

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

**Subject Inspection of Business Subjects
REPORT**

**Saint Angela's, Ursuline Convent
Waterford City, County Waterford
Roll number: 64990D**

Date of inspection: 13 September 2011



**A N R O I N N | D E P A R T M E N T O F
O I D E A C H A I S | E D U C A T I O N
A G U S S C I L E A N N A | A N D S K I L L S**

REPORT
ON
THE QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN BUSINESS SUBJECTS

INFORMATION ON THE INSPECTION

Dates of inspection	12 and 13 September 2011
Inspection activities undertaken <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Review of relevant documents• Discussion with principal and teachers• Interaction with students	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Observation of teaching and learning during eleven class periods• Examination of students' work• Feedback to principal and teachers

MAIN FINDINGS

- Teaching was good overall but in a small number of lessons students were not sufficiently involved in leading their own learning.
- Student learning was good where students were challenged, expertly guided and had shared ownership of learning through activities such as project work.
- Students' outcomes in state examinations are very good.
- Business teachers are diligent in ensuring that their subject knowledge is current and they actively share resources.
- Classrooms are student based and this limits the provision of a print-rich environment.
- Planning practices are good and an expansion of each subject curricular plan would make them complete.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

- Teachers should incorporate more active and co-operative learning methodologies and effective use of information and communication technology (ICT) into their teaching methodologies wherever appropriate.
 - Students should be encouraged to generate their own notes outside of formal class time and note-making could form part of the assessment process.
 - School management should consider the provision of a double period for Business Studies and a dedicated business classroom.
 - Curricular plans should be sufficiently detailed to record the good teaching practices and to serve as a manual for the provision of business education in the school.
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INTRODUCTION

St. Angela's, Ursuline Convent is a voluntary secondary school which offers Business Studies in junior cycle, and Accounting, Business and Economics as optional subjects in Leaving Certificate. Business education is provided in the school's Compulsory Transition Year (TY). The school has a current enrolment of 871 female students. The board of management of the school was given an opportunity to comment on the findings and recommendations of the inspection; the board chose to accept the report without response.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

- Teachers were conscientious, hardworking and in most lessons delivered good learning activities for students.
- In a number of lessons there was a sense of shared ownership of learning between teacher and student. This was achieved by linking the topic to real life situations, lively class discussions and good development of students' analytical and communication skills.
- In all lessons teachers shared learning outcomes with students and most class groups had received a plan of work for the current term.
- In all lessons teachers used a variety of methodologies. In almost every lesson students worked in pairs at some point. However, there is scope to use other methodologies such as group work and role play where appropriate.
- Every year, second-year students work co-operatively in a small group on a business-related project of their own choice. Each group presents their project to the entire second year group. In conversation with students it was evident that they enjoyed this very good learning activity.
- ICT was used to some extent in all lessons. It was most effective where relevant websites, extracts of television programmes, and interactive and attractive media resources were utilised to give a real-life and dynamic focus to business education.
- Teachers were anxious to impart as much knowledge as possible to students. However, in some lessons students were transcribing information that was available in students' textbooks. Students should be encouraged to be responsible for their own note-making outside of class time.
- Good teacher questioning strategies and development of students' answers were observed in most lessons.
- Students were encouraged to keep up-to-date with current business developments.
- Business teachers successfully incorporate elements and resources of the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme into business education.
- Additional resources such as handouts, worksheets, newspaper articles, business documents and visual aids were used by teachers in most lessons to give a real-life focus to learning.
- The development of students' analytical, evaluative, communicative and ICT skills was good in the TY lesson observed.
- All lessons were well planned and paced appropriately and interactions were courteous.
- Students sit common assessments up to Christmas of third year.

- Students are motivated to take business subjects at higher level in state examinations and outcomes are very good.
- Where appropriate, students corrected the work of their peers in class. In some lessons good evaluative comments were noted on students' work. This practice should be expanded especially at Leaving Certificate.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- First-year students select their optional subjects prior to entry. Uptake of the optional Business Studies is good. At Leaving Certificate student preferences generate the options bands. However, uptake of Business and Accounting is currently below national norms. The factors involved merit an analysis by the business subjects department so that an action plan can be devised to address this.
- The time allocated to teaching all business subjects is good. However, consideration should be given to the provision of a double period at some point in the junior cycle to complete book-keeping assignments.
- The business subjects department receives an annual budget and it is used to purchase relevant resources and teaching aids
- Students are classroom based and the potential to develop visual learning environments is diminished. There are plans to extend the building and teacher-based classrooms are being considered. In the past a specialist business classroom was in use and its reinstatement could be pursued in the interim.
- All business teachers are skilled specialists and are diligent in ensuring that their subject knowledge is current. Business teachers regularly attend subject association meetings, conferences and workshops, and have availed of professional development courses.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

- There are subject co-ordinators in place for each business subject and TY module. It is advisable to appoint an overall business subjects department co-ordinator. This position should rotate among the team.
- Regular subject department meetings are held and minutes are maintained. However most discussions pertain to the sequencing of topics and the content of assessments. While this is necessary, it is advisable to focus also on the sharing of good teaching and learning practices.
- Subject plans have the required elements of good planning and include a curricular plan that outlines the sequence of topics to be taught.
- There is considerable expertise and experience in the business subjects department which can be shared and formalised through the development of each curricular plan. The good practice observed in lessons should be documented as a manual for current and new entrants to the subject department. This can be achieved by linking to each topic its learning outcomes, resources, differentiated learning strategies and range of teaching and assessment methodologies.
- The sequencing of topics in junior cycle should be reconsidered. Year three of the cycle is heavily weighted with book-keeping topics.

- The importance of the development of student literacy and numeracy skills was stated as an objective in planning documentation. Business teachers have adopted the good practice of liaising with the mathematics department to ensure that mathematical computations are similar. To build on this good work it is advisable to develop a list of commonly-used business terms and keywords and their explanations for use in lessons and in learning support.
- Business teachers are in the process of continually updating an ICT resource folder for each business subject.
- The business teachers operate an agreed homework and assessment procedure in line with whole-school policies. The use of 'Assessment for Learning' practices is one of the developmental priorities noted in planning documentation and in minutes of subject department meetings.

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

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