

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

**Subject Inspection of Business Subjects
REPORT**

**Borrisokane Community College
Borrisokane, County Tipperary
Roll number: 72370P**

Date of inspection: 20 November 2012



**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

Date of inspection	20 November 2012
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 five class periods• Examination of students' work• Feedback to principal and teachers

MAIN FINDINGS

- The quality of the teaching and learning observed was good.
- Teachers make good use of practical work and group work within lessons to support students' learning.
- Very effective use is made of information and communication technology (ICT) to support teaching and learning in the subjects.
- The subject plans are well developed but there is scope to alter the sequencing of units within subjects to meet the interests of students and their prior experience of the subjects.
- Students' contributions are encouraged through frequent oral questioning and use of examples; however students' engagement with this aspect of lessons varied.
- Very good use of comment-based assessment by teachers is evident that is consistent with good assessment for learning practice.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

- Questioning strategies should be further developed to ensure a greater balance in question types and improved response rates among students.
 - The subject department should agree a common approach to the use of higher-level outcome verbs in the oral and written questioning strategies used.
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INTRODUCTION

Borrisokane Community College is a co-educational school operating under the auspices of Tipperary North Vocational Education Committee (VEC). The school has 524 students currently enrolled and Business Studies and Business are offered as optional subjects in junior and senior cycle respectively. Office Administration and Customer Care (OACC) is an elective module for students of the Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) programme. The school's curriculum also includes an optional Transition Year (TY) programme.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

- The quality of the teaching and learning observed was good.
- Teachers' use of ICT to support students' learning, particularly towards developing students' applied and analytical skills is of a very high quality. One excellent example was observed of the use of a spreadsheet package to demonstrate the effect of changes in income and expenditure on a budget which supported the development of students' analytical skills in a practical and visual way.
- In all lessons students' contributions were encouraged through pair and group work. Clear well-structured worksheets supported the successful completion of group work tasks in the lessons.
- Students' contributions were encouraged through the use of questions and the range of lesson activities used. In a number of lessons, a gender imbalance in the levels of student participation in classroom discussions was evident, with lower levels of female student participation evident. Broadening the range of examples used to initiate discussions should improve the participation rates of all students in whole-class discussion.
- In one lesson role play was used to present two consumer-focused issues in retailing. These were prepared and presented by students and used as a lead into group work. This approach worked well in allowing students to lead the learning and direct the successful completion of the associated group work.
- The whole-school keyword strategy for teaching and learning was used with first-years. The system used, which centres on students recording the keywords in their class work copybooks provides good potential to support the learning needs of students.
- Written questions assigned for class work and homework should include additional higher-level outcome verbs in order to develop students' higher-order thinking skills, especially among the more able students.
- The pace of delivery of learning outcomes within each subject is fast in order to facilitate revision and focus on preparation for examinations. Integrating revision at regular intervals could reinforce learning and improve retention of key skills and concepts.
- There is evidence of very good approaches in providing students with detailed constructive written feedback on their homework. This is consistent with good *Assessment for Learning* (AfL) practice.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE-SCHOOL SUPPORT

- The time allocation for the subjects in both cycles is good. All first-year students take a taster programme in the subject. Following participation in the taster programme, students rank their subject preferences which are then used to generate the optional subject bands.
- Each year one first-year class group for Business Studies is formed comprising approximately twenty-five to thirty percent of the year group. While accepting that the school offers a broad number of subject options this represents a relatively low percentage of the cohort, which has consequences for the uptake of the subject in senior cycle. It is advisable that the subject department should take a more active role in monitoring and promoting the uptake rates of Business Studies each year.
- Phase one of the school's redevelopment is complete and all business teachers have been assigned classrooms in the newly developed building. The rooms are well appointed and the teachers have made very good use of the resources, particularly ICT to support teaching and learning in the subjects.
- The school management's decision to include OACC as an elective within the LCA, with the added dimension of being delivered in a multi-grade setting is challenging for the subject teacher. However, good efforts are being made to acquire the skills and knowledge necessary for the effective delivery of the module and this provides evidence of the willingness of the teachers to engage in self-directed continuing professional development (CPD).
- There is strong adherence by the subject teachers to the whole-school assessment policy, in particular the AfL strategies outlined in the policy.
- The subject department structure provides good support for the induction of new teachers and those undertaking the Postgraduate Diploma in Education (PGDE).

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

- The overall subject plan is very well presented in electronic format. In particular, it incorporates features which make it easy for the user to navigate through the document and improves its accessibility.
- Positive features of the plan include its incorporation of whole-school strategies including, school self evaluation (SSE), literacy and numeracy, special educational needs and the overarching aim for the subjects is stated clearly and is student centred.
- Work is ongoing on the associated schemes of work and the school's focus on SSE provides a framework where the subject teachers can explore teaching approaches as a support to students' learning in the subjects.
- The subject department has demonstrated capacity for reflective practice in subject planning. An example of this is the revised scheme of work for first-year students which was triggered by the teachers' engagement with PGDE students.
- Analysis of the results attained by students in state examinations is undertaken. There is a positive increase in the number of students taking the subjects at higher level in recent

years, and the department has set targets to increase the proportion of higher grades attained by students.

- Individual lessons were well planned with good preparation of additional material and resources.
- Very good record-keeping practices are evident from a review of TY and LCA student folders and the sample of teacher-generated student records reviewed. LCA student folders should include a key assignment sheet so that students can monitor their own progress and thus strengthen student self-assessment.

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 on the findings and recommendations of the report; the board chose to accept the report without response.