

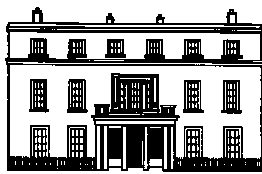
An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

**Subject Inspection of Business Subjects
REPORT**

**St Declans's Community College
Kilmacthomas, County Waterford
Roll number: 72230W**

Date of inspection: 26 February 2016



**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	25 and 26 February
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 two double and six single class periods• Examination of students' work• Feedback to principal and teachers

MAIN FINDINGS

- The quality of teaching and learning observed ranged from very good through to good in the majority of lessons, however, there was scope for development in a significant minority of lessons.
- Teachers and students are commended on their high level of participation over a number of years in enterprise activities and competitions.
- Some class groups do not use a textbook and rely mainly on teacher-generated handouts and transcribed notes to support their learning.
- Business subjects have a high profile on the school's curriculum.
- Subject department planning is well established, collaborative and organised.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

- Where scope for development was identified, teachers should enhance student learning through the increased use of higher-order targeted questioning, effective use of information and communications technology (ICT) and co-operative and active learning methodologies.
 - In keeping with assessment for learning principles, more written feedback should be provided to students on their work.
 - The transcription of large quantities of notes in some lessons should be reviewed and replaced by more active student learning strategies.
 - Students who do not use a textbook should have access to a broader range of enriching learning resources to support their learning in business education.
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INTRODUCTION

St. Declan's Community College is under the trusteeship of Waterford and Wexford Education and Training Board, and has an enrolment of 669 post-primary students. The school provides Business Studies as a core subject in junior cycle. Business education is provided in the compulsory Transition Year (TY) programme. At Leaving Certificate level students are offered Accounting, Business and Economics as optional subjects.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

- The quality of teaching and learning observed ranged from very good to good in the majority of lessons however, there was scope for development in a significant minority of lessons.
- In very good lessons, teachers successfully used teaching strategies that engaged students in their learning. In lessons where there was scope for development there was an overemphasis on instructional teaching.
- The opportunities for students to work in pairs or small groups was only availed of in half of the lessons observed. Student co-operative learning was particularly effective in lessons where the task was well planned and concluded with students presenting their findings in a good plenary session. Co-operative learning activities should be expanded to all lessons, where appropriate.
- In the majority of lessons student-targeted differentiated questions were used very effectively to challenge students and strengthen their learning. In lessons where teacher talk dominated there was an overemphasis on global and lower-order questions which did not effectively engage all students.
- Teachers' personal subject knowledge is good. Where used, teacher and student references to topical and current affairs were very good. In one lesson, the use of a range of newspaper articles was praiseworthy as it helped to expand students' business knowledge.
- In the majority of lessons, ICT was used as a teaching aid. In a small number of lessons the accessing of relevant case studies, websites and extracts of television programmes gave a dynamic focus to business education and facilitated the use of ICT as a student learning tool. This good practice should be extended to all lessons, where appropriate.
- In many lessons, students were given the opportunity to populate graphic organisers that served as good revision aids. The use of the game of Monopoly to explain factors of production in one lesson ensured that learning was enjoyable and relevant for students.
- Many of the business teachers organise student visits to local businesses and encourage students to participate in a range of co-curricular and enterprise activities which are beneficial to students' understanding of business theory. The teachers involved in these activities and their students are commended on their high level of participation over a number of years in enterprise competitions.
- In all lessons, learning intentions were shared with students. Best practice was evident in lessons where they were presented in terms of what students should be able to know, do and understand by the end of the lesson and, as the lesson concluded, their attainment was reviewed. In a small number of lessons only a list of topics was shared with students,

therefore, it is advisable that best practice be adopted by all teachers. The pace and structure of lessons was generally good.

- Some class groups do not use a textbook and rely on teacher-generated handouts and transcribed notes to support their learning. While students have access to a small collection of textbooks in some lessons, a means of expanding access to other enriching student learning resources should be devised. The transcription of large quantities of notes in some lessons restricted time for active learning. This ineffective use of lesson time should be reviewed so that students can experience the breadth and balance of intended syllabus learning outcomes.
- In a small number of lessons there was some evidence of formal checking of students' homework that included very good evaluative and formative comments about how students might improve their performance. This practice should be expanded particularly in senior cycle. It was praiseworthy that in one lesson students were encouraged to work collaboratively on homework assignments.
- Business teachers review student outcomes in certificate examinations and compare them with national norms and school baseline data. In the context of the student cohort, some students are achieving very high grades at ordinary level and this should be carefully monitored by senior management, and business teachers ensure that students take examinations at higher level where possible.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- Management's support for business subjects is commendable in each of the following key areas: curricular provision; equality of access to the subject for all students; timetabling and deployment of staff.
- Business subjects have a high profile on the school's curriculum. It is praiseworthy that students who are following the Junior Certificate School Programme (JCSP) are integrated into the mainstream Business Studies classes. The majority of students who have taken Business Studies at junior cycle retain at least one of the business options at Leaving Certificate.
- In most teacher-based classrooms there were good examples of how these classrooms have been used to display student-generated and visual learning resources. The potential of creating visual learning environments in some classrooms should be further exploited.
- 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, workshops and partake in continuing professional development activities.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

- Subject department planning is well established, collaborative and organised. It is advisable that the business department develop an electronic folder to store and share electronic resources and information.
- Subject department meetings are held regularly and minutes were indicative of the wide range of relevant topics including teaching and learning that are discussed by the business team.

- The over-arching plan for business education is comprehensive. The plan articulates the good focus within the subject department on students' literacy and numeracy skills. Good links were evident with the special educational needs department and the plan contained strategies, information and advice for teachers on specific learning needs.
- Schemes of work for each business subject are in place. Of particular merit is the linking of learning outcomes, methodologies and the hyper-linking of resources in the Economics and Accounting scheme of work. Teachers should adopt this good practice when developing all schemes of work.
- The business module within the TY programme is very well designed. The module emphasises the development of students' work and enterprise skills in addition to developing students' financial literacy skills.

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.