

**An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna**

**Department of Education and Skills**

**Subject Inspection of Business Subjects  
REPORT**

**The High School  
Rathgar, Dublin 6  
Roll number: 60670L**

**Date of inspection: 01 November 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**

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**SUBJECT INSPECTION REPORT**

This report has been written following a subject inspection in The High School, Rathgar. 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 this subject in the school. The evaluation was conducted over one day 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 was given an opportunity to comment in writing on the findings and recommendations of the evaluation; a response was not received from the board.

**SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT**

Business education is offered in each of the school's programmes. Business Studies is an optional subject in junior cycle, there are business-related modules on the school's compulsory Transition Year programme (TY). In Leaving Certificate all three business subjects of Accounting, Business and Economics are provided.

First-year students choose their optional subjects prior to entry. Students choose a subject from each of two groups, both of which include Business Studies. However, the uptake of Business Studies is low. The school strongly encourages students to include a modern language as one of their subject choices and, while the commitment to modern languages is commendable, it has an impact on the uptake of other optional subjects, including Business Studies, in the present option system. It is therefore recommended that senior management review the way in which optional subjects are offered to first-year students. The possibility of providing a subject fair or taster programme for new students, and of including modern European languages in the core curriculum, should be considered.

For the duration of TY, students follow a core curriculum. They choose a subject from two options groups and complete a programme of activities and subjects on a modular basis. All students complete a module on 'Financial Survival Skills'. Business with an enterprise focus is offered in group two and it is currently a popular choice for students. In group one Business and Accounting is offered as foundation courses for the Leaving Certificate. These are primarily aimed at students who have not taken Business Studies in the junior cycle. This good provision of business education in TY gives students new to business an opportunity to engage with it before making subject choices for the Leaving Certificate.

On completion of TY, students have the option to take at least one of the optional business subjects for the Leaving Certificate. Students are surveyed in TY and the option bands are derived based on their preferences. The process of subject selection is similar to that in junior cycle and once again students and their parents receive an informative handout detailing the selection

process, the curriculum, a short descriptor of each subject and a brief list of the essential subjects required for entry into some third level courses. There are four option groups offering eighteen discrete subjects, students choose a subject from each option band. Considering the numbers taking Business Studies in junior cycle, the uptake of business subjects in Leaving Certificate is very good.

The allocation of time periods to Business Studies is very good; first-year students have four class periods per week and second-year and third-year students have five. TY students are allocated three class periods per week for the business and accounting subjects and four periods for the six-week module on financial survival skills. Leaving Certificate students have five class periods for business subjects.

Senior management allocates an annual budget to the business subjects department; it is used to purchase resources such as visual teaching aids, multimedia resources, stationery for class use, business department laptops and membership fees for the Business Studies Teachers Association of Ireland (BSTAI). Teachers are classroom based and as a result their classrooms have become *de facto* business specialist rooms. Each business classroom is equipped with a data projector, computer and access to internet and multimedia equipment. There are some displays of business-related newspaper articles and visual teaching aids in classrooms. However, there is scope to further develop the display of visual resources and student-generated posters and project work in all classrooms where business education is provided.

All business teachers have good up-to-date knowledge of their subjects and topical business issues. Currently, business teachers are not active members of the subject association and were not aware of the Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST) current provision in continuing professional development courses. In the context that Business and Economics are dynamic subjects it would be prudent for teachers to engage in continuing professional development. There was evidence of self-learning among the teaching team as they have informally explored Assessment for Learning techniques (AfL) and, as part of a whole-school initiative, formally updated their information and communication technology (ICT) skills. The school facilitates student teachers in their teaching practice and at the time of the inspection established business teachers were proactively mentoring and supporting a business student teacher.

## **PLANNING AND PREPARATION**

The planning and evaluation work of the business subjects department is managed by a coordinator whose post is linked to the school's post of responsibility system. Agendas and minutes are prepared for the once-a-term formal planning meetings. The records of these meetings indicate that a broad range of topics including analysis of student outcomes in examinations are discussed.

The business subjects department has a programme pertaining to the teaching of all business subjects. This programme contains some of the elements outlined in the School Development Planning Initiative (SDPI). The contextual factors pertaining to student access to business education and the strategies used to differentiate teaching should also be noted. It is desirable to adopt a collaborative team approach in compiling all of the business subject plans. This approach will facilitate the sharing of best practice and knowledge and will ensure that students will receive a similar teaching and learning experience at the various stages of their business

education. There are resources available that may assist in this planning process on the school Development Planning Initiative website (SDPI) at [www.sdpi.ie](http://www.sdpi.ie).

On the Business Studies scheme of work, good practice was noted as students are introduced to book-keeping in first year. However, there are no common assessment practices in place and the order and delivery of topics is left to the discretion of individual business teachers. It is advisable that business teachers make a collaborate decision on the timing of topics so as to facilitate the good practice of common assessment. The aim of a subject plan is not to be prescriptive but to provide a progressive and evaluative framework for the provision of business education. It is recommended in all business curriculum plans to align to each curricular topic its learning outcomes, the resources available, the range of assessment and teaching methodologies and differentiation strategies.

In the programme of work for TY 'Business Enterprise' the listed teaching methodologies include practical work, negotiated learning, classroom discussion, computer-based learning, group work and teacher input. These methodologies are requirements due to the practical nature of the enterprise module. The content of the TY Accounting and Business foundation course is mainly from the Leaving Certificate syllabus. This is acceptable only if the material is presented and explored in a way that is original and stimulating and significantly different from approaches in other curriculum programmes. It was not evident from planning documentation if this was the case as no methodologies were listed. When designing TY modules, it is advisable for business teachers to access the website of the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) [www.action.ncca.ie/en/key-skills](http://www.action.ncca.ie/en/key-skills) for guidance on the type of methodologies that can assist in the development of the desired key skills of the TY programme.

In lessons visited teachers' own individual planning and lesson preparation was good. All materials and resources used in lessons such as handouts, student stationery and visual presentations were organised and prepared in advance.

## **TEACHING AND LEARNING**

During the course of the inspection five lessons were observed: a lesson each of Accounting and Economics in Leaving Certificate, a TY Business lesson and a first-year and second-year Business Studies lesson. The overall standard of teaching and learning in business subjects was good. Lessons observed were well structured and followed a logical sequence of activities. In most lessons learning outcomes were outlined.

The methodologies used were teacher-led discussions and instructions, questioning, graphic organisers and use of ICT. In most lessons teaching methodologies were mainly traditional with the emphasis on teacher input rather than that of students. To access the varied student learning styles, it is recommended that active and co-operative learning methodologies be incorporated into teachers' pedagogical practice.

In most lessons observed, there was very good use of teacher questioning to elicit and clarify knowledge, to check student progression and to develop class discussions and participation. In most lessons, teachers used a mixture of global and targeted questions. Targeted questions were mainly higher-order and served to progress learning in the lesson. Student answering reflected good use of business terminology and knowledge. In senior cycle lessons students were encouraged to expand on their reasoned answers and to give real-life examples to clarify their explanations.

In lessons that had a book-keeping focus there was appropriate integration of theory elements, and good use and explanation of terminology while a proper sequential approach was adopted by all teachers. Teachers modelled good practice in question layout and reminded students of the need for clear labelling and neatness in their work. Teachers moved around the classroom offering individual support and checked progress on practical questions. Use should be made of paired work to encourage co-operation and shared learning among the students when completing practical exercises.

In one lesson a PowerPoint presentation was used as a revision aid and in another the data projector was used to display solutions to a book-keeping question. The judicious use of ICT and multimedia as teaching aids, for research purposes and to access relevant news stories, current affairs programmes and case studies will help to engage student interest and deepen business acumen. There is potential to use ICT in this way in the majority of business lessons. The website of the BSTAI and the Department-sponsored website [www.businessandenterprise.slss.ie/](http://www.businessandenterprise.slss.ie/) have useful resources and links that teachers and students may find of benefit for use in and out of the classroom.

Business students are taught in mixed-ability settings. From an observation of lessons and examination of student work, it was evident that teachers differentiate their teaching in order to address all ability levels in the classroom. The school's booklet 'Information for staff' contains advice on the identification of various learning difficulties and the best teaching and learning strategies to employ in each situation.

Classroom management was good and effective in all lessons. Students responded positively and courteously to teachers' instructions and they were in turn positively affirmed in all their interactions with teachers. Learning activities were well managed and sought to engage students in their learning. Classroom seating arrangements facilitate active learning methodologies and provide ease of movement for the teacher to give individual support and guidance to students.

## **ASSESSMENT**

Students in all junior and senior cycle classes are informally assessed on the completion of each curriculum topic and formal assessments are held twice a year. Assessment in TY is measured by the subject teacher and includes an evaluation of student projects, presentations and completed folders of work. Assessment outcomes and student progression in business subjects are communicated to parents by written reports and at parent teacher meetings.

In the school's homework policy as set out in the staff booklet it is recommended that students in first and second year be set homework of forty-five minutes duration per week and that this increase to one hour in third year for each examination subject. It is also stated that students completing the Leaving Certificate require at least ninety minutes homework per examination subject per week. In most of the lessons visited homework was assigned orally except for one lesson where it was written on the board. However, from an evaluation of a sample of homework diaries and copybooks it was noted that students do not get homework on a regular basis. Correction of homework assignments involved a 'tick' system and in a few instances teachers included some useful evaluative comments. It is recommended that the business subjects department formulate a common strategy for the regular assigning and correction of student homework, to include common assessment and assessment for learning practices

Students are encouraged to take business subjects at their highest level in the State examinations and it is noteworthy that a high percentage of students do so. Student outcomes are good in certificate examinations. A review of these outcomes is conducted by senior management and is communicated to the board of management and the teachers in the business department. It is advisable that business subjects department conduct their own analysis and comparison to the national norm so as to inform their own practices.

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

The following are the main strengths identified in the evaluation:

- The school provides the full range of business subjects to students, and most Business Studies students continue with business education in senior cycle
- The business subjects department is organised and meets regularly to discuss pertinent issues.
- ICT provision in the school is good.
- Teaching and learning is good. Teachers are aware of students' progression and are supportive and affirming in their interactions.
- Students are encouraged to achieve to their highest potential and uptake of higher level in state examinations is good.

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

- The subject options and the choice procedure in first year should be reviewed.
- In each business subject's curriculum plan the learning outcomes, methodologies, resources, homework and assessment required to teach each curriculum topic should be noted.
- Active and co-operative learning methodologies should be added to current pedagogical practice to assist the development of key skills in students.
- Business teachers should devise a common strategy for assigning and correcting homework, and introduce common assessments and Assessment for Learning practices.

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.