

**An Roinn Oideachais agus Eolaíochta**

**Department of Education and Science**

**Subject Inspection of Business Subjects  
REPORT**

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

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**AN ROINN OIDEACHAIS  
AGUS EOLAÍOCHTA | DEPARTMENT OF  
EDUCATION  
AND SCIENCE**

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

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**THIS SUBJECT INSPECTION REPORT**

This report has been written following a subject inspection in Rice College, Westport. It presents the findings of an evaluation of the quality of teaching and learning in business subjects and makes recommendations for the further development of the teaching of these subjects in the school. The evaluation was conducted over two days during which the inspector visited classrooms and observed teaching and learning. The inspector interacted with students and teachers, examined students' work, and had discussions with the teachers. The inspector reviewed school planning documentation and teachers' written preparation. Following the evaluation visit, the inspector provided oral feedback on the outcomes of the evaluation to the principal and subject teachers. 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.

**SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT**

In Rice College Westport, Business Studies is a core subject for the first year of the junior cycle and an optional subject thereafter. At the end of first year, students are required to choose two subjects from Art, Craft, Design; Business Studies and modern languages. For the remainder of the junior cycle, Business Studies is block timetabled for the purpose of facilitating the study of the subject at ordinary level for a small group of students. The remaining two concurrent class groups are taught the subject to its highest level, and students of these class groups are encouraged to take the subject at higher level in the Junior Certificate, subject to ability. At present there is no provision for common assessments in the first year of the cycle. It is recommended that arrangements are put in place by the team of teachers for common assessments, based on the already agreed common content plan, for all first-year students, so that the basis of decision-making for the ordinary level group in the second and third year of the cycle is standardised.

At senior cycle, students have a wide programme and subject choice as the school provides the Transition Year Programme (TY) as an option for students, and following this, either the Leaving Certificate (LC) or the Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA). All three business subjects, Accounting, Business and Economics, are offered as options in a broad range of optional subjects, sixteen in all. Students are given a free choice of five of these subjects, out of which four will be offered based on subject option bands that are established based on student choice from year to year. "Ab initio" study of business subjects is catered for at senior cycle in line with syllabus principles. Economics is currently not a favoured option for students. As a result of planned curriculum co-operation by the school with the neighbouring girls' school, there may be scope for take up of this subject in the future. With this in mind, it is recommended that the existing TY business module is reviewed with a view to re-balancing it towards more economic-related activity. LC students may be eligible for the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP) based on subject options for the LC. It is noted that access to the LCVP is restricted for a

small number of students, who may not have chosen a modern language, as one of their optional subjects for the junior cycle, and consequently the benefits of the LCVP Link Modules are lost to these students. In the interest of maintaining the wide programme provision for all students, it is recommended that access to LCVP should be available to all qualifying students by providing a module in a modern European language, in line with programme requirements and Circular Letter M06/05. Overall, students are well supported in arrangements for subject choices at junior and senior cycle through effective targeting of guidance resources under the Guidance Enhancement Initiative, linked to teacher advice, communication with parents, and open nights at key points in the cycles.

Class period provision for business subjects is in line with syllabus requirements. Business Studies is taught for four class periods per week, and both Accounting and Business are provided six class periods each per week. The TY business module has two class periods per week for each of two TY groups, and the LCVP Link Modules are taught for three class periods per week. There is a good distribution of periods across the school week and an appropriate blend of single and double periods. Concern was noted in the business subjects plan about the undesirability of double class periods for Business at senior cycle. The need for such double periods arises because of block timetabling of business subjects with practical subjects. It may be possible to continue providing double periods in this regard and also to meet the concern about Business by spanning one double period across two school days, if appropriate.

The school has very good Information and Communications Technology (ICT) facilities. It has two well-equipped rooms, one with twenty-five computers, and the other, which is mainly used for learning support and resource teaching, with eight computers. There is a demonstration room with an interactive whiteboard, and all rooms in the school are broadband enabled. The school is pro-active in supporting the business teachers by supplying, on a phased basis, a laptop and data projector for use in teacher-based classrooms. Students receive formal tuition in ICT in the first year of the junior cycle, in TY, and for the remainder of the senior cycle through participation in either LCVP or LCA. TY students take the European Computer Driving Licence (ECDL) as well as a module in digital multimedia. Teachers are well-equipped to take on the challenge of integrating ICT into teaching and learning of business subjects over time, as many have already received their ECDL. It is recommended that, in the context of subject planning, the business teachers identify how best to fulfil syllabus objectives relating to ICT, especially in Business Studies.

Most business teachers are classroom based. This has created an opportunity to develop a relevant range of business resources for sharing among the teachers as well as the display of business-related materials that may act as a motivating influence for business students. There was evidence of such displays in most of the base classrooms visited. There is scope to maximise the value of teacher-based classrooms, thus it is recommended that the business teachers, as part of ongoing subject planning, explore this.

Apart from the small Business Studies group in second and third year, students are taught in mixed-ability groups. The needs of students are to the forefront in the school, through the caring and sensitive approach being adopted by the business teachers, and management roles in the school. In the context of ongoing subject planning, it is recommended that commonly used business terms and calculations are identified, and shared with learning-support and resource teachers, with a view to including these terms in the extra tuition that is available to specific students in English and Mathematics. The Special Education Support Service at [www.sess.ie](http://www.sess.ie) may prove useful in this.

## **PLANNING AND PREPARATION**

The school is involved in school development planning (SDP). The business teachers have developed a plan for the range of business subjects, including the TY module. The focus of the plan is mainly on content, arrangements for class formation to meet the needs of students, and a targeted approach to the acquisition of resources over time. There are clear practices in place regarding the deployment of teachers and teaching continuity from year to year. There are good planning structures in place, and teachers meet frequently, not only to support each other, but also to review progress in implementing the agreed plan. Such meetings were seen to be supportive of colleagues at junior cycle, especially in sharing expertise and experience in the teaching of Business Studies. As subject planning continues there is scope to ensure that the process is all-inclusive, and builds on an extended range of topics over time. These topics include arranging common assessment for all first year Business Studies students, reviewing the TY business module, continuing to develop the use of ICT in the teaching and learning of Business Studies, maximising the use of teacher-based classrooms, and examining co- and cross-curricular links, especially in special education.

There is a good approach to co-curricular activity for business subjects, especially through TY and LCVP work experience aspects of each programme, and the Enterprise Education elements of TY, LCVP and LCA, as well as industrial visits and the use of guest speakers on selected business topics that support and enhance learning. The school is a member of the Consumer Association of Ireland (CAI). This facilitates awareness among students of consumer-related issues. Cross- and co-curricular activity is a topic that could usefully form part of ongoing subject planning, as some of the business teachers also teach other related subjects, especially in TY and LCVP.

Individual lessons observed were linked directly to the team plan. Valuable resources have been built up, as teaching and learning aids. These include extensive reference material, prepared worksheets, worked solutions, and PowerPoint displays of summary materials for use by students as memory aids. Such aids to teaching and learning may be usefully shared with colleagues in the context of ongoing subject planning.

## **TEACHING AND LEARNING**

There was a clear structure and approach to all lessons, with continuity from lesson-to-lesson built in through homework assignments. Teacher-led questioning of previous lesson material and monitoring of homework completion was a common approach observed. There was a good blend of teaching methodologies applied, ranging from whole-class input linked to support for individual students around key learning points that may have presented difficulties for some students. The pace of lessons observed was suited to the needs of students. Every effort was made to ensure that all students understood specific aspects of lessons before moving onto new material. In fact, the needs of students were to the forefront in lessons. The chalkboard was the main visual aid used to show the build up of solutions to accounting type questions at junior and senior cycle. In one lesson observed effective use was made of ICT as a means of displaying relevant notes for students using prepared PowerPoint slides. Experiences in the use of ICT as an aid to teaching and learning may form part of ongoing discussions in subject planning.

Classroom management was good and planned activities were effectively managed. Students were well behaved. Communication between teachers and their students was, in all cases, clear. Students were on task and motivated. Classroom atmospheres were positive and affirming of student effort. There was good rapport between teachers and students. Interactions were positive and well integrated into the flow of the lessons observed. Overall, the level of classroom management and the nature of classroom atmospheres were conducive to the creation of an effective teaching and learning environment.

Through effective involvement of students in the flow of lessons observed, students not only displayed a good understanding of business concepts, but also a good ability to apply these concepts. This was evident in the ability of students to apply double-entry principles in accounting type lessons at both junior and senior cycle, and also in using up-to-date business stories and examples to explain other business concepts and knowledge. The web site of the Business Studies Teachers' Association of Ireland (BSTAI) [www.bstai.ie](http://www.bstai.ie) has useful links that may support students in using the internet as a valuable research tool for the full range of business subjects.

#### **ASSESSMENT AND ACHIEVEMENT**

The school has a comprehensive whole-school policy on homework. This policy is linked to the school mission statement. The policy sets out aims and expectations for homework, and indicates the roles of teachers, students and parents in this regard. There are clear procedures in place, with the students' journal being the pivotal point between home and school. Parents are required to sign student journals weekly; teachers may use the journals to record notes for the attention of parents; year heads, and or class advisers, monitor the journals regularly. Progress reports are issued to parents twice per year, and parent-teacher meetings are held once per year for each year group. Students attend parent-teacher meetings with their parents and the students' journal is a source document around which these meetings occur. Overall there is a good whole-school approach to homework.

An examination of a sample of student homework copybooks and teachers' records in lessons observed, highlighted good practice regarding homework and assessment in the business subjects' area. This practice is in line with the whole-school policy. A good build up of homework consistent with the sequencing of the lesson plans was evident, and an extensive range of continuous assessments was integrated into normal homework routines. Annotation of homework with affirming and guiding comment was generally evident, as was a high level of record keeping among the teachers. As subject planning continues, there is scope for the team of business teachers to share and formalise their own best practice in both homework and assessment, in line with the whole school policy. The web site of the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) [www.ncca.ie](http://www.ncca.ie) has useful information on its Assessment for Learning (AfL) Project that may assist this process.

Students are encouraged to take business subjects at their highest level, subject to ability, and decisions regarding levels are taken at the latest possible time. This is standard practice, except in the case of the small group of students, who are taught mainly for ordinary level for the second and third year of the junior cycle. Students are supported in making decisions for levels in the State examinations through a combination of teacher advice, and meetings with the guidance counsellor on a needs sensitive basis. Parents of some students are consulted, where it is believed that these students are choosing levels that are not matching their perceived ability.

## **SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

The following are the main strengths and areas for development identified in the evaluation:

- Business Studies is a core subject for the first year of the junior cycle and an optional subject thereafter. Students have a wide programme and subject choice.
- At present there is no provision for common assessments in the first year of the cycle.
- Access to the LCVP is restricted for a small number of students.
- Students are well supported in arrangements for subject choices at both junior and senior cycle.
- Class period provision for business subjects is in line with syllabus requirements, and there is a good distribution of periods across the school week and an appropriate blend of single and double periods.
- The school has very good ICT facilities, and is pro-active in supporting the business teachers and students for ICT.
- Most business teachers are classroom based, and displays of teacher-generated business materials were evident.
- The needs of students are to the forefront in the school.
- The team of business teachers has developed a plan for the range of business subjects.
- There is a good approach to co-curricular activity for business subjects.
- Individual lessons observed were linked directly to the team plan.
- There was a good blend of teaching methodologies, ranging from whole-class input linked to support to individual students.
- Classroom management and classroom atmospheres were conducive to the creation of an effective teaching and learning environment.
- Students not only displayed a good understanding of business concepts, but also a good ability to apply these concepts.
- The school has a comprehensive whole-school policy on homework.
- Students are encouraged to take business subjects at their highest level, subject to ability.

As a means of building on these strengths and to address areas for development, the following recommendations are made:

- The school should ensure that access to LCVP is available to all qualifying students by providing a modern European language module in line with programme requirements and Circular Letter M06/05.
- The business teachers should arrange for common assessments, based on the already agreed common content plan, for all first year students.
- The existing TY business module should be reviewed with a view to re-balancing it towards more economic-related activity.
- The business teachers should identify how best to fulfil syllabus objectives relating to ICT, especially in Business Studies.
- The value of teacher-based classrooms should be maximised.
- Commonly used business terms and calculations should be identified and shared with learning-support and resource teachers.
- Subject planning should include a focus on cross- and co-curricular activity.
- Best practice in both homework and assessment should be shared and formalised.

Post-evaluation meetings were held with the principal and with the teachers of business subjects at the conclusion of the evaluation at which the draft findings and recommendations of the evaluation were presented and discussed.

## **Appendix**

### **School Response to the Report**

### **Submitted by the Board of Management**



**Area 1: Observations on the content of the inspection report**

Satisfied

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

All suggestions and recommendations as per the report, p.6, will be implemented as time and resources permit.