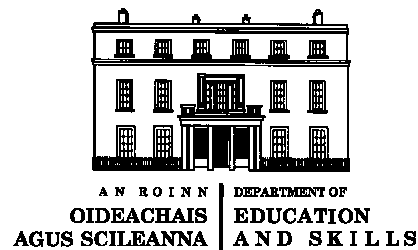


An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Subject Inspection of Business Subjects
REPORT

Loreto Secondary School
Fermoy, County Cork
Roll number: 62270F

Date of inspection: 5 May 2016



REPORT ON THE QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN BUSINESS SUBJECTS

INFORMATION ON THE INSPECTION

Dates of inspection	4 th and 5 th May
Inspection activities undertaken <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Review of relevant documents• Discussion with principal and teachers• Interaction with students• Examination of students' work	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Observation of teaching and learning during nine class periods; three double and three single lessons• Reflection on student engagement in learning in an additional three single lesson periods• Feedback to principal and teachers

MAIN FINDINGS

- Teaching was good overall with many examples of very good practice although in a small number of instances, there was scope for development.
- In some lessons, teaching strategies such as effective group work and the use of assessment for learning strategies (AfL) had a positive impact on student learning; there is potential to further develop these strategies.
- Students are encouraged to achieve to their highest potential and to take business subjects at higher level in certificate examinations, wherein outcomes are very good.
- Business education has a high profile in the school.
- Subject department planning is well established and organised; however, some schemes of work require further development.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

- Student learning should be assisted through the increased use of higher-order questioning, co-operative and active learning methodologies.
 - AfL strategies and information and communications technology (ICT) as a student learning tool should be further incorporated into business teachers' pedagogical practice.
 - Collaborative planning should be advanced through the further development of schemes of work for business subjects as outlined in the body of this report.
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INTRODUCTION

Loreto Secondary School, Fermoy is a voluntary secondary school, with an enrolment of 626 female students. Business Studies is a core subject in first year and an optional subject thereafter. Business education is compulsory in the optional Transition Year (TY) programme. Accounting, Business and Economics are offered to senior cycle students.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

- Teaching was good overall with many examples of very good practice although in a small number of instances, there was scope for development. In lessons where very good practice was observed, teaching strategies such as effective group and project work helped ensure that students were enthusiastic in their learning.
- In the majority of lessons, students had the opportunity to work in pairs or small groups. The team quiz format used in a lesson as a revision tool was enjoyed by students. In a TY lesson, the parameters set for the development and delivery of a project helped ensure it was a successful learning activity. In another lesson, students were preparing a debate. Activities such as these should be developed throughout all class groups.
- ICT was used as a presentation tool in most lessons. In one lesson, the use of very good video clips gave a dynamic focus to business education. The potential of ICT as a learning tool and visual aid should be fully exploited by teachers by accessing relevant resources. The good practice of some teachers of uploading electronic resources and assignments to a student virtual learning platform is a positive development.
- In most lessons, students used graphic organisers and mind maps to summarise information and concepts. The use of flash cards, in a lesson which contained student generated questions, served as very effective revision aids.
- Teachers frequently questioned students in order to check their progress and understanding. However, the questioning techniques tended to be global and lower-order. It is recommended that greater use of targeted higher-order questioning that challenges students be used more frequently in all lessons.
- Teacher use of exemplars to explain concepts in the majority of lessons was good. In some lessons, there was scope to link theory to current business practice and knowledge of the wider business environment.
- In all lessons, learning intentions were shared with students. Best practice was observed in lessons where learning intentions were presented as to what students should be able to know, do and understand by the end of the lesson and as the lesson concluded, attainment of the learning intention was reviewed. It is recommended that such best practice be adopted by all teachers.
- Classroom management and atmosphere in all lessons was very good and was characterised by very good teacher support and affirmation of students' efforts.
- Business teachers regularly assign homework. Students' work was well presented and labelled in the sample of copybooks viewed in each lesson.

- In all lessons, students received affirming and formative oral feedback. In a small number of lessons, students' work was regularly corrected with written feedback provided from the teacher. In one lesson, the use of peer review was good with specific emphasis on observing the agreed presentation standards. These good AfL strategies should be adopted by all teachers.
- Students of business subjects are challenged and encouraged to aim for high academic standards and to take subjects at the highest possible level in the certificate examinations. Student attainment is very good.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- Management's support for the subject is commendable in each of the following key areas: curricular provision; equality of access to the subject for all students and subject resourcing.
- The uptake of the optional subject Business Studies in second year is very high. Most students who have taken Business Studies at junior cycle select at least one of the business options at Leaving Certificate.
- Teachers were highly organised in lessons and ensured that all necessary resources were available. It is praiseworthy that in student-based classrooms, there were some displays of student-generated business resources.
- The informative and attractive display of newspaper excerpts and information on business-related topics on the business notice board in the main school corridor was very good.
- The business department has a significant stock of resources such as business-related board games, visuals and teaching aids. It is praiseworthy that the business teachers have the use of a dedicated office which serves as an area for the storage of business resources, a meeting room and a preparation and work area.
- 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

- The cohesive business team is well organised and has worked collaboratively over a number of years. The very good working relationship between business teachers was reflected in the quality of their interaction during the inspection visit.
- There are regular business department meetings; however, these are frequently subject specific and do not involve the full complement of business teachers. It is advisable that the full team should meet more regularly and the agenda for meetings should place a greater emphasis on the discussion of teaching methodologies and student learning strategies.
- A very good over-arching plan has been developed by the business team. Of merit is the business department's stated aims and objectives for the delivery of business education.

- Teachers are to be commended on the early introduction and emphasis placed on the bookkeeping elements of Business Studies throughout the three years of junior cycle.
- The considerable expertise and experience in the business subjects department should be formalised through the further development of the scheme of work for the new Business Studies specification. This can be achieved by populating the good template already in use which links to each topic its learning outcomes, resources and range of teaching and assessment methodologies. Schemes of work should be further developed for most senior cycle business subjects.
- It is praiseworthy that evaluation of business education is developing and that teachers have identified that strategies to encourage student problem solving need to be further developed, as does the use of digital media and active methodologies. In some class groups, students are requested to evaluate their work and chart their aspirations for business education; this is good practice.
- The well-organised electronic business folder which is accessible to all business teachers on the school's server is a good development.

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 accepts the report as the final inspection report available for publication and wished to respond formally to the report. The Board agrees that the response submitted will be included as an appendix to the published report. The board's response is submitted below.

Appendix

SCHOOL RESPONSE TO THE REPORT

Submitted by the Board of Management

Area 1 Observations on the content of the inspection report

The Board of Management is delighted to welcome this very positive report on the teaching of business subjects in Loreto Secondary School Fermoy. The Board particularly welcomes the affirmation of the following:

- The good teaching and learning that is taking place in this department
- The work of the highly organised teachers in this department
- The very good results students achieve at higher level in business subjects in certificate examinations
- The high profile of business subjects in the school
- The variety of methodologies and strategies used in classes – the sharing of learning intentions in all lessons, pair and group work, the use of ICT and video clips, graphic organisers and mind maps, flash cards and debating etc.
- Classroom management and the atmosphere in all lessons were very good
- There was very good teacher support and affirmation of students' efforts in all lessons.

Area 2 Follow-up actions planned or undertaken since the completion of the inspection activity to implement the findings and recommendations of the inspection.

The recommendations contained in this report will be implemented and will inform future practice.