An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

Subject Inspection of Business Subjects
REPORT

Presentation Secondary School,
Clonmel, County Tipperary
Roll number: 65340P

Date of inspection: 3 and 4 February 2010
REPORT
ON
THE QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN BUSINESS

SUBJECT INSPECTION REPORT

This report has been written following a subject inspection in Presentation Secondary School, Clonmel. It presents the findings of an evaluation of the quality of teaching and learning in Business 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 and examined students’ work. 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 deputy principal. The board of management 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

Presentation Secondary School Clonmel provides the full spectrum of programmes for its students. Programmes include the Junior Certificate, Junior Certificate School Programme (JSCP), Transition Year (TY) programme, Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA), Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP) and the established Leaving Certificate. Business subjects form an integral part of the curriculum in many of the programmes. The school is to be commended for the range of programmes provided for students.

In Presentation Secondary School, Clonmel, students in first year have an opportunity to sample Business Studies for the full school year. In second year, the subject is offered within an option band. The uptake of Business Studies in second year is very high, with eighty percent of first years choosing the subject and this is praiseworthy. The school’s TY programme is optional for students. Business as a subject on the TY curriculum allows non-business students from junior cycle to experience the subject. At senior cycle, the Enterprise module of LCVP is taught by business teachers. It is praiseworthy that the expertise of business teachers is employed in delivery of the LCVP. Students can avail of two business subjects, Accounting and Business, at senior cycle. Student uptake in Accounting is good but this is not replicated in Business where there has been a decline in uptake of the subject in the last few years. It is recommended that senior management, together with the subject department, review uptake trends in business subjects. As part of this review, the factors and reasons for the decline in uptake should be explored and addressed.

The time allocated to the teaching of business subjects is satisfactory and in line with syllabus requirements for junior and senior cycles. It is noteworthy that senior management has ensured that a teacher with expertise in business is a member of the resource teaching team. This year,
Senior cycle has a resource class for students who require extra tuition in business subjects. The school is to be commended on the way it endeavours to meet the learning needs of its student cohort.

Senior management is proactive in facilitating and encouraging collaborative planning among business teachers. The subject department is assigned time to meet twice a year. From examination of minutes of subject meetings, it is evident that targets are set at each meeting and that targets are acted upon and evaluated at subsequent meetings. This is good practice. Informal meetings also take place within the subject department on a needs basis in relation to subject or student matters.

The majority of teachers are business specialists. In assigning teachers to subjects, senior management should try at all times to ensure that teachers are qualified in the relevant business subject area. Senior management facilitates attendance at available in-service as a means of updating skills and knowledge. Some of the subject teachers are members of the Business Studies Teachers’ Association of Ireland (BSTAI). The website of the BSTAI [www.bstai.ie](http://www.bstai.ie) contains literature from conference workshops which may assist teachers in the delivery of their subject. Accessing updates and information from the website on a regular basis is therefore recommended. The local branch of the BSTAI has good links with Tipperary Institute (TI), which specialises in Business and Information Technology courses. It may be beneficial for students to avail of some of the activities such as the Business Studies quiz organised jointly by the BSTAI and the TI.

The school has recently completed a major refurbishment and has plans to provide mounted data projectors and computers in some student-based classrooms and to provide a central area for the storage of business related resources and materials. This is a very positive development. Currently, there is some access to information and communication technology (ICT) through the provision of a mobile data projector for use in classrooms and through access to two computer rooms when they are available. The library also has some ICT facilities that can be used by students and teachers. Facilitation of the increased use of ICT on an incremental basis is recommended.

**Planning and Preparation**

The collaborative approach adopted by the business department in developing a plan for each of the business subjects is commended. The subject plans contain all the required elements of good planning. Each plan outlines the curriculum to be covered for each year group, the methodologies to be employed, assessment modes and provision for students with special educational needs. Each plan also refers to cross curriculum links, record-keeping and homework policy. The business department now needs to further develop these plans. The inclusion of student outcomes for each topic would enhance the plan. Aligned to each topic, specific examples of the methodologies that can be employed, such as role play, group work and use of ICT, would be a useful addition. Resources and materials available should also be referenced to each curriculum topic. The subject department should start the process of accessing and developing resources and materials that can be used in tandem with ICT. It is recommended that all the business related resources in the school should be catalogued and listed in the subject plan.

Business teachers follow the same curriculum plan for each year group at junior cycle which facilitates common testing. This is good practice. From records of the business subject department meetings, it is clear that there are regular reviews of the curriculum plans, which are amended to take account of the needs of particular class groups. This is a particularly good approach. The TY
plan is divided into three different modules; ‘Enterprise’, ‘World of Work’ and ‘Topical Issues with budgeting skills’. While the modules are well constructed and aspire to meet the ideals of the TY programme, the module that is offered in the third term needs to be more specific in its content. This module could incorporate curriculum content that introduces the students to the subjects at senior cycle by using explorative and active learning methodologies. This may have a positive influence on subject uptake at senior level.

In all lessons observed, teachers were well prepared and used resources such as textbooks, handouts, application forms and question sheets. Some of the resources were prepared electronically. This facilitates storing, amending and sharing resources within the department. Lessons were well structured with the aims of the lesson outlined at the start of class, a review of homework which often provided the link with previous learning and introduction of material that matched the learning aims. Homework was assigned at the end of each lesson.

**TEACHING AND LEARNING**

All classes groups were of mixed ability and the pace of the lessons was satisfactory for most ability groups in the class. Students remained on task throughout the lessons observed. Teachers used methodologies that included teacher talk, questioning, pair and group work. Of particular merit was the use of group work in a senior class of two different ability groups. To recap the elements of the marketing mix, a mind map was constructed from the teacher’s questioning of students. Tasks were then set for the two groups. Both groups were monitored to ensure they understood their task and completed work to a sufficiently high standard. Where assistance was required, it was given in an affirming manner.

In junior cycle lessons, the teachers imparted a good learning technique to the students. Where the topic being taught was difficult for the students, teachers made learning easy by using mnemonics, a commendable practice that ensures that the students retain the knowledge. It is recommended that the range and variety of active teaching and learning methodologies be expanded and that the use of ICT be incorporated. This development will help students become independent learners and allow them to expand and deepen their understanding of business subjects.

In most lessons, students were questioned to ascertain their understanding of the material presented. Questions were asked on a global and targeted basis. Students’ answers were positively reaffirmed. As a means of increasing students understanding, motivation and attainment, higher-order questioning should be used more frequently and, in particular, targeted at students of higher ability.

In the curriculum plan for business studies at junior cycle, each year group is exposed to the book-keeping elements of the syllabus. This is very good practice, as it allows for an integrated approach in the teaching of business studies. In one lesson observed, students were writing up the purchases book, making all the necessary calculations. A very good step–by-step approach was employed, ensuring that all the students were proficient in carrying out the task. From observation of and discussion with students, it was evident that students responded well to this approach. It was noted that, in the past, teachers at junior cycle shared the teaching of a class group. The curriculum was divided in relation to each teacher’s speciality and students benefited from the expertise of two business studies teachers. This practice is commended and very good.
In some of the lessons visited, there was good linkage of the topic being taught to everyday occurrences and real life situations. In a lesson that looked at job seeking skills, students talked about their own experience of part-time jobs and were able to compile a list of required skills and their functions. When topics being taught are linked to real life situations, this helps to deepen understanding in the business subjects.

There was not an over reliance on textbooks and some teachers generated handouts to supplement classroom teaching. The content of the handouts was good and where these were used, the students stored them in a folder. Presentation of material on whiteboard was good, but there is scope to present material visually by using overhead projectors and ICT, thereby broadening the range of media with which to present lesson content and facilitate learning. The inclusion of ICT as a methodology and resource in the teaching and learning of business is vital.

As classrooms are mainly student-based, there were few examples of business-related materials on display. Senior management has plans to provide a storage area for business-related resources that will facilitate the use of a range of resources. This is a welcome development. Two classrooms had student-generated posters relating to business which were attractive, informative and well executed. Business teachers and students had a notice board in one of the main school corridors, on which photographs and information on business-related events in the school were displayed. It was visible, informative and attractive and benefited the profile of business in the school.

Classroom management was very good in all the classes visited and was characterised by mutual respect between all parties in the classroom. Teachers had a good rapport with students and positively reaffirmed their efforts. Most students had a range of copies that were used for notes, homework and tests. An examination of copies found that they were well maintained, neat and clearly labelled to indicate class work and topics. This is good practice.

**ASSESSMENT**

In each business subject plan, there is an agreed practice on assessment and homework. Homework was assigned in every lesson observed. The methods of correction varied from oral answers by teacher or student, written correction on the board and collection of work by the teacher to assess content and quality of work. On inspection of a sample of homework copybooks, it was evident that student homework is corrected regularly and there were some examples of evaluative comments on students' work. The practice of provided written annotation and evaluative comments on student work should be expanded throughout the business department. In the setting of homework, teachers should strive to set a balance between short and long questions, as this will facilitate students in developing higher-order thinking skills.

Each class group sits formal tests at the end of the academic year. In first and second year, students have a formal common test which is commendable. In all business subjects, class tests are administered during the year. In some class groups, more regular chapter tests should be administered, as this will help reinforce learning. Assessment in TY is carried out by the subject teacher and includes an evaluation of the written report for the enterprise activity, an analysis of the student evaluation sheet, and teacher observation of student progress and learning. To formalise the assessment process in TY, it is recommended that a portfolio of work be maintained as an element of the assessment process.
Teachers maintain records of students’ completion of homework and test results. Student outcomes in tests and achievement are communicated via a written twice-yearly report to parents. Each year group has a parent-teacher meeting which allows for discussion on student progress in the subject.

Student attainment in state examinations is consistently good at all levels. Results in certificate examinations are analysed by the principal who communicates the results of this analysis to the board of management. The results are given to the business subject department for their own analysis and comparison with national norms.

**SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

The following are the main strengths identified in the evaluation:

- At junior cycle, student uptake of Business Studies is very good.
- The school provides an environment that is respectful and affirming for students.
- Teachers are aware of the different ability groups within their classes and differentiate their teaching and curriculum plans to take cognisance of attainment abilities.
- Students’ copybooks are well maintained, with teachers modelling good practice.
- The subject department plans in a collaborative manner. The subject plans developed had all the elements of good planning.
- Teachers adopted an integrated approach in the teaching of Business Studies and on some occasions, there was good linkage of the topic being taught to everyday occurrences and real life situations.
- Classroom management was very good in all the classes visited and was characterised by mutual respect between all parties in the classroom.
- Student attainment in state examinations is consistently good at all levels.

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

- Senior management and the business subject department should put strategies in place to address the decline in uptake of Business at senior cycle.
- The range and variety of active teaching and learning methodologies should be expanded and should incorporate the increased use of ICT.
- The assessment of a student’s portfolio of work should be incorporated into the assessment process in TY.
- It is recommended that all business-related resources be catalogued and listed in the subject plan.
- It is recommended that senior management promotes further access to ICT, so that the integration of ICT into teaching and learning in business subjects is consolidated.

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

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Appendix

School response to the report

Submitted by the Board of Management

Area 1: Observations on the content of the inspection report

The Board of Management welcome the very positive report on the quality of teaching and learning of Business in the Presentation Secondary School, Clonmel.

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

Senior Management and the Business Department are implementing strategies to address the uptake of Business in Senior Cycle.

Numbers have already increased in fifth year (2010/11).