

**An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna**

**Department of Education and Skills**

**Subject Inspection of Business Subjects  
REPORT**

**St. Mary's Academy  
Carlow, County Carlow  
Roll number: 61120E**

**Date of inspection: 07 April 2014**



**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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**INFORMATION ON THE INSPECTION**

<b>Date of inspection</b>	07 April 2014
<b>Inspection activities undertaken</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Review of relevant documents</li><li>• Discussion with principal and teachers</li><li>• Interaction with students</li><li>• Examination of students' work</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Observation of teaching and learning during seven class periods: one double and five single lessons</li><li>• Feedback to principal and teachers</li></ul>

**MAIN FINDINGS**

- Teaching and learning observed was of a high standard with some scope for further development in some aspects.
- In all lessons very good co-operative learning activities were observed.
- Assessment methods are good and developing, with a growing emphasis on assessment for learning (AfL).
- The volume, variety and assessment of students' homework ranged from good to fair within the business department.
- A business subjects plan is in place but it requires some additional detail.

**MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS**

- To further develop teacher's pedagogical practice, the extended use of AfL practices and more frequent use of higher-order questioning is recommended.
- There should be agreement among business teachers regarding the range and quality of homework assigned to students, and its correction.
- The content of the business subjects plan and each curricular plan should be further developed as outlined in this report.

## **INTRODUCTION**

St. Mary's Academy is a voluntary secondary school, with an enrolment of 564 male post-primary students. Business Studies is an optional subject in junior cycle. Business and Enterprise is a core module in the optional Transition Year programme (TY). Business and Economics are offered to Leaving Certificate students.

## **TEACHING AND LEARNING**

- Teaching was of a high standard with some scope for further development in some aspects. In each lesson observed, teachers used a variety of methodologies that included good co-operative and active learning strategies.
- In all lessons, students were given the opportunity to work in pairs or small groups. This teaching approach was particularly effective in a lesson that used a market stall strategy to share student learning. In a junior cycle lesson, a role play activity was an enjoyable learning activity for students.
- Questioning strategies were successfully employed to make links with prior learning, to assess student understanding of business knowledge and in the development of very good class discussions. In one lesson, the use of a multi-choice question format was particularly good in assessing student's attainment of lesson content. Good targeted questioning was used in all lessons to differentiate learning. In some lessons, higher-order questioning allowed students to apply critical thinking skills and this strategy should be expanded to all lessons.
- Information and communication technology (ICT) use occurred seamlessly as a constructive teaching and learning tool. The pertinent video resources and visuals sought to engage students and allowed business education to attain a real-life focus. First-year students confidently and capably used tablets to conduct research that deepened student learning.
- Each lesson was well planned and had a good structure. The sharing of learning outcomes with students at the outset varied in effectiveness. Best practice was noted in lessons where learning outcomes, in terms of what students should and could know, were visible throughout the lesson. At the conclusion of one lesson, students were involved in recapping the key learning points and this is worthy of replication in all lessons.
- All business teachers regularly assign homework. However, there are varied approaches among the team in the type and quantity of work assigned. To enable greater consistency this merits review. Business teachers should develop agreed best practices for the assigning of regular and varied modes of developmental homework.
- It is praiseworthy that some junior cycle students complete projects as part of their yearly assessments. To further challenge students in assuming responsibility for their own learning, the use of debates, research presentations and project work could be employed as student learning experiences.

- Homework is corrected regularly by teachers. In many lessons very good practice was observed where students' work was returned with affirming comments. To support student learning, it is recommended that detailed formative feedback that gives direction as to how students could improve their work be provided on all lengthy assignments. On occasion, students should also evaluate and assess their own work using set marking criteria so as to apply their own critical skills and internalise learning.
- Students are encouraged to achieve to their highest potential and to take business subjects at higher level in certificate examinations, wherein outcomes are good.

#### **SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT**

- There is good provision for and support from senior management for business education in the school.
- All first-year students sample Business Studies for the first half of the academic year and in doing so have the opportunity to attain some financial literacy skills and to make a well-informed decision about choosing optional subjects for the remainder of the year.
- Students are taught in mixed-ability settings for junior cycle. Currently, students taking Business in Leaving Certificate are divided into ability groupings based on Christmas assessment results. It is advised that consideration be given to the maintenance of mixed-ability groupings as setting may have a negative effect on student motivation, attainment and opportunity.
- Business teachers are diligent in ensuring that their subject knowledge remains current. They have attended in-service relating to their subjects. As part of whole-school professional development, teachers have engaged in broader themes, including ICT development and 21<sup>st</sup> century teaching methods.
- As classrooms are mainly student-based, the potential to develop a visual learning environment is diminished. The possibility of assigning a business room in the future could be considered by management. As an interim measure, business teachers could further develop the notice board in the school environs as an effective medium for the display of topical business matters.

#### **PLANNING AND PREPARATION**

- The business subjects department has a junior and senior cycle co-ordinator. The appointment of an overall rotating coordinator should be considered as it would allow each teacher to assume a leadership role in the development of business education throughout the school.
- Business teachers meet formally once a term. However, minutes of meetings are not always retained and it is advisable that they are.
- The business subjects plan is good in design and content. The inclusion of SMART numeracy targets to progress the school's improvement within the business subjects department is very good practice as is the yearly evaluation of the work of the department. To further develop whole-school numeracy practices, the department should liaise formally with the mathematics department to ensure that there are similar approaches to mathematical computations, and the agreed practice should be noted in planning documentation.

- The overall business department plan should be extended to include teaching strategies for students with special educational needs and the procedures for mentoring new and student teachers to the department.
- All business teachers follow a common agreed programme of work in junior cycle. The sequencing of topics in this programme should be re-considered. Year three of the cycle is heavily weighted towards book-keeping topics. It is advisable to incorporate book-keeping elements throughout the three-year cycle. This approach will also facilitate the integration of theory elements into book-keeping.
- The curriculum plan for each business subject details the sequence of topics to be taught. All curricular plans can be further developed by aligning learning outcomes, resources, differentiated learning strategies and a range of assessment and teaching methodologies with each curriculum topic.

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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.