

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

**Subject Inspection of Business Studies
REPORT**

**Saint Flannan's College
Ennis, County Clare
Roll number: 61920N**

Date of inspection: 6 December 2013



**AN ROINN | DEPARTMENT OF
OIDEACHAIS | EDUCATION
AGUS SCILEANNA | AND SKILLS**

REPORT
ON
THE QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN BUSINESS STUDIES

INFORMATION ON THE INSPECTION

Dates of inspection	5 and 6 December 2013
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 ten class periods• Examination of students' work• Feedback to principal, deputy principal(s) and teachers

MAIN FINDINGS

- The quality of teaching and learning observed was good or very good in most lessons with strong cohesion evident among the subject teachers.
- Some exceptionally well-organised approaches to active-learning were observed including student demonstration, brainstorming, pair and group work.
- Additional resources are used well to support teaching and learning and many of the teachers have been involved in developing the department's shared electronic resources.
- Students' progress is measured in line with the whole-school policy on assessment through end-of-topic and year-end tests, however, there is scope to have aspects of students' classwork and homework reflected in this assessment process.
- There is a very positive attitude to the subject at whole-school level with open access for all students and mixed-ability classes in first and second year.
- Teachers have recently introduced a self-reflection activity within individual planning, and this approach has significant potential to progress discussion on pedagogy and assessment approaches.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

- Subject teachers should further develop the recently introduced individual approach to self-reflection into a department-based evaluation of progress in the subject.
 - The range of in-class assessment techniques used in monitoring the quality of written work completed by students should be further developed.
 - The organisation of class groups in third year should be kept under review to ensure that the desired objectives of the current arrangement are being achieved.
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INTRODUCTION

St Flannan's College is a co-educational voluntary secondary school with a current enrolment of 1126 students. The school's patron is the Catholic Bishop of Killaloe and the school has a long history of education provision. In addition to junior cycle, the school provides an optional Transition Year (TY) programme and both the established Leaving Certificate and Leaving Certificate Vocational Programmes (LCVP) at senior cycle. Business Studies is a core subject in junior cycle.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

- In the lessons observed the quality of teaching and learning was generally good or very good with a number of very good examples of effective use of active-teaching methodologies.
- A number of exceptional examples of teachers adapting their methodologies to reflect the range of learning styles within the class group were observed in particular, with first-year groups. Many lessons were interactive with teachers using mixed media including visual and written stimuli. In a few lessons role play and brainstorming were used to assess student understanding of topics including banking and communication.
- A number of very good examples of student-led learning were observed. In two first-year lessons, where the content of the lessons came from the business for living section of the syllabus, the teachers pre-assessed students' knowledge of the topic before introducing new material. This is a very good approach.
- Where group work was most effective only one hand-out was distributed to groups to generate discussion. In addition, some very good examples of the use of 'show-me boards' as tools for differentiation and assessment were observed.
- Information and communication technology (ICT) was used in a number of lessons to support students' learning in the subjects including the use of presentation and multimedia software. The teachers had developed a range of customised worksheets, templates and notes that were varied to suit the range of learning styles.
- Written homework is an integral part of the assessment strategy within the subject department. Some good examples were observed of the correction process being well managed within lessons with good pace evident. However, some additional development is required across the department on promoting self and peer assessment among students. This is especially relevant with the mathematical and bookkeeping elements of the subject.
- Teachers could enhance the classroom environments with examples of students' work. Students should be encouraged to bring in their own examples when covering consumer and budgeting issues allowing students to contextualise theory to real life and developing financial literacy skills.
- The practice of including written evaluative comment on the students' work should be further developed across the department. In addition teachers should develop the use of portfolio assessment as part of the formative assessment process.
- When using teacher-developed support notes, teachers are advised to include the use of aids such as mnemonics and graphic organisers to accommodate the range of students' learning styles. Of particular merit is the approach adopted by one teacher who used

summative worksheets to engage students with drafting their own notes on topics including labour relations.

- In relation to students' work the use of out-dated questions from past certificate examinations should be reviewed. Questions should relate to students' experience and the business environment as was evident in one lesson where current bank application forms were used.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- The subject is core for all students and the school's management and subject teachers are anxious that the subject continues to maintain a central role in the school's curriculum provision at junior cycle.
- Time provision for the subject is good and the inclusion of double periods provides a very good opportunity for the completion of the bookkeeping outcomes of the syllabus. Management should strive for continuity in the allocation of teachers to class groups in the context of available resources.
- Classes are mixed ability in first and second year and are set in third year. The rationale for this approach was established a number of years ago and setting has involved the allocation of additional teaching resources. The team is advised to ensure that this approach continues to achieve its original objectives which include promotion of higher-level take up in the subject. Among the areas to monitor are gender distribution in the classes, teacher allocation, and student selection criteria.
- Assessment in junior cycle is on a continuous assessment basis with end-of-year examinations. While some minor variance is evident in the number of assessment tests used by individual teachers, the availability of centrally shared resources enables a high degree of consistency between the teachers.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

- There is a strong sense of cohesiveness and collective responsibility among the subject teachers for the development of the subject plan.
- Self-reflection by teachers on the short-term schemes of work has recently been introduced. Evidence to date shows that teachers have reflected on issues including, subject content, teaching methodologies, grouping of students and assessment. This approach should be further developed into a department-based annual review of themes including for example, pedagogy and assessment approaches.
- The team has been adapting the well-established revision approach of *things to do and to learn* within subject planning. This approach could be used in lessons to introduce learning outcomes for students as the language is accessible for students in junior cycle.
- Overall yearly objectives and topics to be completed are agreed but teachers have a great degree to flexibility to adopt their own approach to completing the yearly schemes. In one excellent example the teacher had further developed the agreed learning outcomes with additional associated literacy and numeracy outcomes.
- A resource bank has been developed to support teaching and learning in the subjects and the team is constantly striving to expand the range of these resources. Effective systems

are in place to facilitate the sharing of these resources among the team within the subject-planning folder on the school's network.

- Among the range of resources available are teacher-developed worksheets, question banks with worked solutions, and individual lesson plans with associated presentations. This is very good practice.

The draft findings and recommendations arising out of this evaluation were discussed with the principal, deputy principal(s) and subject teachers at the conclusion of the evaluation. 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.