

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

**Subject Inspection of Business Subjects
REPORT**

**Lucan Community College,
Esker Drive, Lucan,
Co. Dublin
Roll number: 70080T**

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**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 Lucan Community College. 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, deputy principal and subject teachers. 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.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

Lucan Community College provides the full range of business subjects at both junior and senior cycle. A business programme delivered in modules is also included within the Transition Year (TY) programme. The time allocated to the subjects at junior and senior cycle is very good and provision for the business modules within TY is good. The subject department is commended for its policy of open access for students to all senior cycle business options without the pre-requisite of having completed Junior Certificate Business Studies.

Incoming first-year students select the subject from a number of optional subjects prior to entry to the school. Occasionally in previous years the selection was made from a number of pre-set option bands. The school's management indicated that in the current school year the option bands were formulated based on students ranking their preferences and in the context of school resources and the school's policy of providing a broad range of subject options. In recent years approximately one-third of first-year students opted for Business Studies, but the number has been as high as half of the incoming first-year students. At whole-school level, junior cycle students are banded into two groups and initial analysis indicates that proportionately more students from the second band take Business Studies. The subject department, in collaboration with school management, is advised to analyse the pattern of uptake in the subject and the impact, if any, of class assignment on subject selection at junior cycle. In addition, the pattern of uptake of the subjects at senior cycle, including the impact of TY on the uptake of senior cycle business options, should be considered.

There are two base classrooms for the subjects where the existing information and communication technology (ICT) infrastructure is due to be upgraded as the school's ICT development project rolls out. Even within current infrastructure, very effective use is made of ICT by the teachers for the presentation of lesson content, subject and individual lesson planning and managing the correction of student work. This current good practice provides a very good

platform for the effective use by the department of additional ICT resources as they become available.

It is evident that the teachers of the subjects are committed to continuing professional development (CPD). In addition to membership of the subject association on the part of some, others are also involved with internal and external initiatives that focus on teaching and learning. Of particular merit is that when recent staff changes resulted in a new teacher being assigned to Accounting, the teacher developed an individual CPD programme that combined formal in-service with peer support. This indicates that, among the teachers, there is an understanding of the importance of self-learning and coaching strategies for personal professional development.

It was brought to the attention of the school's principal and deputy principal during the subject inspection that the current whole-school timetabling arrangements fall short of what is required with respect to instruction time as directed in circular M29/95 *Time in School*.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

Subject planning is a key strength of the work of the business teachers within the school. The department members work collaboratively and consistently towards developing business provision within the school. Subject department meetings are held regularly, the co-ordinator is appointed for a two-year period and good leadership is provided within the department.

An overall curriculum plan for the subjects has been developed that includes agreed schemes of work for each of the business subjects. Each subject scheme is fully developed and links learning outcomes with suggested methodologies, resources and assessment strategies. A significant resource bank has been developed to support teaching and learning in the subjects and the team is constantly striving to expand the range of these resources. Effective systems are in place to facilitate the sharing of these resources within the team. The subject plan and associated documentation is maintained using a combination of manual and electronic systems. A manual system is used for text-based and older resources and these are filed on a thematic basis. Themes include, for example, consumer studies, distribution, and management. The method of filing allows for ease of use in supporting the range of subjects at both junior and senior cycle, particularly those learning outcomes associated with business theory. These manual resources are stored in one of the base business classrooms and this allows ease of access as required.

The team is cognisant of the potential provided by appropriate use of ICT as a support to subject planning and teaching and learning. In preparation for the upcoming upgrade of the school's ICT network, business teachers have migrated their individual electronic resources to the subject department folder within the school development planning folder on the school's network. Among the vast range of resources available are teacher-developed worksheets, question banks with worked solutions, and individual lesson plans with associated PowerPoint presentations. This is excellent practice.

A modular programme has been developed for business within TY. Of particular merit is the economics module that provides students with the opportunity to engage actively with the subject as the content is broad and students' research and applied skills are developed through the inclusion of project work within the assessment structure for the module. The accounting module within TY as it is currently structured is too closely aligned in content and question format to the Leaving Certificate accounting syllabus and it is recommended that further development of the module, along the format of the other business modules, be progressed. In addition, the current

second-year Business Studies scheme of work should be reviewed to reprioritise the completion of some of the bookkeeping outcomes earlier in the academic year.

Project work that encourages students' application of their ICT skills is included within the junior cycle programme. This is good practice and strengthens co-curricular links. There was very good planning for the integration of additional teaching and learning aids in all business lessons observed.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

The overall standard of teaching and learning observed during the inspection was very good and centred on maximising students opportunities for learning. Of particular merit was the teachers' awareness of the range of students' learning styles and their use of visual material and other media to support teaching in the subjects. Lesson content and pace were appropriate to the class group, subject matter and time available. Teachers ensured that there was good continuity with prior learning and that lessons were well structured and characterised by smooth transitions from one stage to the next.

Excellent practice was evident across all business subjects where students were given opportunities to explore both practical and theoretical aspects of the syllabuses in an integrated way that maximised the learning outcomes. In one fifth-year accounting lesson that included students who had not taken the subject at junior cycle, Club Accounts were introduced using a role play activity. This achieved the objectives of outlining the role of the treasurer, recording transactions and progressing to the preparation of the relevant accounts.

The additional resources used in lessons, including the teacher-developed worksheets, were focused on the development of the students' applied business skills. Very effective use was made of teacher-developed flash cards and worksheets, to introduce students to preparation and presentation of the Trading, Profit and Loss Account in one junior cycle lesson observed. Appropriate use was made of additional support notes in the subjects. In Economics, for example, these included both teacher-developed and student-developed notes and the use of mnemonics and graphic organisers, to accommodate the range of learning styles.

A consistent approach was evident among the team members in relation to the range of teaching methodologies used. Lesson content was summarised and a range of questioning strategies was used. Students were kept actively learning in nearly all lessons observed and this was achieved as a result of thorough individual lesson planning.

Students' use of subject-specific terminology was very strong and it was also evident from a review of students' copybooks in one class that the teacher, in addition to general corrections, was correcting spelling mistakes. This is very good practice as it supports the development of students' literacy skills and prepares them for participation in further education and working life. It is recommended that this practice be included within the assessment criteria set out in the subject plan.

Students were for the most part active in their own learning, in their questioning and in their responses to questions. An examination of students' written, oral and practical work indicated good progress, appropriate to their abilities, in relation to planned learning outcomes. The students observed demonstrated clear knowledge and understanding of topics under study and could apply their learning in a range of business contexts. Learning activities, including oral,

aural, practical and project work, were well managed. The classroom seating arrangements created safe, orderly and participative learning environments. There were some very good examples of pair work and peer assessment used which helped generate and maintain enthusiasm for the subjects. Classroom management strategies are consistently good among the team members and, where active teaching methodologies were prevalent, students' enthusiasm and enjoyment of the subjects was evident.

ASSESSMENT

An overall whole-school assessment policy is in place and though individual teacher's approaches differ, they are consistent overall with the policy in relation to the assignment of homework. There was evidence in many of the lessons observed of the incorporation of *Assessment for Learning* (AfL) principles in the assessment instruments and strategies used.

Of specific merit was the management of the corrections process for bookkeeping and accounting exercises. In the lessons observed, teachers accessed electronic versions of the solutions from the subject department folder on the school network to enable students to quickly assess their own work. Completion and accuracy rates were then reviewed by the teachers moving through the classrooms to check individual students work. Emphasis is also placed on self assessment by students of their work and good practice was evident in the correction of project work within TY. Teachers maintain records of student homework and assessments and the formal assessments used mirror the format of the relevant assessment instruments used within the state examinations.

SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The following are the main strengths identified in the evaluation:

- Whole-school support for the subjects is good, including the timetable provision and the availability of ICT resources.
- The use of the base classrooms to support teaching and learning in the subjects is maximised.
- Teachers are interested in the development of the subjects and engage in continuing professional development.
- Collaborative practice among teachers in the subject department is exceptionally strong which has led to excellent practice with respect to subject planning.
- Classroom management strategies are consistently good among the team members.
- Very good teaching was observed that was focused on maximising student learning.
- The teaching methodologies adopted promote active learning and incorporate strategies to accommodate the range of students' learning styles.
- *Assessment for Learning* (AfL) strategies are incorporated within the teaching of the subjects.

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

- Further development of the accounting module, along the format of the other business modules, within the TY programme is required, and the current second-year Business Studies scheme of work should be reviewed to reprioritise the completion of some of the bookkeeping outcomes earlier in the academic year.
- The subject department, in collaboration with school management, is advised to analyse the pattern of uptake in the subject and the impact, if any, of class assignment on subject selection at junior cycle. In addition, the pattern of uptake of the subjects at senior cycle,

including the impact of TY on the uptake of senior cycle business options, should be considered.

A post-evaluation meeting was held with the principal, deputy principal and subject teachers at the conclusion of the evaluation when 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

We welcome the process of the inspection and the content of this inspection report and have a number of observations we wish to add.

1. The number of exemplars of good practice listed in the report is welcomed and the Board commends the teachers involved on their good work.
2. The Board commends the manner in which the students participated in the Inspection process and took the opportunity to demonstrate their knowledge, skills and copy work.
3. At a time when resources are tight, this report demonstrates the importance of good planning, strong professional development practices, collaboration, and teaching that maximises student learning. The capacity of the teachers involved to demonstrate these traits despite the decrease in available resources is praised by the Board.
4. Since the completion of the subject inspection, a PC and Interactive Whiteboard has been installed into every classroom and staff training is being offered in integrating ICT into the teaching and learning process.
5. Given the national focus on improving Language, Literacy and Numeracy skills across the curriculum, the report's recognition of the importance of a teacher correcting spelling mistakes as well as general errors is welcomed.

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

We commend the focus of the report on the teaching and learning observed in the school. We accept the spirit of the recommendations for further development and are already working towards achieving many of them. Our Business Department meetings have already discussed the draft report and recommendations.

1. The school management has begun the process of addressing the shortfall in instruction time as directed in circular M29/95.
2. The Business department is working to further develop the Accounting module in TY and to streamline the departmental schemes of work to encourage greater consistency across different classes.
3. Regarding the recommendation made to analyse the pattern of uptake of Business subjects in 1st year and Senior cycle, the Board wishes to state that in line with the College's policy of offering a broad and balanced curriculum, it continues to offer a range of Business subjects while ensuring an appropriate range of subjects from other disciplines are also available. Increasing the number of students engaged in Business subjects could effectively remove another subject from the curriculum unless the DES supplied additional teaching resources. This year an additional Business class is being offered to incoming 1st year students as a result of the demand and the available resources. The subject department will continue to engage with school management in regard to the Options process.
4. The staff council has listed the issue of class assignment in 1st year (i.e. a review of our current banding system) as a priority issue for the Planning Committee to engage with in the coming year.
5. Overall the teachers involved welcomed the opportunity to have their good practice reaffirmed and to learn from the suggestions and recommendations of the Inspector.
6. The Business department summarised the draft subject inspection report at a recent staff meeting highlighting the main strengths identified in the report and the key

recommendations. This allows the learning of one subject department to be disseminated throughout the school.