

**An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna**

**Department of Education and Skills**

**Subject Inspection of Business Subjects  
REPORT**

**Saint MacDara's Community College  
Templeogue, Dublin 6W  
Roll number: 70260V**

**Date of inspection: 4 October 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**

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**INFORMATION ON THE INSPECTION**

<b>Dates of inspection</b>	3 and 4 October 2011
<b>Inspection activities undertaken</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Review of relevant documents</li><li>• Discussion with principal and teachers</li><li>• Interaction with students</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Observation of teaching and learning during twelve class periods</li><li>• Examination of students' work</li><li>• Feedback to principal and teachers</li></ul>

**MAIN FINDINGS**

- Good teaching and learning overall was observed, with instances of very good practice; in a small number of lessons class time was not utilised effectively.
- Effective practice included development of students' business acumen, use of co-operative methodologies and development of key student learning skills.
- Varied practices regarding the type and quantity of homework assigned and its correction were observed and these ranged from fair to very effective.
- Business subjects have a high profile on the curriculum with all first year students having the opportunity to attain financial literacy skills.
- Planning practices are good; the business subjects plan and subject curricular plans require some development.

**MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS**

- For effective use of class time unnecessary note-taking should cease in favour of the other good practices observed during the course of the inspection.
  - There should be agreement among business teachers regarding the type and quality of homework assigned to students, and its correction.
  - The content of the overall business subjects plan and each curricular plan should be developed as a manual on how to provide the best possible business education in the school.
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## **INTRODUCTION**

St. Macdara's Community College is under the auspices of Co. Dublin Vocational Education Committee, with an enrolment of 831 post-primary students. Business Studies is a core subject in first year and an optional subject thereafter. Business education is offered in the optional Transition Year (TY). Accounting, Business and Economics are offered to Leaving Certificate Students.

## **TEACHING AND LEARNING**

- Teaching and learning was good overall with some very good practice observed. Business teachers sought to give their subjects a real-life focus and to teach for understanding. However, in a small number of lessons a change in some of the methodologies used would ensure that class time is more effectively used for student learning.
- Good practice was noted in lessons where students were encouraged to think for themselves, work co-operatively, develop their key skills and take ownership of learning.
- In almost every lesson students worked in pairs. However, in some lessons there is scope to use additional methodologies such as group work and role play, where appropriate.
- In a small number of lessons there were instances in which students were transcribing notes that were in their textbooks and this was not a good use of lesson time. Students should be encouraged to be responsible for their own note-making outside of class time.
- There was a focus on the explanation of keywords and exploration of unfamiliar business terminology in all lessons. In some lessons teachers were enhancing general literacy by ensuring words were correctly spelt.
- All students received homework. However, in a small number of lessons students were not receiving a sufficient amount of homework and in some lessons students had completed a significant portion of their homework during class time. There should be an immediate review of homework assigned to Business Studies students who currently have only two contact periods per week.
- Students received good support and guidance in all lessons.
- Questioning was an effective methodology when directed to individual students and differentiated between ability levels.
- In lessons that had a book-keeping focus, teachers took a very supportive step-by-step approach, ensuring that students understood concepts and processes. Students were encouraged to work with their peers in these lessons.
- In most lessons information and communication technology (ICT) was used as a teaching aid. Its use should now be developed by accessing relevant case studies, websites, extracts of television programmes and interactive resources.
- At the outset of some lessons learning outcomes were shared with students. It is advisable that in all lessons learning outcomes be articulated at the outset, and then reviewed at the end.
- In the majority of business lessons students sat in groups which enabled teachers to support them in their learning and facilitated students to work co-operatively.

- In a visit to a TY lesson it was evident that the programme is delivered in a way that befits its ethos and aims. Students displayed good entrepreneurial skills and clearly enjoyed and benefited from the programme.
- An examination of a sample of student copybooks and journals highlighted varied practice in the quantity and type of homework assigned. Business teachers should consider best practice in homework and aim for a consistent practice throughout the business subjects department.
- There was some evidence of formal checking of students' homework by teachers. In some lessons teachers noted comments as to how students might improve their performance. This good practice should be expanded.
- Students are encouraged to achieve to their highest potential and to take business subjects at higher level in certificate examinations, wherein outcomes are good.

#### **SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT**

- All first-year students take Business Studies and this good provision allows all students to attain financial literacy skills. The majority of first years continue with the subject for the duration of junior cycle.
- Class-period provision for Business Studies is adequate. While the provision of two class periods per week for first-year Business Studies students is less than normal, this is balanced against the good breadth of subject provision in first year. Two double-class periods are provided for the duration of the junior cycle.
- The allocation of periods to the subjects at Leaving Certificate is good.
- Teachers are up-to-date in their knowledge of business subjects. At least one member of the business subjects department attends subject association meetings, seminars and conferences.
- Teachers are classroom based and while there are some displays of visual resources there is scope to further develop a visual business environment in most classrooms where business education is being taught.

#### **PLANNING AND PREPARATION**

- Regular subject department meetings are held. It is advisable to change the format of recording minutes so as to reflect items discussed and actions taken. The sharing of good and effective teaching and learning practices should now be considered as an item for discussion.
- The business subjects plan is good in design. However, it should be extended to include the inventory and location of paper-based and ICT resources. The list of keywords for each topic should also be expanded to include definitions and explanations that can be used in lessons and in learning support. The plan should articulate the method by which numeric calculations are taught so as to ensure that practices are similar to those in the mathematics department.
- 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 effective practice observed in lessons should be documented as a manual for current

teachers and new entrants to the subject department. This could be achieved by linking to each topic its learning outcomes, resources, differentiated learning strategies and range of teaching and assessment methodologies.

- First-year students maintain a notes copybook and homework copybook which are supplemented by handouts and worksheets. Students have access to a set of textbooks while in class. Business teachers should consider the compilation of a booklet for student use that contains necessary and relevant information and worksheets.

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The draft findings and recommendations arising out of this evaluation were discussed with the principal and subject teachers at the conclusion of the evaluation. The board of management of the school was given an opportunity to comment on the findings and recommendations of the report; the board chose to accept the report without response.

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