

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

**Subject Inspection of Business Subjects
REPORT**

**Saint Joseph's Secondary School
Providence Road, Foxford
County Mayo
Roll number: 64640W**

Date of inspection: 11 November 2015



**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

Date of inspection	11 November 2015
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 five class periods; one double and three single periods• Examination of students' work• Feedback to principal and teachers

MAIN FINDINGS

- There were many strengths in the teaching approaches used to promote students' learning.
- Lesson planning, the collation of subject-specific resources and recordkeeping are very good.
- The physical learning environments, and teaching strategies used, strongly supported the development of students' literacy skills.
- Independent and collaborative learning opportunities were provided, though there is scope to adapt classroom layout to further facilitate collaborative learning.
- There are exceptionally good systems within the department, and at whole-school level, to provide students, including in-coming first-year students, with information about the subjects.
- The Transition Year (TY) business programme is well developed and provides for both knowledge acquisition and skills development.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

- Building on existing questioning and collaborative learning approaches, strategies for differentiation should continue to be developed.
- In developing the numeracy approaches to the subject, agreement should be reached with the teachers of related subjects about common approaches to be used.
- The teachers' very good approach of using frequency analysis with summative assessments should be used more strategically, to support subject planning and reflection on teaching and learning.

INTRODUCTION

St Joseph's Secondary School, which operates under the trusteeship of the catholic diocese of Achonry, is a mixed school with a current enrolment of 422 students. Following junior cycle, students can opt for either the established Leaving Certificate or the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP). The school's curriculum also includes an optional TY programme.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

- There were many strengths in the teaching approaches used to promote students' learning.
- Students were busy and kept on task. Lesson pace and structure were good. Lessons were framed by teachers' use of learning intentions and the identification of appropriate content and resources. There is scope to progress this approach, and increase students' ownership of the learning intentions, through, for example, agreeing rather than presenting the lesson intentions. Learning intentions were revisited during and at the end of lessons and, in one effective approach, a wordle was used to facilitate students in revisiting the lesson intentions.
- Student-generated examples were used to frame knowledge acquisition and the development of research and evaluation skills appropriate to the subjects. Information and communications technology (ICT) was used to present material. In one lesson on advertisement, ICT was used inter-actively within the lesson structure, including the use of multi-media presentations.
- Teachers are classroom based and the physical learning environments were well developed. The learning environments strongly supported literacy development, including the use of wordles, commercially-sourced and student-generated posters, and images of local businesses. In addition, the recent initiative of displaying, and making available, subject-specific reference books is very good.
- Independent and collaborative learning opportunities were provided for students. Pair work and group work were used, though group work was more structured than pair work. Questioning was frequent and included a mix of global and targeted questions. Teachers should build on these approaches for differentiation.
- Classroom interactions were positive and there was good evidence that teachers were managing the volume of materials that students are required to bring to business lessons. Students' diaries and teacher instruction indicated the days on which business record books and workbooks should be brought to class. This is a very student-centred approach and indicates good forward lesson planning on the part of teachers.
- Literacy development is encouraged mainly through the use of a key-word strategy, though other techniques including matching exercises, word grids, crosswords and pre-reading were evident. In evaluating the use of teacher-generated notes, greater emphasis on student-developed notes and exemplars should be incorporated into students learning. In developing the numeracy approaches to the subject, agreement should be reached with the teachers of Mathematics about a consistent approach to topics including, for example, graphing data sets.
- Given the small size of some of the class groups and teachers' encouragement of group work, consideration should be given to varying classroom layout to facilitate teacher movement and provision of support to smaller groups.

- Homework is frequently assigned and teachers' feedback on students work includes commentary on rubrics, presentation and the correction of errors. In planning for homework teachers use a mix of consolidation and research tasks, which is good practice.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- Provision for the subjects is very good. The time allocated to the subjects meets the guidelines and, in junior cycle, includes a double period in each year, which is good for the delivery of the bookkeeping outcomes of the syllabus.
- Teachers have access to a range of ICT resources. The school is located in two sites with the business teachers located in the second site which results in difficulties in maintaining high-speed broadband access in both sites.
- Awareness of trends, including student take-up of the business subjects and ranking of student preferences, is very high both at management and subject department level. There are exceptionally good systems in place to inform in-coming first-year students about the subject. All opportunities are availed of by the teachers to promote the subject at whole-school level, including the school's prospectus and the newsletter the teachers have developed to provide information to in-coming first-year students and their parents.
- Analysis of results in certificate examinations is completed by the subject department and there is evidence of department reflection on attainment. The emphasis placed by the teachers on taking the subject at the highest level is evident in subject planning and the department's analysis of trends.
- The excellent record-keeping by teachers of students' results from summative assessments, including frequency analysis, provides a very good opportunity to reflect on teaching and learning.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

- The quality of subject planning is good with some very good examples of the subject plan being adapted to reflect agreed whole-school approaches, for example in relation to special educational needs. In addition, while the subject team is small it clearly works on a collaborative basis.
- The schemes of work are reviewed on an on-going basis and the whole-school literacy and numeracy strategies are currently focusing on subject-specific teaching and learning strategies.
- The TY business programme is well structured, focusing on Enterprise as a TY-specific activity. This programme also includes modules that explore the European Union and which emphasise both knowledge and skills development, for example presentation skills. In addition, the school maintains a well-established relationship, through the Local Enterprise Office, with a business enterprise which supports the range of learning experiences for students in TY.
- Individual lesson planning, the collation of subject-specific resources and record-keeping are very good. In cataloguing and updating resources, particularly past question sets, teachers should ensure that materials are all current and relevant to students' experience.

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 in writing on the findings and recommendations of the report, and the response of the board will be found in the appendix of this report.

Appendix

SCHOOL RESPONSE TO THE REPORT

Submitted by the Board of Management

Part A Observations on the content of the inspection report

Classroom layout has been modified as advised at inspection with reference to group work and student support.