

**An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna**  
**Department of Education and Skills**

**Subject Inspection of Business Subjects**  
**REPORT**

**Rice College,**  
**Westport, County Mayo**  
**Roll number: 647000**

**Date of inspection: 8 March 2016**



**REPORT  
ON  
THE QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN BUSINESS SUBJECTS**

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**INFORMATION ON THE INSPECTION**

<b>Dates of inspection</b>	7 and 8 March 2016
<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 ten class periods; four single periods and three double periods</li><li>• Examination of students' work</li><li>• Feedback to principal, deputy principal and teachers</li></ul>

**MAIN FINDINGS**

- Good quality teaching and learning was evident in all the lessons observed.
- Interactions were respectful and teachers encouraged student engagement and supported learners.
- Opportunities for collaborative learning that arose in lessons were not always fully developed.
- There was very good implementation of recommendations from a previous subject inspection report.
- Subject provision and time allocated on the timetable for the subjects is very good.
- Planning structures are good and the business programme in Transition Year (TY) is well planned and focuses on actively engaging students with a range of business knowledge and skills.

**MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS**

- Subject and lesson planning should include a greater focus on developing collaborative learning opportunities, in particular, structured pair and group work.
- The teachers should further progress assessment for learning (AfL) strategies through the systematic use of learning intentions and success criteria with units of work.
- The first-year programme in Business Studies should increase its focus on the development of students' financial literacy.

## **INTRODUCTION**

Rice College is a boys-only voluntary secondary school operating under the trusteeship of ERST (Edmund Rice Schools Trust). The school draws students from a wide area surrounding Westport, and the current enrolment is 528 students. All curricular programmes are offered to students and the TY is compulsory for all students. There was a previous inspection of business subjects completed in 2006.

## **TEACHING AND LEARNING**

- Good quality teaching and learning was evident in all the lessons observed.
- In many lessons teachers used direct teaching methods to develop students' knowledge and skills. Oral questioning was widely used to test students' knowledge and application. A mix of global and targeted questions were used and questioning was best when it was directed and follow-up questions were targeted at more able students. However, there is need to increase the opportunities for collaborative learning both through structured pair and group work activities.
- Classes were very well managed and well planned, especially in relation to the use of additional resources.
- In almost all cases learning intentions were shared explicitly, through oral or written means, with students. In supporting this approach, further analysis of how success criteria can be used to extend the way in which students will demonstrate their learning and measure the quality of the work they undertake, should be undertaken and adopted within planning for the delivery of learning outcomes.
- Information and communications technology (ICT) was used very effectively to support teaching and promote the development of students' research and analysis skills. Teachers plan for the use of ICT and the material used to support its use are appropriate to the students' age and learning experience and are accessible to a wide group of students.
- Teachers' subject knowledge is very good. They showed good knowledge of the current business environment and used exemplars to support their teaching that were tailored to the age and experience of students.
- The whole-school numeracy approaches of estimation and calculation were included within all lessons, even with the business theory focused lessons. For example, in one business lesson students were encouraged to use an on-line mortgage calculator as a homework task to assess the effects of different interest rates.
- Homework is regularly assigned and includes a very good mix of short-answer and long-answer style questions. To support learners, especially more able learners, a formal system of written feedback for improvement should be used occasionally by teachers when reviewing the quality of students' homework.
- Peer-assessment and self-assessment strategies focused mainly on numeric question sets. For example, in accounts questions, students worked to a check-balance approach. One possibility to explore is to draw on the good practice that exists in the use of visualisers to get students to peer assess samples of anonymised student work using agreed rubrics and success criteria.

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

- Provision for the subjects is very good. Business Studies is provided as a year-long taster programme for first-year students, and approximately two-thirds of students take the subject as one of their optional subjects for Junior Certificate.
- Time allocation is very good, in particular in senior cycle, and access to the subjects at all levels is very good.
- Staffing in the subjects has changed in recent years with retirements of long-serving teachers. However, subject continuity has been maintained and this shows great commitment on the part of the subject teachers and the school's management to retaining business options.
- The school has recently re-introduced Economics as an optional subject at senior cycle, resulting in all three business subjects being offered to students. This positive development was actively promoted by the teachers and supported by the school's management. It is indicative of the strong position of business subjects on the school's curriculum. A year-long business programme is also offered in TY.
- Provision for ICT is very good and each classroom has a well-integrated sound system. One area for future development in the teaching of the subjects is for the department to plan for the integration of ICT as a tool for assessment and student-led research and projects.
- The subject teachers have agreed an assessment of learning (AoL) system for junior cycle. This approach, and the subject department's good practice in the use of common assessments, with the associated data this yields, provides significant scope for reflection on teaching and review of pedagogical approaches.

## **PLANNING AND PREPARATION**

- Subject planning is good and the teachers have agreed a three-year rotation cycle for the role of subject co-ordinator.
- There is a high degree of consistency in the presentation of the subject plans with very good use of planning tools and resources available to present the plans in a coherent and logical sequence.
- Individual strengths of the team members are evident in the presentation and inputs to the plans and schemes of work at senior cycle. In particular, a lot of work has been completed in relation to the plan for Economics in the short time since the re-introduction of the subject.
- To complement the work done to date, a number of refinements are advised: the first-year scheme should focus more closely on the development of financial literacy using the teachers' experience and judgement to agree the critical strands; in addition, the senior cycle accounting scheme should continue the practice of reviewing the sequencing of topics to match the skill set of incoming fifth-year students.
- Individual lesson preparation has been strengthened by the development, over many years, of resources and resource banks by the teachers.
- The TY programme has a good structure and delivers a lot of outcomes within the time allocation, including TY-specific activities, and some limited subject sampling.

- Reporting to parents is in line with the whole-school agreed systems.

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The draft findings and recommendations arising out of this evaluation were discussed with the principal, deputy 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**

The school has viewed the business report from the Department of Education.  
We are extremely happy with it and we will take on board its recommendations.

**Part B Follow-up actions planned or undertaken since the completion of the inspection activity to implement the findings and recommendations of the inspection.**

Teaching methodologies to incorporate collaborative learning opportunities through paired and group work.  
AfL to be progressed further.  
Financial literacy will be addressed during first year.