear teacher instruction and the explanation and demonstration of key processes and new skills occurred at appropriate stages in the lesson.

There was evidence of some scope for development in relation to the practical coursework in 25% of the lessons. In a few instances practice was ineffective. With regard to the food studies area in particular, the examples of best practice described above should be adopted for all practical coursework lessons.

As far as possible, the evaluation stage should be formally included in practical lessons to provide students with the opportunity to develop the evaluative skills necessary for the practical examinations. The inspectors advised that in the majority of instances students would benefit from further guidance on, and practice in, the skills of evaluation and critical appraisal.

Reports noted that in a small number of cases students' coursework journals showed that some were not completely familiar with the assessment criteria for the food studies practical coursework assignments for the Leaving Certificate. Teachers should ensure that students observe the assessment criteria as described in the coursework journal. Further support and guidance is available in the *Leaving Certificate Examination Home Economics—Scientific and Social Coursework Requirements*. A range of exemplars for food studies practical coursework is also available on the web site of the Home Economics Support Service.

The majority of reports commended the range and the high standard of project work, as well as the level of originality, design and creativity, in the three optional studies for the Junior Certificate. Design and craftwork was the most popular option among students. One report noted:

In the area of design and craftwork, students completed a wide range of original and highly creative items based on a variety of crafts that included: knitting, patchwork, quilting, appliqué, crochet, cross-stitch and embroidery.

In the main, there was evidence of the incremental development of students' skills in accordance with their level and ability. However, in 18% of the reports the inspectors cited areas for development with regard to the optional studies. Typical recommendations included:

Attention is drawn to the importance of a clear link with child development in the project work for the childcare option.

A more student-centred approach is recommended for the design and craftwork, especially in relation to the craft chosen and the completion of the support folder. Teachers should encourage and support students in the further development of their creativity and originality in the analysis, interpretation and evaluation of the design brief.

In the completion of project work in all three optional studies for the Junior Certificate, teachers and students should pay

careful attention to the guidelines for optional study project work in the *Junior Certificate Examination Home Economics Guidelines* as issued annually by the State Examinations Commission. The inspectors also advised that an appropriate level of guidance and intervention from the teacher is a crucial factor in all the practical coursework elements of the syllabuses.

### Features of good practice

- The organisation and implementation of all aspects of the practical coursework was described as excellent in a third of the reports
- The range and the high standard of project work for the Junior Certificate was commended in the majority of reports

### Concerns

- In 25% of the practical coursework lessons the emphasis was on completing the product, with a lack of attention to the process
- Students needed further guidance on, and practice in, the skills of evaluation and critical analysis in the majority of lessons
- In a small number of schools there was an inappropriate level of guidance and intervention by the teacher in some aspects of the practical coursework

## 4.5 The quality of learning

During the classroom visits, students engaged in a variety of activities that provided evidence of their progress with regard to learning. In over 75% of the reports, good-quality to highly effective learning was noted. Evidence of learning was most apparent when teachers set high expectations for their students and when the students were stimulated and challenged to engage with the learning process and thus reach their full potential. The reports noted many examples of effective individual and collaborative learning. The effective use of a variety of teaching methodologies, clear instruction by the teacher, the thorough monitoring and appraisal of work, as well as the provision of constructive feedback, all contributed to high-quality learning.

In most of the lessons the inspectors' interactions with students and observation of classroom activities provided evidence that students had a good knowledge and understanding of the concepts and processes related to the topics being taught. The majority of the students were competent and confident in the demonstration of knowledge and skills. In such instances students were also enthusiastic and purposeful in their work and showed a positive approach to the subject.

The inspectors also found evidence of learning through the observation of students' work. One report noted:

Observation of students' copybooks, notebooks and folders, the practical coursework journals and the project work, indicated good progress in theory and practical work, as well as work that was of an appropriate standard.

In a few instances, where students' engagement was poor and where they did not appear to understand the content of the lesson, a number of common features were evident. These included an over-reliance on lecture-style teaching, lessons that were pitched at an inappropriate level, and attempts to cover too much during the lesson. In a small number of lessons there was an absence of a developmental approach to learning and lack of attention to checking students' understanding of content and processes. Typical recommendations included:

Time should always be allocated to check that students understand the key concepts and processes being taught. This should occur throughout as well as at the close of lessons.

In fewer than half the reports there was evidence of good practice on the part of students with regard to developing a systematic storage system for such materials as notes and hand-outs from lessons. The inspectors recommended that

students be encouraged to file all such documents from lessons in a systematic manner. This would ensure that all work related to each topic would be easily accessible and should prove a useful revision tool for students.

### Features of good practice

- Teachers set high expectations, and students were stimulated and challenged to engage with the learning process in over 75% of the lessons
- In most of the lessons, students had a good knowledge and understanding of the concepts and processes being taught
- The majority of students were competent and confident in the demonstration of knowledge and skills
- The majority of teachers checked students' understanding and learning throughout lessons

### Concerns

- In a few instances there was an over-reliance on lecture-style teaching, resulting in little engagement by students
- A few lessons were pitched at an inappropriate level
- There was a lack of attention to checking students' understanding of content and processes in a small number of lessons

## 4.6 The classroom environment

“Classroom environment” refers to the physical surroundings in the classrooms visited as well as the relations and atmosphere that existed among students and teachers in their classrooms. It was noteworthy that the majority of reports described the classroom environment for Home Economics as excellent, while the remainder ranged from satisfactory to good. The inspectors commended the many home economics teachers who worked diligently at creating an atmosphere for students that was conducive to learning.

Excellent classroom management was evident in the way that students and the learning activities were managed. Words such as *secure*, *supportive*, *respectful* and *caring* were used to describe the classroom atmosphere, and reports referred to the very positive rapport between students and their teachers. There was much evidence of teachers providing students with opportunities to seek individual help and clarification in a non-threatening and supportive manner. In almost all cases, students’ participation was encouraged and warmly welcomed, and they were praised for their efforts and successes. The benefits of teachers conveying their own enthusiasm and enjoyment for the subject to their students were evident in many instances.

In most schools a print-rich and stimulating learning environment was created through the effective use of notice-boards, the display of educational posters and students’ project work, and photographic exhibitions. In a few instances the displays were linked to the topic being taught and were used as a resource during lessons. This practice was commended by the inspectors where they observed it. The practice of creating a print-rich environment should be extended to all specialist classrooms, as it was noted that this was sometimes confined to the kitchens. In some instances the displays needed to be rotated more regularly.

### Features of good practice

- The learning environment in the majority of classrooms was excellent
- In almost all lessons the teachers adopted a positive and encouraging approach, and there was very good rapport between students and teachers
- A print-rich and stimulating learning environment was created in most classrooms







# Chapter 5

The quality of assessment

## 5.1 Modes of assessment

Assessment was an important element of much of the teaching and learning observed, and practice in relation to the assessment of Home Economics was described as effective in most of the schools. Over 25% of the inspection reports referred to excellent practice in this area. In these schools a range of assessment modes that reflected the assessment objectives of the relevant syllabus was used to monitor students' progress and competence.

The inspectors' reports showed that there was scope for development in relation to the assessment modes used for Home Economics in 25% of the schools. In the majority of instances an assessment policy for Home Economics had been drafted. However, in most cases the written policy did not inform practice with regard to the assessment of students' progress.

The inspectors recommended that many of the assessment policies needed further development and continuing review. In particular, the frequency of assessment, timing and modes of assessment applicable to each year group should be specified. While a few reports showed some attention to differentiation in assessment, this area requires further exploration and development.

There were some excellent examples of the monitoring and assessment of students' skills in the practical components of the syllabuses. However, in most cases this was confined to the assessment of food and culinary skills only. The inspectors advised subject departments that, as far as possible, the assessment of students' progress in Home Economics should include the assessment of all components of the syllabuses. This should include the practical work and project work and, where relevant, provide opportunities to incorporate the design process. This approach and the aggregate mark thus achieved would provide a more accurate indicator of students' progress in the subject as well as practice for the certificate examinations. One report noted:

The assessment of, for example, the theoretical component only, restricts the attainment of a wide variety of learning outcomes for students.

It was encouraging to note the increasing trend of providing a common assessment for each year group in the end-of-year in-house examinations. It is recommended that where this is not already done, all schools should adopt this approach. In the majority of schools good practice was evident when the written papers for the in-house examinations were based on the format and style of the relevant certificate examinations. This practice trains students in the development of

examination techniques, such as the timing and depth of treatment required in answering examination-style questions.

It is worth noting that the chief examiners' reports and associated marking schemes for past examinations, which are issued by the State Examinations Commission, should prove a useful source of information for students and teachers. These can be downloaded at [www.examinations.ie](http://www.examinations.ie).

### Features of good practice

- The majority of schools had an assessment policy for Home Economics
- The range of assessment modes used in 25% of the schools reflected the assessment objectives of the syllabuses
- Written papers for in-house examinations were based on the style and format of certificate examination papers in the majority of cases

### Concerns

- In most cases the written assessment policies did not inform practice with regard to the assessment of students' progress
- In fewer than half the schools the range of assessment modes used did not assess all components of the syllabuses

## 5.2 Homework

Homework provides students with the opportunity to reinforce and apply work carried out in lessons and facilitates them in developing research skills and independent learning. The practice of developing an agreed homework policy for Home Economics, based on the school's homework policy, was commended in the majority of reports. While there was excellent practice in relation to the implementation of a few of the homework policies, most subject departments were advised to review the homework policy for Home Economics, to ensure that practice was in line with the written document.

All the reports referred to the regular assignment of homework, which was sometimes assigned in considerable amounts, as an integral part of home economics lessons. However, observation of students' copybooks showed much variation in the type and the suitability of homework assigned. While the majority of reports described practice in relation to homework as effective, only a few considered that practice was excellent. On the other hand, over 33% of the reports indicated that there was scope for development, and in some instances poor practices, in this area.

Where there was excellent practice it was obvious that homework was carefully planned to complement the work

carried out in lessons. Homework was usually assigned at the conclusion of lessons. As an alternative, the assignment of homework at the beginning of lessons could help students focus more clearly on the lesson.

More than half the reports drew attention to the fact that the majority of questions assigned for homework were of the lower-order variety. In particular, the inspectors noted an increasing tendency to use the exercises in the students' workbook that accompanies the textbook as the basis for much of the homework. While there was some merit in using the workbook to verify the recall of information, in most instances the students transcribed the answers directly from the textbook, and thus the learning potential, including opportunities for independent research, was minimised.

Some reports also noted the emphasis in the senior cycle on providing students with lots of practice, almost exclusively on short-answer questions, with less emphasis on question styles from sections B and C of the Leaving Certificate examination paper, at both the higher and the ordinary level. It was recommended that this practice be addressed so that all students develop the necessary analytical skills for the answering of such questions.

There was clear evidence, too, of much variation in the monitoring of homework, which varied from a tick or a signature to some very high-quality marking and comments. The majority of reports stated that, while a substantial amount of homework was assigned, it was sometimes difficult to find evidence of how the homework, and particularly the learning that ensued, was monitored or annotated. One report advised that:

Students need feedback on their progress so that they and their teacher can identify any shortfalls in their knowledge, understanding and skills.

This evidence clearly suggests that it is necessary that a balance be achieved between the amount of homework set and the capacity to provide feedback to students. It is therefore recommended that teachers explore how best this balance can be maintained, perhaps by focusing on the purpose of the homework assigned.

In 25% of the schools where excellent practice was noted there was evidence of meticulous marking, using marking criteria similar to those used in the certificate examinations. In fewer than half the reports there were indications that teachers had begun to apply some of the principles of assessment for learning (AfL), particularly with regard to the use of "comment-only" marking and the provision of

constructive feedback. The inspectors recommended that subject departments further explore the principles of AfL. Further information is available on the NCCA web site ([www.ncca.ie](http://www.ncca.ie)).

### Features of good practice

- In the majority of schools an agreed homework policy had been developed for the subject
- In all cases homework was assigned regularly
- The marking criteria from the certificate examinations were used in the marking of students' work in 25% of cases
- The application of the principles of assessment for learning was noted in fewer than half the reports

### Concerns

- In most cases practice in relation to homework was not in line with the written policy
- There was much variation in the type and appropriateness of homework assigned, and there was scope for development in this area in more than a third of schools
- In more than half the schools the majority of questions assigned for homework were of the lower-order variety
- In the majority of cases it was difficult to find evidence of how the homework, and particularly the learning that ensued, was monitored and annotated

## 5.3 Monitoring of students' achievement

The inspectors noted excellent practice in the monitoring of students' achievement in a third of the schools. In such cases teachers had kept meticulous records of attendance, homework, behaviour, and the results of all formal and informal assessments. These were usually recorded in teachers' journals. Where accurate records of achievement were maintained, the information was very useful in providing a profile of students' progress over time, sometimes over the complete junior or senior cycle. It also acted as a basis for feedback and advice on examination levels, in consultation with students and their parents. This attention to detail was commended.

It was disappointing to note, in a small number of reports, that the monitoring of students' achievement was confined to recording results obtained in the in-house examinations twice a year. It is recommended that all schools adopt a thorough approach to the monitoring of students' achievement at all levels.

Students' journals and parent-teacher meetings provided regular opportunities for the provision of feedback. The results of formal assessments were communicated regularly to parents each year. A small number of reports noted the

effective use of the JCSP postcards as another commendable model of reporting to parents. Some reports noted:

Teachers have adopted the very good practice of regularly providing students with verbal, one-to-one feedback on their progress.

In a few instances teachers prepared a short report on each student's progress in Home Economics for the parent-teacher meetings. Excellent practice was noted where such reports included record sheets that described students' performance in each of the examinable components of the syllabus. One report noted the following excellent practice:

Students were involved in the tracking of their own progress over a given time. In the student journals observed, a record sheet was provided where students could plot their achievement in each class test and in formal assessments.

### Features of good practice

- There was excellent tracking of attendance, homework, behaviour and the results of all formal and informal assessments in a third of schools
- The JCSP postcards were used to report to parents in a small number of schools

### Concerns

- In a small number of cases the monitoring of students' achievement was confined to the in-house examinations twice a year



# Chapter 6

Summary of main findings and recommendations



## The quality of subject provision and whole-school support

### Main findings

Students' access to Home Economics was excellent in 28% of schools.

In almost all schools the time allocation for Home Economics was in line with the recommendations of the syllabus.

Almost all teachers had a recognised qualification in Home Economics.

There were adequate and well-maintained home economics facilities in the majority of schools.

A subject-specific health and safety policy had been developed in the majority of cases.

Almost all lessons were conducted with careful regard for health and safety.

### Recommendations

School managements should aim to ensure equality of access to Home Economics for all students.

The use of teachers who are not subject specialists to teach Home Economics should be avoided as far as possible.

The review and adequacy of specialist facilities should be a continuing part of school development planning in all schools.

Subject departments should ensure that health and safety policies include clear routines for all lesson types.

## The quality of planning and preparation

### Main findings

There were well-established and well-organised subject departments in most of the schools.

In the majority of cases the role of co-ordinator was rotated among the teachers.

In almost all the schools the subject departments and individual teachers provided schemes of work. A small number of the schemes were excellent, and almost half were of a high quality.

In most cases excellent use was made of ICT in the planning process.

The quality of resources developed by the home economics teachers was the focus of high praise in the majority of schools.

### Recommendations

Subject departments should note that the central focus of subject planning should be to meet the varying learning needs of all students.

To comply with syllabus requirements, the core textile skills section of the Junior Certificate syllabus should be planned and implemented in all schools.

Teachers should note that the design process must be planned as an integral part of all the practical coursework and relevant project work from an early stage in the junior cycle and senior cycle.

## The quality of teaching and learning

### Main findings

The quality of short-term planning and preparation was excellent for the majority of lessons.

Effective to excellent practice with regard to the use of teaching methodologies was noted in more than 75% of the reports.

Planned learning outcomes were shared with students in fewer than half the reports.

Teaching was clear and accurate in most cases.

The organisation and implementation of all aspects of the practical coursework was described as excellent in a third of the reports.

Evidence of learning was most apparent when teachers set high expectations for their students and when the students were stimulated and challenged to engage with the learning process.

The majority of teachers checked students' understanding and learning throughout lessons.

The range and the high standard of project work for the Junior Certificate was commended in the majority of reports.

The learning environment in the majority of classrooms was excellent.

### Recommendations

Teachers should share clearly defined learning outcomes with the students at the beginning of all lessons.

Where traditional teaching methodologies dominate, attention should be given to the exploration, inclusion and effective use of a wider range of active learning methods.

All schools should consider the development of a strategic plan for the integration of ICT in the teaching and learning of Home Economics.

The effective use of differentiation in teaching requires further exploration and development in schools.

Greater emphasis should be placed on the inclusion and development of higher-order questions in all lessons.

Teachers should make sure that all practical lessons focus on teaching and learning and ensure that the relevant theoretical knowledge is integrated with the practical processes.

## The quality of assessment

### Main findings

The majority of schools had an assessment policy and a homework policy for Home Economics.

The range of assessment modes used in 25% of the schools reflected the assessment objectives of the syllabuses.

There was an increasing trend of providing a common assessment for each year group in the end-of-year in-house examinations.

There was evidence of some excellent record-keeping with regard to the monitoring of students' achievement in a third of the schools.

Written papers for in-house examinations were based on the style and format of certificate examination papers in the majority of cases.

### Recommendations

Subject departments should ensure that the homework and assessment policies inform practice in measuring students' progress.

Subject departments should ensure that the range of assessment modes used assesses all components of the syllabuses.

The assignment of homework should take cognisance of the importance of providing students with some opportunities to develop higher-order thinking skills.

Teachers should explore how best to maintain a balance between the amount of homework set and the capacity to provide feedback to students.

Subject departments should further explore the principles of assessment for learning.





# Appendix

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## Useful web sites

### General education web sites

[www.education.ie](http://www.education.ie)

Department of Education and Science

[www.examinations.ie](http://www.examinations.ie)

State Examinations Commission

[www.ncca.ie](http://www.ncca.ie)

National Council for Curriculum and Assessment

[www.ncte.ie](http://www.ncte.ie)

National Centre for Technology in Education

[www.scoilnet.ie](http://www.scoilnet.ie)

Scoilnet

[www.sdpi.ie](http://www.sdpi.ie)

School Development Planning Initiative

[www.sess.ie](http://www.sess.ie)

Special Education Support Service

[www.slss.ie](http://www.slss.ie)

Second Level Support Service

### Subject-specific web sites

[www.homeeconomics.ie](http://www.homeeconomics.ie)

Home Economics Support Service

[www.ifhe.org](http://www.ifhe.org)

International Federation for Home Economics