

**An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna**

**Department of Education and Skills**

**Subject Inspection of Business Subjects  
REPORT**

**Blackwater Community School  
Lismore, Co. Waterford  
Roll number: 91509E**

**Date of inspection: 02 May 2014**



**A N R O I N N | D E P A R T M E N T O F  
O I D E A C H A I S | E D U C A T I O N  
A G U S S C I L E A N N A | A N D S K I L L S**

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

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**INFORMATION ON THE INSPECTION**

<b>Dates of inspection</b>	01 and 02 May 2014
<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><li>• Discussion with first and sixth-year students</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Observation of teaching and learning during seven class periods: three single and two double lessons</li><li>• Examination of students' work</li><li>• Feedback to principal and teachers</li></ul>

**MAIN FINDINGS**

- The quality of teaching in the lessons observed was good in general with some examples of fair practice.
- Learning was good in the few lessons where students were given autonomy over their learning.
- The amount, variety and assessment of students' homework ranged from good to fair.
- There is potential to further develop a visual learning environment in the dedicated classrooms provided for business education.
- The business subjects plan is good in design but there is scope to develop the content and process of business department planning.

**MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS**

- Teachers should incorporate a variety of active learning methodologies, more effective use of information and communication technology (ICT) and the further development of a visual learning environment into their practice.
- Questioning strategies and assessment for learning (AfL) practices should be developed and strengthened in all lessons.
- There should be agreement among the teachers regarding the type and quality of homework assigned to students, and written formative feedback should be given to students, where appropriate.
- The content of the business subjects plan and each curricular plan should be developed collaboratively as a manual on how to provide the best possible business education in the school.

## **INTRODUCTION**

Blackwater Community College, a co-educational school, has a current enrolment of 764 students. The school offers Business Studies in junior cycle, and Accounting and Business as optional subjects in the Leaving Certificate programme. Business education is compulsory in the school's optional Transition Year (TY) programme

## **TEACHING AND LEARNING**

- The quality of teaching ranged from fair to good in the lessons observed and generally, was good. While there were instances of good practice in most lessons, there were also scope for improvement in teaching practice.
- Learning was good in the few lessons where students were given autonomy over their learning. In other lessons, students were not sufficiently involved in leading their own learning, as there was an overemphasis on instructional teaching
- In one lesson, students worked in small groups. However, there were many opportunities for students to work in a collaborative manner in other lessons but these were not availed of. The use of co-operative learning and active learning methodologies, such as role play, should be provided where appropriate so that students can actively experience, process and apply their learning.
- In lessons that had a book-keeping focus, there was good integration of book-keeping practice with theoretical knowledge. A good step-by-step approach with an emphasis on teaching for understanding was adopted by teachers and this enabled students to become familiar with concepts and practice. Teachers gave individual support and guidance to students when required in an affirming manner.
- Questioning strategies were used more effectively in some lessons than others. In most lessons, there was an overemphasis on global and lower-order rather than targeted and higher-order questions. It is advisable to have an appropriate mix of questioning strategies in all lessons.
- ICT was used as a teaching aid to display solutions to worked questions and in one lesson, a video clip was played. The use of ICT should be further developed so as to give a real-life and dynamic learning focus to business education by accessing relevant electronic resources.
- The development of student's communicative, evaluative and ICT skills are good in TY. All students interview and complete a project on a local entrepreneur. Students also have good opportunities to develop their enterprise skills through their participation in enterprise competitions.
- Learning outcomes were not shared with students in any of the lessons observed. It is advisable that learning outcomes in terms of 'what students should and could know and be able to do' be outlined at the outset of all lessons. The planned learning outcomes should be revisited towards the end of each lesson to assess students' learning, affirm effort and clarify points of information.

- In all lessons observed, homework was assigned to students. As evidenced from a sample of homework journals from each lesson, this practice was not consistent. It is advised that all students are assigned an appropriate variety and quantity of homework in each lesson.
- Students are commonly assessed where appropriate and there was evidence of the use of regular in-class assessments by some teachers. However, in the samples of students' homework and test copybooks viewed, there was no evidence of any written evaluative or affirming comments. It is recommended that AfL techniques be used in business education so as to further enhance the learning experience for students.
- Students are encouraged to achieve to their highest potential. Uptake of business subjects at higher level is good as are the subsequent outcomes in certificate examinations.

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

- All first-year students sample Business Studies and have the opportunity to attain some financial literacy skills and to make a well-informed decision on subject choices for second year. The uptake of the optional subject, Business Studies, in second year 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. The uptake of Accounting is particularly good.
- Class-period provision for all business subjects is good. There is a suitable blend of single and double-class periods for business subjects.
- Business teachers are provided with their own base classrooms. There are a few displays of visual learning resources in some of these classrooms. The potential to create a visual learning environment should be further exploited by all business teachers.
- All teachers of business subjects are subject specialists with up-to-date knowledge of their subject and relevant topical issues. In the context of providing business education as dynamic and developing, teachers should engage formally in continuing professional development, where provided.

#### **PLANNING AND PREPARATION**

- The business subject department is well established. A co-ordinator is in place and in line with good practice, this role should rotate among team members.
- Regular subject department meetings are held. It is advised that more detailed minutes of meetings be maintained so as to provide a comprehensive résumé of items discussed. While, most discussions pertain to necessary organisational aspects of the department, good teaching and learning pedagogy should also be included as a standing item on the agenda.
- Subject plans have been developed for all business subjects and contain aspects of good planning. However, the approach to planning needs to be more informative and developmental. The business subjects plan should inform the school community including current and future business teachers on how business education is delivered in the school.
- The subject plan articulates the strategies that the school employs for students with special educational needs. The plan could detail the specific strategies that business teachers use in business education. The details of the numeracy and literacy strategies

used in business education should also be noted in the plan and the linking of targets from the school's self-improvement plan to the practices used in business education should also be documented.

- The expertise and experience in the business subjects department could be shared through the development of each subject's curricular plan thus ensuring that all business students experience the curriculum in a similar and consistent manner. This can be achieved by linking each topic with its learning outcomes, resources, differentiated learning strategies and teaching and assessment methodologies.
- The TY module gives students a taste of the three business subjects in senior cycle and facilitates the development of enterprise activities. The module conforms to the ethos of the TY programme
- The majority of teachers had their own electronic resources for use in lessons. The development of a subject department electronic folder to store and facilitate sharing of current and new electronic resources and information should be actively pursued.

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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 Business Department is satisfied with the report.

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

Each of the recommendations have been implemented or in the process of being implemented as indicated by the Business Department to the Principal.