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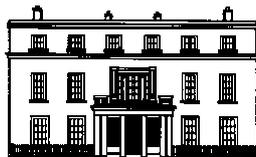
Department of Education and Skills

Subject Inspection of Business Subjects

REPORT

**Presentation Secondary School
Waterford City, County Waterford
Roll number: 64970U**

Date of inspection: 9 December 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 Presentation Secondary School Waterford. 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 these subjects 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 evaluation; a response was not received from the board.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

Presentation Secondary School participates in DEIS, the Department's initiative for delivering equality of opportunity in schools. The school provides the full spectrum of programmes for its students: the Junior Certificate, Junior Certificate Schools Programme (JCSP), the Transition Year programme (TY), Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA), Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP) and the established Leaving Certificate. Business education is a part of the curriculum in all the programmes. The school is to be commended for the range of programmes it provides for its students.

Business Studies is a core subject at junior cycle. All first-year students complete JCSP learning targets. In second year, students can decide on whether to complete the Junior Certificate or JCSP. Business is a core subject in the compulsory TY curriculum. TY students actively engage in enterprise by taking part in mini-company competitions. On conclusion of enterprise competitions, students partake in the Junior Achievement Programme as they complete a module of personal economics. Accounting and Business are optional subjects in the Leaving Certificate curriculum. The uptake of business subjects at Leaving Certificate is very good. Business teachers are involved in the delivery of LCVP and facilitate the participation of all Business students in relevant LCVP activities.

Time allocation for the teaching of business subjects is generally good. At junior cycle, Business Studies is timetabled for three single class periods in first year and four single periods thereafter. It would be prudent to provide one double period at some point in the cycle to facilitate the teaching of book-keeping elements of the syllabus. TY Business is timetabled for a double and two single class periods and Leaving Certificate business subjects have a double and three single class periods. Teachers in the business subjects department all experience teaching in senior and junior cycles.

Teachers are classroom based, and most of these classrooms provide a stimulating print-rich environment displaying posters and relevant business newspaper articles. Nevertheless, there is scope to further develop visual learning environments in all classrooms. Most of the classrooms had audio and visual equipment that served as teaching and learning tools.

There is access to information and communication technology (ICT) in some classrooms and in the school's two computer rooms. There are plans to provide ICT equipment in all classrooms in the coming weeks. The school's management responds on a needs basis to teachers' requests regarding the acquisition of additional resources. The library has a dedicated business section which is stocked with up-to-date business magazines and books. Business resources are located in several areas of the school; it is recommended that all business-related resources be listed with a note of their location for inclusion in subject planning documentation. This will facilitate the sharing and use of resources within the subject department.

All teachers in the business subjects department are skilled subject specialists with good up-to-date knowledge of their subjects and relevant business issues. Senior management facilitates attendance at in-service courses. Teachers have availed of whole-school in-service courses on the use of ICT and business-related in-service provided by various agencies. However, teachers are not currently members of the Business Studies Teachers Association of Ireland (BSTAI) nor have they availed of in-service opportunities provided by the Department-sponsored Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST). It is advisable that business teachers consult the websites of both organisations so as to keep up-to-date with current developments.

All students of business subjects are taught in a mixed-ability setting. It was evident throughout the inspection that the needs of students are central in the teaching of business subjects. There are good support structures in place to meet the learning needs of all students. It is admirable that business teachers as part of their monthly meetings have discussed ways to improve the standards of literacy and numeracy through teaching and learning practices.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

The business subjects department's planning needs are managed by a co-ordinator and this position rotates on a yearly basis. Senior management affords all subject departments planning time once a year. In addition to this business teachers on their own initiative meet once a month at lunchtime to discuss issues that pertain to the provision of business education. As evidenced from minutes of these meetings there is good dialogue, collaborative planning and evaluation of activities within the business subjects department.

A business subjects policy has been developed using the School Development Planning Initiative (SDPI) template and contains all the elements of good planning. Within this policy there are curriculum plans for each business subject taught in the school. Business teachers have noted in their planning documentation that "their experience and expertise is shared among themselves to ensure that students have a similar experience in the classroom". It is therefore recommended that curriculum plans for each business subject be developed by aligning learning outcomes, resources, teaching methodologies, differentiation techniques and assessment modes to each topic.

The TY business plan details week by week the enterprise activities of the programme. All TY enterprise students are concurrently timetabled for a double period so as to facilitate group activities such as guest presentations.

In planning documentation, the links with the co-ordinator for special educational needs and English as an additional language are documented. In classrooms teachers use keywords and vocabulary lists to assist student learning. To develop this good practice in relation to numeracy, business and mathematics teachers should confer on areas of similar practice such as percentages and take a common approach to the teaching of these within the school.

Teachers' short-term and medium-term planning is very good. All handouts, ICT and supplementary paper-based resources were prepared in advance of lessons.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

During the course of the inspection seven lessons were observed, covering Leaving Certificate Business and Accounting, TY Business and a lesson from each year of junior cycle Business Studies. The methodologies used included pair work, use of mnemonics, questioning, teacher-led discussions and use of ICT. Teaching and learning was generally good overall; however there is scope for improvement in some areas, notably in the use of a wider array of teaching methodologies. It is recommended that the range and variety of active and co-operative teaching and learning methodologies be expanded within the business subjects department.

The majority of lessons observed had a good structure. At the conclusion of some lessons teachers recapped the learning outcomes before they set designated homework. This good practice should be followed in all lessons. In most lessons teachers made very good references to local, national and international business people, organisations and topical business issues. Teachers were skilful in linking students' own experience and knowledge to classroom learning. This good practice allows students to link classroom learning to real-life situations and in doing so deepen business acumen.

In planning documentation, business teachers articulated that the "Business Studies syllabus had objectives regarding the use of ICT" and in minutes of meetings teachers expressed a desire to increase its use in their practice. In lessons where ICT was used it was effective. Currently not all classrooms have ICT facilities. It is recommended to incorporate the use of ICT and multimedia into the delivery of all business subjects by fully utilising the available ICT in the school and incorporating ICT research and projects as part of student assignments. The business and enterprise link of the website of the PDST has an array of ready made ICT resources that teachers may find of benefit for use in the classroom.

In lessons that had a book-keeping focus there was good use and explanation of accounting terminology. A step-by-step approach was adopted by all teachers and this helped students to become familiar with concepts and practice. The planned introduction of ICT to display solutions to questions will lead to efficiencies of class time.

In all lessons observed questioning techniques were used to deepen understanding, determine student progress and advance learning of the material being taught. Questioning was used more effectively in some lessons than others. Occasionally there was an overemphasis on global rather than targeted questions. This encouraged chorus answering and was not effective in engaging all students. In some lessons higher-order targeted questions were used effectively to differentiate between ability levels and this is an effective methodology in a mixed-ability setting. As a means of increasing students' understanding, motivation and attainment, higher-order questioning should be used more frequently and targeted at students of higher ability.

Additional learning aids such as mnemonics, summary notes, handouts, keyword posters and physical items were used in many lessons. The addition of visual and multimedia resources via ICT will enhance teaching and learning in the classroom.

Classroom management and atmosphere was very good in all lessons. Seating arrangements were conducive to group and pair work and facilitated teachers' movement throughout the classroom as they tendered individual support to students. In all lessons observed there was a good rapport between students and teacher. Where individual help, clarifications or explanations were required, such support was provided in an affirming manner.

ASSESSMENT

Each class group sits formal assessments at Christmas and the end of the academic year. Common assessment is used in junior cycle. Students in all years are also informally assessed on the completion of each curriculum topic. Attainment in TY is measured by the subject teacher and includes an evaluation of student projects completed during the year. Teachers maintain records of all assessment outcomes and these, along with student progression in business subjects, are communicated to parents in written reports and at parent teacher meetings.

In all the lessons observed homework was assigned. In each lesson a random sample of student copybooks and journals was examined by the inspector. Practices varied within the business subjects department. Good practice was noted where regular, consistent homework was given, it was of an appropriate quantity and quality, and evaluative comments were used in correction of students' work particularly in senior cycle. It is recommended that this good practice be followed by all business teachers.

Student outcomes in state examinations are good. Results are analysed by the business subjects department and principal who communicates the results of this analysis to the board of management. The analysis of results is used to inform teaching and learning practices.

SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The following are the main strengths identified in the evaluation:

- There is good provision of business education in the entire range of curricular programme offered in the school.
- The business subjects department works collaboratively and has regular meetings. Students' needs are at the core of the business subjects department's activities.
- There are good links between business teachers and the special education needs and English as an additional language department.
- A good enterprise culture exists in the school and effective use is made of co-curricular activities.
- Subject plans contain all the elements of good planning.
- Observed good practice in lessons included use of learning outcomes, keywords, visuals, ICT, higher-order questioning, linkage of theory to students' own knowledge and experience of the economy.

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

- A double period should be provided at some point in junior cycle so as to facilitate practical bookkeeping exercises.
- In all curriculum plans, each topic should be aligned to desired learning outcomes, methodologies, differentiated strategies, resources and assessment modes.
- All business related resources should be catalogued with a note of their location for inclusion in subject planning documentation.
- The effective use of ICT, higher-order targeted questioning, active and co-operative teaching and learning methodologies should be expanded within the business subjects department.
- A review of the homework policy and practices should be conducted to ensure consistent allocation of homework and the use of assessment for learning techniques.

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