

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

**Subject Inspection of Business Subjects
REPORT**

**Loreto Secondary School
Kilkenny City, County Kilkenny
Roll number: 61580P**

Date of inspection: 22 April 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

SUBJECT INSPECTION REPORT

This report has been written following a subject inspection in Loreto Secondary School, Kilkenny. 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 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 and subject teachers. The board of management was given an opportunity to comment in writing on the findings and recommendations of the report; a response was not received from the board.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

In Loreto Secondary School, students are offered the full spectrum of business subjects. Commendably, Business Studies is a core subject in first year. The majority of students going into second year choose to continue with the subject. The curriculum at senior cycle includes all three business subjects of Accounting, Business and Economics. This ensures continuity of business education for students and there is a good uptake of business subjects in senior cycle. Transition year (TY) students can also avail of business education as Accounting, Business and Economics each have a module on the TY curriculum. The Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP) is also provided by the school and business teachers are involved in its delivery.

The time periods allocated to the teaching of business subjects is good. Teachers retain the same class group from second year and this also applies in senior cycle. It is good that almost all business teachers take Business Studies classes at junior cycle. In senior cycle, the allocation of subjects to teachers reflects their individual interests and competencies in the different areas of business education.

All teachers of the business subjects are subject specialists, and most are members of the Business Studies Teachers Association of Ireland (BSTAI). Business teachers in the school ensure that at least one member of their subject department attends BSTAI meetings and conferences. On their return to the school they share the knowledge of the activity with the other members of the subject department. Senior management facilitates attendance at available in-service, is supportive of professional development activities and is proactive in the provision of whole school continuing professional development (CPD) in areas pertaining to classroom teaching strategies and subject planning. Currently, senior management has organised a five-week information and communication technology (ICT) course for all members of staff. This is commendable. Business subject teachers are also to be commended on their participation in a project on differentiated learning hosted by the Special Educational Support Service (SESS).

The majority of teachers in the business subject department are classroom based and as a result their classrooms have become *de facto* business specialist rooms. In most of these classrooms

there were visual aids such as overhead projectors (OHP) and multi media equipment. The business classrooms were good print-rich environments with commercial, teacher and student-generated posters. Of particular merit were the displays of students' project work and the effective use of notice boards.

At the time of the evaluation there was no fixed ICT equipment or data projector in any of the classrooms where business education was being provided. However, all classrooms are broadband enabled and some classrooms have fixed data projectors that can be accessed by business teachers. There are also two computer rooms which teachers and their students can use when available. Senior management has plans to update ICT provision in the school and the ICT course referred to above is part of this strategy. Nevertheless, it is recommended that in the interim senior management and the business subject department put in place strategies to ensure that ICT is used in teaching and learning of all business subjects. The Business Studies syllabus has specific ICT objectives and ICT should be incorporated into the delivery of all business subjects.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

Teachers in the business subject department have a good working relationship. There are regular formal and informal meetings throughout the year for which minutes are filed for ease of reference. There is a subject co-ordinator in place; the role pertains to subject development planning and rotates within the business subject department.

A comprehensive business subject plan has been developed. The plan has all the elements of good planning as outlined in the School Development Planning Initiative (SDPI). The business subject department is commended on the development of its own mission statement for the provision of business education for its student cohort. In the curriculum plans for each business subject the linking of the learning outcomes to each topic is particularly good. However, it is recommended that the methodologies and resources that are available be also aligned to each curriculum topic. This will ensure that all students have a consistent classroom experience. This is especially pertinent in junior cycle as the good practice of common assessment prevails in first and second year.

The TY business modules courses are good and aspire to meet the ideals of the programme. Students have a lesson in each of Accounting, Business and Economics. Some of the topics are from the senior cycle curriculum but they are taught in an explorative manner that includes research and project work.

Teachers' short-term planning was good. Teachers were well prepared for the delivery of lessons and good lesson planning practices were evident. Acetates and paper-based resources such as newspapers, magazine, information sheets, handouts, banking documents, word-searches and question sheets were prepared in advance of lessons. The electronic preparation of resources facilitated the storing, amending and sharing of these resources within the department.

Teachers in the business subject department are allocated a yearly budget which helps to secure teaching aids and resources. There is a secure-storage area in the staff room for shared business and LCVP resources. Most of these resources are catalogued. This is good practice. In the business classrooms there are also shelved areas that contain resources which are also available to all teachers of business subjects in the school.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

Nine lessons were observed, and a class group from each year in junior and senior cycle was visited. The overall standard of teaching and learning in all business subjects was very good. Lessons were well planned and structured. At the start of each lesson proposed learning outcomes were outlined. This was followed by a review of homework which often provided the link with previous learning and then new material was introduced that matched the lesson learning outcomes. Homework was assigned at the end of each lesson. Each lesson was appropriately paced for the mixed-ability student cohort.

In all lessons observed, both traditional and active methodologies were successfully used in teaching and learning. Of merit in some lessons, particularly at senior cycle, was the use of students' own knowledge and awareness of economic events and people to progress learning. This incorporation of current and topical events into business theory is admirable as it engages students in their learning and deepens business acumen.

In lessons that had a book-keeping focus teachers employed a good sequential approach to the teaching of concepts and teachers checked for understanding before moving on to the next step. Students' presentation of work was neat as it mirrored teachers' own good practice. Teachers used OHP effectively to display work and progress student learning. In a lesson at senior cycle the teacher used examples of local businesses and the current economic situation to explain the accounting concept being taught.

In almost all lessons observed group or pair work was employed as a methodology. It was well planned and fitted seamlessly in with the other learning activities of the lesson. Business teachers are commended on the good use of this co-operative learning methodology. In a junior cycle lesson students worked in groups on a multi-choice questionnaire, where a reasoned deduction and debate had to take place among the group members to glean a correct answer. This was a good learning activity. Group work was a particularly effective learning methodology in several senior cycle lessons and this was echoed by a student who told the inspector that "we like learning this way".

Teachers made good use of learning aids such as graphic organisers, mnemonics, blank banking documents, flow charts and coloured pens to organise learning. This good practice sought to address the various learning styles in the classroom. It was reported that teachers use TV programmes and news items in the lessons and in the resource storage area there were some appropriate audio visual materials. In some lessons observed, teachers set homework that required students to access teletext pages for share prices and conduct internet research on various companies. This is good practice. However, the incorporation of ICT and audio visual stimulus materials into all business education should now be a priority for the business subject department.

In almost all lessons observed, there was good use of teacher questioning to elicit and clarify knowledge, to check student progression and to develop class discussions. In most lessons, teachers used a mixture of global and targeted questions. Targeted questions were good; they were mainly higher-order and served to differentiate learning in the lesson. Student answering was good and displayed a grasp of business terminology and knowledge. All students' contributions were positively affirmed.

Classroom management was good in all lessons observed and an effective learning environment and atmosphere was noted. All business classrooms had seating arrangements that supported active learning methodologies. There was a good rapport between students and teacher, and where individual help was required or explanations sought, such support was provided in an affirming manner. Students were encouraged to be active participants and to be confident in their own learning.

ASSESSMENT

The business subject department has in place an agreed homework and assessment policy. The homework policy sets out the criteria for the setting and correction of homework. In lessons observed the agreed policy was seen to be followed. The assessment policy sets out the parameters to assess student attainment in business subjects. The business subject department planning folder contained samples of student assessments, which were well designed with a range of short and long questions. TY students have some written assignments in all business subjects and a project to complete in Economics and Business. At the end of TY, students' attainment is assessed both in a written test and through evaluations of presented projects.

Students sit informal class tests and formal end-of-year tests. There are common assessments up to the 'mock' examinations at junior and senior cycle. This is good practice as student choice of levels is left late in each cycle thus providing students with every opportunity to take business subjects at the highest possible level. From a review of a sample of students' folders it was observed that assessments are corrected using state examinations marking schemes. This is good practice as is the use of evaluative comment observed in the majority of class groups. Results of formal tests are communicated to parents via a written report and there is a formal parent teacher meeting to discuss students' progression in business subjects.

In each lesson visited a sample of homework and notes copybooks as well as homework diaries was inspected. They reflected a good quantity of homework in most class groups. However in some class groups, particularly in junior cycle, students had recorded "learn notes" as homework. In class groups where this is a regular occurrence teachers should consider a more active and engaging method of homework. In some class groups teachers regularly used evaluative comments in the correction of written homework. It is recommended that this good assessment for learning practice be expanded within the subject department. Student copybooks were well maintained.

Students are encouraged to take business subjects at their highest level in state examinations. The outcomes in state examinations are very good and are analysed by the principal. This is good practice as it permits teachers to compare attainment with national norms.

SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The following are the main strengths identified in the evaluation:

- Senior management ensures the provision of the full spectrum of business subjects on the school curriculum and supports the provision of continual professional development for business teachers.
- The business classrooms are effective print-rich learning environments.
- The subject department has constructed a good subject plan in a collaborative manner.

- An effective blend of active, co-operative and traditional methodologies is employed by business teachers in the classroom, and the overall standard of teaching and learning is very good.
- All interactions in classrooms were cordial, respectful and affirming.
- Teachers employ good assessment techniques.

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

- The methodologies and resources available to the business subject department should be aligned to each curriculum topic in each business subject plan.
- The incorporation of ICT in teaching and learning in business subjects should be viewed as a priority for senior management and the business subject department.
- The use of assessment for learning practices should be expanded within the business subject department.

Post-evaluation meetings were held with the teachers of business and with the principal at the conclusion of the evaluation when the draft findings and recommendations of the evaluation were presented and discussed.

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