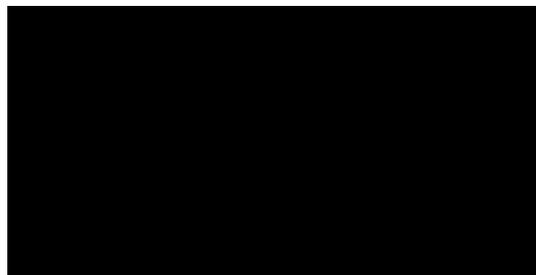


An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Subject Inspection of Business Subjects
REPORT

Borris Vocational School
Borris, County Carlow
Roll number: 70400L

Date of inspection: 22 January 2013



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

INFORMATION ON THE INSPECTION

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| Date of inspection | 22 January 2013 |
| 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 four lessons: one single and three double class periods• Examination of students' work• Feedback to principal and teachers |

MAIN FINDINGS

- Teaching was good overall; there were instances of very good practice but also scope in some lessons to expand the range of teaching methodologies.
- Assessment methods are developing, with a growing emphasis on assessment for learning (AfL) and self-evaluation.
- Business teachers are diligent in ensuring that their subject knowledge is current and that resources and knowledge are shared.
- The development of an internet host page to share resources and information with students is progressive.
- Planning practices are good although subject plans require some further development.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

- Where scope for development was identified, teaching strategies that actively involve students in learning should be applied.
 - In keeping with assessment for learning (AfL) principles, more written feedback should be provided to students particularly in Leaving Certificate.
 - Curricular plans should be sufficiently detailed to record the good teaching practices and to serve as a manual for the provision of business education in the school.
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INTRODUCTION

Borris Vocational School is under the auspices of County Carlow Vocational Education Committee, with an enrolment of 485 post-primary students. Business Studies is a core subject in first year and an optional subject thereafter. Mini-company and personal finance are core subjects in the optional Transition Year programme, and Accounting is offered as a ten-week module. Accounting and Business are offered to Leaving Certificate Students.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

- Teaching and learning was good overall, and some very good practices were observed. However, in a small number of lessons there was potential to further develop methodologies that actively involve students in their learning.
- In the majority of lessons students were given the opportunity to work in pairs or small groups. This methodology was particularly effective in a lesson that looked at people at work. Co-operative learning activities should be expanded to all lessons. Teachers could also develop student project work, debates and presentations so as to further involve students in leading their own learning.
- In the majority of lessons observed, a mix of differentiated targeted questions was used effectively to challenge students and deepen learning. However, in a lesson where teacher talk predominated there was an overemphasis on global and lower-order questioning and this did not effectively engage all students.
- In a Business Studies lesson, the playing of two video clips was an excellent use of information and communication technology (ICT) to deepen student learning. In some lessons the use of ICT could also be further exploited to provide summary aids and solutions to questions. Student access to resources used in lessons through an internet hosting site is a very progressive development.
- The development of students' literacy skills was well supported by clear explanations of unfamiliar terminology, keywords and outcome verbs. Teachers have placed an emphasis on student correction of mis-spellings. In lessons involving numerical calculations, a common approach was used.
- In most lessons students were given the opportunity to use graphic organisers to summarise information and concepts and these served as good revision aids.
- Students are encouraged to participate in a range of co-curricular and enterprise activities which are beneficial to students' understanding of business theory and to the development of key skills.
- All business teachers regularly assign homework and monitor it well. In some lessons the use of peer review and the noting of evaluative comments on students' work enriched student learning. This good practice should be expanded to all lessons.
- Common assessments are administered. In some class groups, students and their parents provide feedback on the outcomes of topic assessments. This is a worthy method of student self-evaluation and provides feedback for teachers.
- Students are encouraged to achieve to their highest potential and to take business subjects at higher level in certificate examinations, wherein outcomes are good. Business teachers review student outcomes in state examinations annually and compare them with national norms with a view to developing their practice.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- All first-year students take Business Studies, enabling them to attain financial literacy skills and to make a well-informed decision on subject choices for second year. However, there has been a marginal decline in the uptake of the subject in recent years. It is advisable that an analysis and review of factors involved be conducted by senior management and the business subjects department, and a strategy put in place to increase uptake rates.
- Currently Business and Accounting are offered in Leaving Certificate. Senior management has endeavoured to maintain Accounting as an option on the Leaving Certificate curriculum. Currently, there is no fifth-year group. The option to amalgamate a fifth-year and sixth-year class so that the subject choice is maximised for students could be discussed by senior management and the subject teacher.
- All teachers of the business subjects are subject specialists, and are avid attendees of continuing professional development (CPD) events. A business teacher is currently attending a course in instructional leadership. It is laudable that a written summary report and information from CPD activities are made available to all business subject teachers.
- Most business teachers have their own base classroom. There are some good examples of how the rooms have been used to display exhibits of students' work. Seating arrangements in all classrooms were conducive to co-operative learning and in one classroom the configuration of desks enabled students to permanently sit in groups.
- Business Studies is timetabled for two single and one double class in first year and for the remainder of junior cycle two double class periods are timetabled. As part of the yearly review business teachers should analyse the effectiveness of timetabling in second and third year in terms of student-teacher contact and the opportunities to complete homework.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

- There are regular formal and informal business subjects department meetings. Minutes provided indicate a collaborative approach to planning and teaching particularly at junior cycle. The business teachers form a good self-evaluating team and are willing to develop their practices.
- The business subjects plan is comprehensive and contains all the elements of good planning. The addition of the good literacy and numeracy practices observed in lessons would further enhance the plan.
- Each business subject's curricular plan outlines the sequence in which topics are to be taught. Aligned to each topic are their learning outcomes. These plans can be further developed by aligning resources and a range of teaching and assessment methodologies to each curriculum topic.
- The plan for the delivery of Business Studies in first-year is very well organised. A pack of resources that includes graphic organisers, attractive visual handouts, word searches and worksheets is available for each class group.

- Business teachers had their own electronic resources for use in lessons. The development of an electronic folder to store and facilitate sharing of electronic resources and information is currently being progressed.

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 was given an opportunity to comment in writing on the findings and recommendations of the report; a response was not received from the board.

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