Subject Inspection of Business Subjects

REPORT

Saint Brigid’s College
Callan, County Kilkenny
Roll number: 61520U

Date of inspection: 24 March 2011
REPORT  
ON  
THE QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN BUSINESS SUBJECTS  

INFORMATION ON THE INSPECTION  

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<th>Dates of inspection</th>
<th>23 and 24 March 2011</th>
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<td><strong>Inspection activities undertaken</strong></td>
<td><strong>Observation of teaching and learning during six class periods</strong></td>
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<td>• Review of relevant documents</td>
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<td>• Discussion with principal and teachers</td>
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MAIN FINDINGS  

- Overall teaching and learning was very good and in the majority of lessons exemplary practice was observed.  
- Learning activities ensured that students enjoyed learning, accessed multiple intelligences, attained good business knowledge and developed key skills.  
- Teachers have devised good homework and assessment practices and use assessment for learning techniques.  
- Business education has a good profile on the school’s curriculum and senior management is supportive of it.  
- The planning, organisational and collaborative practices of the business subjects department are good, and focus is on the learning needs of its student cohort.  
- Curricular plans did not detail the very good practice observed in lessons.  

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS  

- The provision of a double period for Business Studies and an additional class period in first year should be considered by senior management.  
- In each business subject curriculum plan, learning outcomes, teaching methodologies, resources, differentiation strategies and assessment modes should be aligned to each topic.  
- Curricular plans should be sufficiently detailed to record the current very good practice and to serve as a manual for the provision of business education in the school.
INTRODUCTION
St Brigid’s College is a voluntary secondary school which offers Business Studies as a core subject in junior cycle, and Accounting and Business as options in Leaving Certificate. Business education is provided in the school’s optional Transition Year (TY). The school has a current enrolment of 343 female students.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

- Overall teaching and learning was very good and in the majority of lessons exemplary practice was observed.

- In all lessons teachers shared learning outcomes with students, and used good targeted higher-order questioning and an appropriate blend of methodologies to engage students in their learning.

- Exemplary practice was noted in several lessons. In addition to the good practice noted above the use of good co-operative and active learning methodologies, graphic organisers, visual aids and student oral presentation of research work all served to access the various student learning styles.

- The learning activities in almost all lessons ensured that students took leadership of their own learning acquired good business acumen, worked co-operatively with their peers and developed key skills.

- In all lessons students displayed good subject knowledge.

- Teaching aids and information and communication technology (ICT) were used very effectively, although in one lesson the use of a projector would have led to a better use of class time.

- There was a strong sense of teachers’ commitment to supporting and affirming individual students in their learning. A positive and secure learning environment was evident.

- Students are encouraged to achieve to their highest potential and to take business subjects at higher level in certificate examinations, wherein outcomes are good.

- Student copybooks and folders were found to be very well maintained. They were neat, well labelled and dated, and included graphic organisers to recap on the main points of topics.

- Homework was given in all lessons; it reinforced learning and developed students’ skills. In a review of journals it was evident that students regularly receive good and varied homework assignments.

- In almost all lessons there was good practice in relation to monitoring of homework. The use of peer review, emphasis on neat presentation and the articulation of good evaluative guiding comments on students’ work enriched learning.

- The use of a student learning skills profile tool informed business teachers of individual student learning styles and helped them to adapt delivery of lessons for the various styles of learners in lessons.

- Students were regularly assessed and outcomes were communicated to parents and students.
SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- First-year students have three single lessons of Business Studies and four single periods for the remainder of the junior cycle. This is adequate but not generous provision and the good explorative manner in which the subject is taught would benefit from an additional period in first year. This should be considered by senior management.

- The provision of a double period should be considered at some point in the junior cycle, as the book-keeping elements of the syllabus have a practical focus and a double period would ensure completion of topics such as final accounts.

- Students receive good information on subject choices for Leaving Certificate.

- Senior management has endeavoured to maintain Accounting as an option on the Leaving Certificate curriculum and this has resulted in an amalgamation of the current fifth-year and sixth-year classes.

- Business teachers have their own base classrooms. In the majority of these classrooms there were good ICT facilities and there are plans to further develop this resource.

- All business classrooms were good visual learning environments with some very good exhibits of student-generated posters.

- All business teachers teach a range of subjects across both the junior and senior cycle. There is some specialisation at Leaving Certificate which is consistent with the interests of the teachers.

- Business teachers are diligent in ensuring that their subject knowledge is current. They have attended in-service relating to their subjects. As part of whole-school professional development teachers have engaged in broader themes, including ICT development and the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment-sponsored key skills initiative.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

- The planning, organisational and collaborative practices of the business subjects department are good. Planning has the learning needs of its students at its core.

- The business subjects department meets once a term. It is evident from minutes that business teachers are reflective practitioners.

- The business subjects plan contains all the elements of good planning. The list of effective methodologies that a teacher may use in classrooms, the outline of practical advice that is to be given to new business teachers and the department’s own mission for the provision of business education are particularly good.

- All curricular plans can be further enhanced so as to provide a written record of the observed good practice in lessons. The exemplary practice in some lessons can serve as a benchmark, thus ensuring a consistent high standard of delivery in lessons.

- The sequencing of topics in junior cycle should be re-considered. Year three of the cycle is heavily weighted towards book-keeping topics. It is advisable to incorporate book-keeping elements throughout the three-year cycle. This approach will also facilitate the integration of theory elements into book-keeping.

- The curricular plan for Accounting needs to take cognisance of the new development of amalgamating two different year groups. This will require detailed planning on the
sequencing of topics, the introduction of co-operative methodologies such as group work and peer teaching, and the use of teaching aids.

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 evaluation; a response was not received from the board.

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