

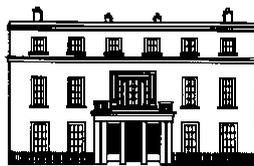
An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

**Subject Inspection of Business Subjects
REPORT**

**Loreto College,
Mullingar, County Westmeath
Roll number: 63290Q**

Date of inspection: 5 May 2011



**AN ROINN | DEPARTMENT OF
OIDEACHAIS | EDUCATION
AGUS SCILEANNA | AND SKILLS**

**REPORT
ON
THE QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN BUSINESS SUBJECTS**

INFORMATION ON THE INSPECTION

Dates of inspection	4 and 5 May 2011
Inspection activities undertaken <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Review of relevant documents• Discussions with principal, deputy principal and teachers• Interaction with students	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Observation of teaching and learning during 10 class periods• Examination of students' work• Feedback to principal, deputy principal and teachers

MAIN FINDINGS

- Students' behaviour was very good during the inspection and interactions between students and teachers were respectful.
- Most students were engaged with lesson content and effective learning was evident when the teaching strategies included a mix of approaches.
- Occasionally teaching strategies were too teacher-centred and there is a need to ensure that all lessons include opportunities for independent and active learning.
- Homework is regularly assigned but teachers should develop an agreed system for monitoring homework and attainment.
- Teachers were cognisant of the needs of students with additional educational needs and there was evidence of the use of key differentiation strategies in many lessons.
- Provision for business subjects is excellent with strong continuity from junior to senior cycle.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

- Senior cycle business teachers should provide greater structure and guidance to students when they are generating their own notes to ensure that the higher-level outcomes are promoted and students' attainment improved.
 - An immediate planning priority is to develop a strategy for the introduction of information and communication technology (ICT) as a teaching tool. Teachers should engage in personal professional development to improve their skills in the use of ICT.
 - The subject department structure and functions should be further developed.
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INTRODUCTION

Loreto College is a voluntary secondary school with a current enrolment of 744 students. Business Studies is a core subject in junior cycle, and in senior cycle all three business subjects, Accounting, Business and Economics are provided. Enterprise is included as a module within the school's Transition Year (TY) programme and Office Administration and Customer Care (OACC) is a vocational specialism in the Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA).

TEACHING AND LEARNING

- Student behaviour was very good and interactions between students and teachers were respectful.
- Teacher-centred approaches dominated a number of lessons and one contributing factor is the layout of classrooms. However, when active teaching was observed the students' interest and engagement with the lesson activity was very good.
- A key strength in the provision for business is the extent to which students are introduced to applied business theory and practice. The range of extracurricular and co-curricular provision in the subject is very good and is not confined to TY but extends to other subjects in the range, for example daily news bulletins in Economics.
- Students' general literacy and numeracy skills were good in the lessons observed. One very good example was observed of the development of students' literacy skills through the use of a comprehension exercise based on a theory aspect of the business studies syllabus.
- There is considerable scope to develop the use of ICT as a support to teaching and learning, as there was no evidence that teachers of business incorporated ICT as a teaching tool. Reflecting students' home-based access to ICT, a number of teachers encourage students to use web-based sources to further develop applied aspects of their learning. This practice should be extended across the department.
- Students' learning was generally very good with high response rates in many of the lessons observed and a high degree of accuracy and subject-specific terminology used in students' oral responses in class.
- Many lessons commenced with a question and answer session. Much of the questioning focused on testing knowledge and recall and the teachers are advised to ensure that some part of the questioning process targets students' higher-order thinking skills.
- In a majority of lessons observed homework was assigned mid-way through the lesson with guidance given to the students as to how to complete it. This practice is consistent with the principles of Assessment for Learning (AfL) and should be adopted by all teachers in the department.
- There is evidence of monitoring of homework completion but the team are not consistent in their recording of completion rates. There should be a system for recording students' homework outcomes.
- In some classes very good practice exists with respect to students generating their own support notes including the use of mind-maps and summary worksheets. Where summary worksheets were used best, the format of questions varied and emphasised the development of students' higher-order thinking skills.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- The provision of OACC in LCA provides continuity with students learning and experience at junior cycle and shows good reflective practice. Also, the focus on enterprise in TY is good as it differentiates the learning experience from junior cycle where the subject is core.
- The number of time periods allocated at both cycles is very good. At junior cycle this is particularly good given the constraints placed by the breadth of the curriculum provided to students.
- Initial analysis indicates that there is a high level of retention of at least one business subject by the majority of students moving from junior to senior cycle. The subject department should regularly monitor and profile the level of follow through.
- The ongoing improvement in the school's physical and ICT infrastructure provides an excellent opportunity to integrate ICT into the teaching of the subjects.
- To maximise the potential of ICT as a teaching and learning tool, business teachers will need to engage in personal professional development to develop their ICT skills. The skills developed should facilitate the presentation of material, sharing of appropriate resources, and management of the correction process.
- The school has an agreed whole-school homework policy that has been adapted within the business subject plan.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

- The position of subject co-ordinator should rotate and it is recommended that the co-ordinator remain in place for a two-year term. This will facilitate the progression of planning priorities and ensure that all members of the team get the opportunity to engage with the professional development aspect of the role.
- There is a need to ensure that a range of administrative and pedagogical topics are discussed at department meetings.
- While an overall subject plan has been developed that is closely aligned to the schools mission statement, further work is required on the schemes of work. The schemes should detail the learning outcomes, assessment modes, resources and methodologies appropriate to each of the curriculum topics identified in the long-term curriculum plans.
- Generally, individual planning is good including planning for the use of additional resources within lessons. The development of the subject plan will strengthen the capacity of the department to respond to unforeseen changes in staffing, or working with post-graduate diploma students.
- The greatest evidence of collaboration exists in relation to the junior cycle plan and generally teachers are on track in achieving the agreed lesson outcomes. Good practice exists in relation to the use of common assessments.
- As part of the subject planning process the subject department should take responsibility for the analysis of student outcomes in the state examinations. This work is currently undertaken by the school's management team.
- Currently the level of take up of the business subjects at higher level is mostly above the national averages for the subjects but there is scope to improve attainment in senior cycle Business. One strategy for improving attainment should be the placing of greater

emphasis on higher-level outcomes and skills in teachers' delivery of the syllabus outcomes.

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

The board of management was given an opportunity to comment in writing on the findings and recommendations of the report; a response was not received from the board.