

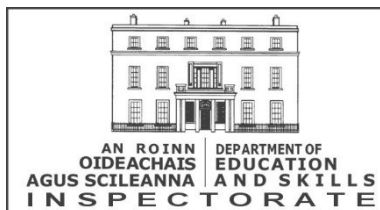
An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

**Subject Inspection of Business Subjects
REPORT**

**Dominican College
Taylor's Hill, Galway
Roll number: 62990Q**

Date of inspection: 5 April 2016



**REPORT
ON
THE QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN BUSINESS SUBJECTS**

INFORMATION ON THE INSPECTION

Dates of inspection	4 & 5 April 2016
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 eight class periods• Examination of students' work• Feedback to principal, deputy principal and teachers

MAIN FINDINGS

- High quality teaching and learning was evident in the lessons observed.
- A very good range of teacher-led and inquiry-based teaching approaches were used, though there is scope to increase the opportunities for collaborative learning.
- The teachers have developed a very good initiative in assessment, where class assessments are linked to both reporting on progress and whole-school numeracy initiatives.
- Teacher are extending the co-curricular provision thereby increasing students' financial literacy and their interactions with the wider business environment.
- Class tests show very good development of written formative feedback to students on their work.
- The school's management uses the findings and recommendations of previous inspection reports to develop action plans for use at whole-school and subject-specific level.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

- Greater opportunities for collaborative learning should be incorporated within lessons.
- To complement the department's assessment initiative, a number of refinements are recommended: assessment of units of learning and project work should be consolidated through the use of success criteria and teachers should provide students with written formative feedback on extended items of work.

INTRODUCTION

Dominican College is a girls-only voluntary secondary school operating under the trusteeship of the Le Chéile Schools Trust. Students participate in the Junior Certificate programme at junior cycle and the Leaving Certificate and Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP) programmes at senior cycle. Participation in the Transition Year (TY) programme is optional for senior cycle students. The current enrolment is 627 students.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

- High quality teaching and learning was evident in the lessons observed.
- Teacher-centred pedagogical approaches were well managed with teachers ensuring that subject-specific knowledge and information was shared in ways which guided and directed students through the process of learning. Some specific examples of direct instruction observed included recapitulating content from previous lessons and introducing new content through focusing on key business terms and principles.
- A number of very effective inquiry-based learning approaches were used which focused on student investigation. In one lesson, students deduced the categories of industry from a given set of scenarios. In this, and in a number of other lessons, this facilitative approach was very effective in encouraging students to apply their knowledge.
- The classrooms were busy active places with students working purposefully. Students were challenged by the teaching strategies used to develop their knowledge and skills.
- Teachers placed very good emphasis on students exploring the wider business environment. The use of news boards in the classrooms, and the development of a financial news project with fifth-year class groups, are very good supports for developing students' capacity to synthesise and evaluate key financial and business trends.
- Many opportunities were provided for students to learn independently, with less emphasis on collaborative learning. A number of collaborative learning strategies were observed, including where students were engaged in classification and brainstorm activities related to banking. However, there is scope to extend the range of collaborative learning opportunities, given that working with others is a key skill for Business Studies.
- In senior cycle, a wide range of learning aids was provided for students, as well as summary revision aids. Of particular merit is the promotion of the practice of note-making, where students are required to actively engage with the material in developing their own revision aids.
- The mixed-ability groupings allow students to access the courses to the highest levels and this is reflected in the very positive participation rates and attainment in the subjects.
- Students' self-assessment of their progress in the subjects is an assessment initiative developed by the subject teachers. Class assessments are linked to progression and whole-school numeracy objectives. Currently, the provision of written feedback for improvement is at a developmental phase with the emphasis placed on students' own review of their progress. This approach can be developed further by greater guidance from teachers, including the use of success criteria for units of learning and projects.
- The teachers are using the range of technological resources interactively, including data projectors and visualisers, for the presentation of students work. In Accounting, students

are encouraged to use an educational electronic platform to access additional subject-specific resources.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- Provision for the subjects is very good. Business Studies is core for junior cycle students and students are facilitated with both Accounting and Business as optional choices at senior cycle.
- Classes across all year groups are organised on a mixed-ability basis and teachers are developing co-curricular provision in both junior and senior cycle thereby broadening students' interactions with the wider business environment and improving students' financial literacy.
- The teachers, through their involvement with the subject association, including at branch-officer level, are very aware of subject trends and developments.
- The teachers have developed a professional network with other schools for the development and sharing of resource banks and TY-specific activities. This very exceptional approach to building professional networks demonstrates a very high degree of professional development among the teachers. It is also an indicator of the teachers' commitment to a change ethos, which will be very beneficial in light of the ongoing subject developments, including the introduction of the new specification for Business Studies in September 2016.
- A number of subject-specific initiatives in assessment have been developed by the business teachers. These have focused, in particular, on developing approaches to self-assessment and the identification by students of areas for improvement in their work. As a numeracy strategy, students' monitoring of attainment is also linked to graphing.
- Teachers' use of written formative feedback on students' class tests is very good. This effective approach should be expanded and used periodically with students' extended written homework.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

- There is a very high level of collaboration among the subject teachers in relation to subject planning. The approach used also accommodates flexibility for individual styles.
- The inspector's review of the minutes of subject department meetings indicates that there is a very good mix of topics discussed, including subject organisation, pedagogy and planned innovations. Another possibility to consider is whether the subjects would benefit more from having one overarching department meeting rather than meetings for each of the three subject specialisms.
- The analyses of attainment and participation rates in certificate examinations is very comprehensive and indicates capacity among the team to reflect links with teaching and learning approaches. This capacity for reflection is also evident in the department's development of assessment folders as part of the student self-assessment initiative.
- The school's management uses the findings and recommendations of previous inspection reports to develop action plans for use at whole-school and subject-specific level. It is

clear that the relevant recommendations in relation to subject planning have been shared, and adapted for use within the business department.

- In further developing assessment approaches, the use of success criteria and samples of students work for developing self-assessment and peer-assessment approaches should be factored into planning for assessment.

The draft findings and recommendations arising out of this evaluation were discussed with the principal, deputy 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.