

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Subject Inspection of Business Subjects
REPORT

Our Lady of Mercy Secondary School,
Waterford City, County Waterford
Roll number: 64971W

Date of inspection: 24 April 2013



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	23 and 24 April
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 seven lessons; five single and two double periods• Examination of students' work• Feedback to principal and teachers

MAIN FINDINGS

- Teaching and learning was good overall; there were some instances of very good practice but in some lessons there was scope to develop active learning methodologies.
- Entrepreneurial activities in Transition Year (TY) are of a very high standard.
- Students are encouraged and supported to achieve to their highest potential and to take business subjects at higher level in certificate examinations, wherein outcomes are good.
- There is very good provision of business education in the school and the time allocated to teaching all business subjects is good.
- The good planning activities of the business subject department are well established and organised.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

- All business teachers should further develop the use of methodologies that actively involve students in their learning and strategies that incorporate the student voice such as questioning and student presentations.
 - Business teachers should further develop their assessment for learning strategies and strategies to promote students' literacy skills in the classroom.
 - The sequencing of topics in junior cycle should be re-considered.
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INTRODUCTION

Our Lady of Mercy is a voluntary secondary school which provides Business Studies as an optional subject in junior cycle. Business education is a core module in the optional Transition Year. At Leaving Certificate students are offered Accounting, Business and Economics. The school has a current enrolment of 576 female students.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

- Teaching and learning was good overall, and some very good practices were observed. However, in some lessons there was potential to further develop methodologies that actively involve students in their learning.
- In some lessons, there was an over-reliance on instructional teaching. There was one instance of group work and a small amount of pair work observed during the inspection. Where these methodologies were used, they were successful in promoting learning and their further use and development is recommended as is the use of other active methodologies such as role play.
- In lessons with a book-keeping focus, a very good step-by-step approach was used. Teachers were diligent in ensuring that students fully understood the concepts involved.
- The type of questioning used by teachers in lessons varied. In the majority of lessons, there was a very good balance between global and targeted questioning. Where questioning was appropriately differentiated, students had opportunities to develop higher-order thinking skills.
- In most lessons, teachers initiated good student discussions and used topical, local and national business related exemplars which helped students to deepen their understanding of business education. It is advisable to further develop the student voice in all lessons through questioning strategies, student project work and presentations.
- Enterprise activities in TY are of a very high standard. Students are encouraged and supported to develop their entrepreneurial skills through participation in enterprise competitions and the running of public charity events.
- The use of information and communication technology (ICT) was good in lessons. It was most effective when it allowed business education to attain a dynamic real-life focus as relevant video clips that deepen business understanding were accessed from the internet.
- All lessons were well planned and prepared. At the outset of lessons, an outline of work was shared with students. This should now progress to the articulation of learning outcomes in terms of what students should and could know. At the conclusion of lessons students could also be involved in recapping the key learning points
- A sample of student copybooks and folders was viewed in each lesson and these were of a high standard in terms of neatness and layout. Homework is given regularly and best practice observed was where a variety of modes was assigned to students.
- There was evidence of formal checking of students' homework by teachers. In some of the students' copybooks, teachers noted comments as to how students might improve their performance. This good practice should be expanded.

- Good strategies were employed by teachers to develop students' numeracy skills and mental arithmetic. However, there should also be a focus on the explanation of unfamiliar language, subject-specific terminology and key words in all lessons.
- Classroom management was very good in all lessons and teachers were very affirming of students' effort.
- Students are encouraged and supported to achieve to their highest potential and to take business subjects at higher level in certificate examinations, wherein outcomes are good.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- There is very good provision of business education in the school and the time allocated to teaching all business subjects is good.
- The majority of students who have taken Business Studies at junior cycle retain at least one of the business options at Leaving Certificate.
- Classrooms are student based. A business specialist room has been developed and its use is maximised for business education. This room currently serves as a valuable visual learning environment with displays of projects and awards. The change from student to teacher-based classrooms is currently being considered by senior management.
- Business teachers are diligent in ensuring that their subject knowledge is current. They have attended in-service training relating to their subjects.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

- The planning activities of the business subject department are well established and organised. Business teachers work in a collaborative and supportive manner and are very committed to the continued development of business subjects.
- Detailed minutes are maintained of the regular formal meetings. It is evident that discussion is meaningful and that the students' learning is central to the work of the subject department.
- The co-ordinator of the subject department has been diligent in carrying out the duties for a number of years. It would be prudent if the post was to rotate among the business teachers as this would facilitate the building of capacity, leadership skills and expertise within the business subject department.
- Planning documentation was indicative of high standards that are maintained within the department. The planning folder contains relevant school-based policies and strategies to develop students' numeracy and literacy skills.
- The layout and detail in each business subject's curricular plan is good. Currently, the addition of a range of methodologies used in the teaching of each topic is in progress. This will facilitate the plan's use as a manual for the delivery of each business subject in the classroom.
- The sequencing of topics in junior cycle should be re-considered. It is advisable to incorporate book-keeping elements throughout the three-year cycle so as to facilitate the integration of theory elements into book-keeping.

- An analysis of results in the certificate examinations is carried out by business teachers each year. It is commendable that business teachers plan to compare students' results in business subjects to grades obtained in other subjects so that an evaluation can be made on performance.
 - Business teachers are in the process of developing an ICT resource folder for each business subject.
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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, 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

Area 1: Observations on the content of the inspection report

The Board of Management acknowledges the value of this inspection report and is conscious of the recommendations contained in it. This school is committed to the promotion and development of excellence in the provision of business subjects. The Board welcomes the main findings in the report which confirm that the quality of teaching is good, Entrepreneurial activities in Transition Year are of a very high standard, students are encouraged and supported to achieve to their highest potential, the very good provision of business education in the school and the good planning activities of the business subject department.

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 business department, as part of its on-going planning practices, will consider the various recommendations made.