

**An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna**

**Department of Education and Skills**

**Subject Inspection of Business Subjects  
REPORT**

**Newtown School  
Waterford City, County Waterford  
Roll number: 65010R**

**Date of inspection: 8 December 2010**



**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**

---

**SUBJECT INSPECTION REPORT**

This report has been written following a subject inspection in Newtown School. It presents the findings of an evaluation of the quality of teaching and learning of 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 of the school was given an opportunity to comment on the findings and recommendations of the evaluation; the board chose to accept the report without response.

**SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT**

Newtown School provides the full spectrum of business subjects on its curriculum. In junior cycle students can choose Business Studies and in the compulsory Transition Year Programme (TY) two business-related modules are provided. The Leaving Certificate curriculum includes all three business subjects of Accounting, Business and Economics. The Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP) is also provided by the school and business teachers are involved in its delivery.

Prospective first years choose their optional subjects pre-entry to the school. Business Studies is offered in a band that also contains Technical Graphics and a second modern language, with music as a further option in the band for second year. It is reported that first-year students may change their choices up to the end of September. Each TY student is afforded the opportunity to develop their entrepreneurial skills and the option of choosing a business module. This allows students that are new to business to experience it and consider a business subject as one of the optional Leaving Certificate subjects. Leaving Certificate subject options are generated from student preferences.

The uptake rate of all business subjects in Leaving Certificate is almost twice the uptake rate in junior cycle. Almost all junior cycle Business Studies students continue with business education as do a similar number of students who experience business in TY. It is recommended that senior management and the business subjects department conduct an analysis and review of factors influencing first-year subject choice to ensure students are making an informed decision. As part of this review, the provision of a first-year taster programme should be discussed.

Time allocation for the teaching of business subjects in junior and senior cycle is satisfactory. Students in junior cycle have three class periods in first year and four thereafter. TY Business and Enterprise students have a double and single period. Enterprise is concurrently timetabled to facilitate guest speakers and workshops. In Leaving Certificate, students have one double and three single periods for business subjects. Teachers rotate within and between the junior and senior cycles and remain with their class group throughout the duration of a curriculum cycle.

Classrooms are teacher based and these *de facto* business classrooms are valuable learning environments where print-rich resources and student projects are displayed. While there were some displays of business-related material in business classrooms there is scope to further develop these classrooms as visually stimulating environments. Resources such as business related magazines, books and audio visual resources are located in business teachers' classrooms, the school library and the staff room. It is recommended that planning documentation should include a catalogue of all available paper-based resources and should note their location so as to facilitate their shared use within the business department.

The school's Information and Communication Technology (ICT) facilities are very good. There is a computer suite available for class and individual student use in the school. All business classrooms have good ICT facilities.

All teachers of business subjects are subject specialists. Senior management facilitates attendance at relevant in-service as a means of updating skills and knowledge, and gives financial support for professional development activities and membership of professional associations. While no member of the business subjects department is currently a member of the Business Studies Teachers Association of Ireland (BSTAI), business teachers have availed of Enterprise and LCVP in-service. It was evident that teachers successfully incorporated strategies from these in-service courses in their classroom practice.

#### **PLANNING AND PREPARATION**

The business subjects department has a rotating co-ordinator whose responsibility is to monitor student-teacher progress and to organise meetings and resources. Senior management affords all subject departments planning time once a year. The two business teachers have a very good working relationship and regularly meet informally to discuss issues that pertain to the provision of business education in the school.

A business subjects plan has been developed by the business teachers. The plan includes most of the elements of good planning as outlined in the School Development Planning Initiative (SDPI). It is advisable to include cross-curricular and co-curricular links and the procedures for mentoring newly-appointed and student teachers. The plan should also note the good practices observed in relation to assessment.

There are curriculum plans for each business subject provided in the school. The inclusion of book-keeping in the first-year Business Studies plan is good. Business teachers have embarked on the next step of development of curriculum plans as they align learning outcomes and methodologies to each topic. It is recommended that available resources, differentiated teaching strategies, homework and assessment practices also be included. This will ensure that the good practice observed in classrooms is documented for use by any new member of the business department.

The planning of the TY programme aspires to meet the ideals of the programme. The Business module has aspects of Accounting, Business and Economics. While some of the topics are from the senior cycle curriculum they are delivered in an explorative manner that includes research and project work. Students partake in mini-company competitions through the Enterprise module. Business teachers evaluate the TY programme each year for its effectiveness.

Individual planning and lesson preparation by teachers was very good. During the course of the inspection teachers used resources such as textbooks, newspapers, handouts, question sheets, ICT generated resources and visual aids to progress learning. In planning for lessons there was some very good use of ICT both as an aid to teaching and in providing additional materials to support students in their learning. Business teachers are currently investigating the best platform to host documents and resources so that they can be shared between business teachers and students.

## **TEACHING AND LEARNING**

The standard of teaching and learning was very good. Four lessons, of which two were double periods, were observed as part of this inspection. They included a first-year and second-year Business Studies lesson and lessons in Accounting and Economics. A TY lesson was not observed; however the inspector met with a TY class group where a discussion took place on their experience of business education.

Each lesson observed had a very good and clear structure. Most lessons began with teachers sharing lesson outcomes with students and these were referred to at the end of lessons. In some lessons there was good recapitulation on previous lessons as teachers referred to keywords and asked students to explain them. Teachers skilfully assessed students' understanding of completed homework as they sought not only answers but explanations and examples to support answers. Students were encouraged to take ownership of their own learning as they wrote answers to homework on the board and had to explain the process to their peers.

The range of methodologies used included student research, pair work, use of ICT, group work, graphic organisers, class discussions and teacher-led input. Of particular merit was the use of a variety of methodologies in double lessons which engaged students in learning activities and sought to access various learning styles. Teachers are commended on the good planning and range of learning activities provided in lessons.

A very good step-by-step approach was adopted in lessons that had an accounting focus. Teachers offered individual support to students in addition to checking progress on questions. There was good use of paired work to progress student's understanding. Students' presentation of work was neat and good as it mirrored teachers' own practice. The good practice of teaching book-keeping from first year has facilitated the integration of book-keeping practices with the theoretical elements of the syllabus in all lessons. Data projectors and visuals were employed effectively by teachers to display worked examples and solutions to assignments.

Students exhibited a good understanding of business topics and were competent in the application of their knowledge to real-life situations. Teachers made good references to local and national business enterprises, entrepreneurs and topical economic issues. ICT, newspapers articles and class discussions were effectively used to progress student knowledge, understanding and evaluation of economic and business issues. In a lesson that looked at the national budget ICT was used effectively to play clips of the budget speech to progress understanding and explain terminology. In the same lesson, a selection of current newspaper articles on the national budget was used; this resource and the TV clip served as an impetus for a good class discussion where students were prompted to use analytical and critical evaluation skills.

In all lessons observed, there was good use of teacher questioning to elicit and clarify knowledge, to check student progression and to develop class discussions. Teachers used a mixture of global and student targeted questions. Targeted questions were good; they were mainly higher-order and

served to differentiate learning in the lesson. Student answering was very good. All students' interactions were positively affirmed.

Seating arrangements were conducive to group and pair work and facilitated teacher movement throughout the classroom as they tendered individual support to students. In all lessons observed teachers tendered individual help, clarifications or explanations when required in an affirming manner.

Classroom atmosphere was very good in all lessons. There was a strong sense of the teachers' commitment to supporting individual students in their learning. The rapport between teachers and students was positive, cordial and respectful and this helped to create the effective teaching and learning environment observed.

### **ASSESSMENT**

The business subjects department has devised its own homework and assessment policy. Formal assessments are administered twice a year. Students are also assessed informally at the end of each topic. Good practice was observed in the use of a student test copybook. Each fortnight students in Leaving Certificate completed a long question under timed test conditions. These questions were corrected by the teacher and good evaluative feedback is given to students.

In all lessons observed, the homework assigned was compatible with the learning outcomes of the lesson. Good homework correction practices were observed. The students' work was monitored and in some instances formative feedback was used to help students to identify areas for improvement. In lessons that required a display of a written solution, teachers modelled good practice in neatness and labelling of answers. A selection of students' account books, folders and journals were viewed by the inspector and were found to be neat and well maintained. Students and teachers are commended for the high standards demonstrated in this important aspect of school work.

There are good communication links between the students' home and the business teachers. A formal written report is sent home at the end of each term and students' progress in business subjects is discussed with parents at parent-teacher meetings.

Students are encouraged to achieve to their highest potential. Uptake rates at higher level are very good as are outcomes in certificate examinations. A review of these outcomes is conducted by the principal and teachers in the business department. The outcomes are compared to national norms and used to inform teachers' own practice.

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

The following are the main strengths identified in the evaluation:

- Business subjects have a high profile on the curriculum offered in Newtown School and student uptake of business subjects at Leaving Certificate level is very good.
- Teachers are willing to avail of continuing professional development and use resources and teaching strategies from these in their classrooms.
- The business subjects department works in a collaborative manner, and engages in planning that is student centred and reflective.

- Very good teaching and learning was observed in classrooms. In lessons the variety of methodologies, the linkage to real-life business events, the effective use of ICT and higher-order questioning all served to engage the students in their own learning.
- Students are encouraged and supported to achieve to their highest potential; results are very good in certificate examinations.

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

- An analysis and review of factors influencing subject choice in first year should be conducted. As part of this review, the provision of a taster programme for incoming first years should be considered for discussion.
- Curricular plans for business subjects should include the specific learning outcomes and the range of teaching and learning methodologies to be used for each curriculum topic and the list of resources that can be used to support teaching and learning of business subjects.

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

*Published November 2011*