

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

**Subject Inspection of Business Subjects
REPORT**

**Saint Jarlath's College
Tuam, County Galway
Roll number: 68074M**

Date of inspection: 20 March 2013



**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

INFORMATION ON THE INSPECTION

Dates of inspection	19 and 20 March 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 nine class periods• Examination of students' work• Feedback to principal and teachers

MAIN FINDINGS

- The quality of teaching and learning in the lessons observed ranged from good to very good.
- The most effective approach to mixed-ability teaching observed was when the lesson structure was based on specific learning outcomes.
- Written homework is a key feature of the assessment of students work and though written work is monitored, there is scope to develop the range of formative feedback given to students.
- A range of techniques and approaches to guided learning was evident, especially the use of revision notes though there is scope to vary the approaches used including the use of mnemonics and graphic organisers.
- Teachers' lesson planning and the presentation of work by both teachers and students are very good.
- The subject department functions very well with effective planning and review structures evident, including systems for data collection and analysis.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

- Subject teachers should further develop the use of information and communications technology (ICT), especially the use of spreadsheet applications for the management of corrections within lessons.
 - The department should develop a subject-specific strategy for incorporating project work as an assessment component at junior cycle.
 - The content of business modules within the Transition Year (TY) programme should be reviewed annually to ensure that they meet the needs of the students and the programme.
-

INTRODUCTION

Saint Jarlath's College is a boys-only voluntary secondary school with a current enrolment of 506 students. The school operates under the trusteeship of the Archdiocese of Tuam and in 2009 amalgamated with the nearby Saint Patrick's College. The school provides both the Junior Certificate and Junior Certificate Schools Programme (JCSP) in junior cycle and the Established Leaving Certificate and Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP) at senior cycle. Recently, the school has introduced the TY Programme.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

- The overall standard of teaching and learning in the lessons observed ranged from good to very good. A good mix of activities including opportunities for students to actively engage with lesson content was evident in nearly all of the lessons observed.
- There is scope to broaden the range of questioning approaches used with students, especially more able students, as there is a tendency to ask questions that mainly test recall and fact. Asking more challenging questions that encourage student to interrogate and evaluate the lesson content will develop their higher-order thinking skills.
- ICT is used intermittently in the teaching of business subjects. Among the applications used well are presentation software and multimedia presentations. However, there is scope to extend the use of spreadsheets to present accounting and bookkeeping exercises.
- A review of student journals and students' responses indicated that a good volume of written homework is assigned and completed in business subjects and that the purpose of the homework is to consolidate in-class learning. There was also evidence of teachers monitoring students' homework.
- Best practice was evident when teachers included written evaluative comment on the students' work. In a small number of the lessons very good practice was observed where homework was assigned early in the lesson thereby preparing students for the homework set. This approach is effective and provides scope for the increased use of extension activities to develop higher-order skills.
- The range of examples used to develop applied business knowledge was both current and appropriate to students' needs and interests. However, students should be encouraged to bring in their own examples when covering consumer and budgeting issues thereby allowing them to contextualise theory to real life and further develop financial literacy skills.
- A tendency for support notes to be text-based was observed during the inspection. Students would benefit from additional guidance on alternative methods of note generation. The increased use of mnemonics and graphic organisers is recommended.
- The business department has documented its approach to developing students' literacy skills. This could be strengthened by agreeing strategies for the use of keywords and promoting correct spellings and syntax.
- Work is ongoing on promoting strategies for developing students' numeracy skills. The approach focuses on basic mathematical operations which when fully operational will strengthen students' understanding of the importance of numeracy and accuracy in business.

- Very good use is made of workbooks and textbooks, and the teachers' language register strengthens students' use of subject-specific language. On occasion, there was an overemphasis on exam questions and techniques in non-examination year groups.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- Business Studies is a core subject for students in junior cycle. Time provision for the subject in both junior and senior cycle is good and there is continuity in subject provision with two senior cycle business options, Accounting and Business, offered to students.
- Arising from concerns about curriculum overload, there has been some discussion at management level about the position of Business Studies as a core subject at junior cycle. Using statistical analysis of student outcomes, the business team has strongly advocated for the continuity of Business Studies within the core. In framing their successful proposal to management, the business department demonstrated its capacity for data analysis and review which are core concepts underpinning school self evaluation (SSE).
- Classes are mixed-ability, which is effective in meeting the needs of the students. The subjects are well resourced. It was evident that the teachers have engaged with whole-school and subject-specific professional development programmes. They are also involved in the subject association.
- Detailed analysis of outcomes in the certificate examinations is undertaken both at school and subject department level and students' attainment in the examinations is good, especially at junior cycle.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

- The quality of subject department plans is very good.
- The department has good cohesiveness and strong leadership. This is evident from the interactions at school level, the range of materials available for teaching the subjects and collaboration in subject planning.
- The schemes of work are well laid out with detail on specific learning outcomes, and resources. A range of teaching strategies appropriate to specific learning outcomes has been included and reflects the good practice evident at classroom level.
- Bookkeeping is emphasised in second year and time is built-in for revision in each of the yearly schemes of work. The subject plan indicates that there is flexibility in planning for the delivery of Business at senior cycle. This has not always been the case for Accounting where previously the sequencing of topics was too challenging. The current approach where consideration of students' prior knowledge of the subject and their needs are prioritised should be maintained.
- The recently designed TY business programme is structured in terms of aims and learning outcomes. The programme emphasises the development of students' basic money-management skills in addition to introducing students to a range of business skills. The modular approach adopted provides considerable potential to regularly vary and update the modules, based on the needs and interests of individual TY groups.
- Individual lesson planning was of a very high standard, especially the integration of additional resources.

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 of the school 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 of Saint Jarlath's College welcomes this subject inspection report, as it acknowledges the good work and practices of the business department in the school and acts as a positive guide towards on-going development.

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 has noted the constructive findings and key recommendations in the report and is committed to their implementation.