An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

Subject Inspection of Business Subjects
REPORT

Carlow Vocational School
Carlow, Co. Carlow
Roll number: 70420R

Date of inspection: 29 January 2014
REPORT ON THE QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN BUSINESS SUBJECTS

INFORMATION ON THE INSPECTION

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<th>28 and 29 January</th>
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<td><strong>Inspection activities undertaken</strong></td>
<td><strong>Observation of teaching and learning during five class periods; one double and three single lessons</strong></td>
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<td>• Review of relevant documents</td>
<td>• Examination of students’ work</td>
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<td>• Discussion with principal and teachers</td>
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MAIN FINDINGS

• Business teachers’ delivery of business education was of a high quality overall, but in a few instances there was scope for development in some aspects of teaching practice.

• Student learning was very good in the lessons where teachers taught for understanding and made lesson content interesting.

• Students have opportunities to experience business activities through participation in a range of good co-curricular and extracurricular activities.

• Senior management is supportive of business education which has a good profile on the school’s curriculum.

• A strong planning culture exists within the business department and this has facilitated development of teaching practices that enable students learning.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

• In the small number of lessons where scope for development was identified, student learning should be assisted through the increased use of higher-order targeted questioning, co-operative learning methodologies and a more purposeful lesson pace.

• The curriculum plan for each business subject should be further developed with the addition of details of the range of teaching and assessment practices that can be used in lessons.
INTRODUCTION

Carlow Vocational School is under the auspices of Carlow and Kilkenny Education and Training Board, with an enrolment of 240 post-primary students of which 72 are pursuing a repeat Leaving Certificate course. The school is involved in the Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) initiative. Business Studies is an optional subject in junior cycle. Business education is offered in the optional Transition Year (TY). In Leaving Certificate, Business is currently provided for students. The school provides the full range of business subjects to students taking the repeat Leaving Certificate course.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

- The teaching observed was of high quality overall. Teachers gave a real-life focus to business education, taught for understanding and maintained high expectations for students. In some lessons, there was scope for further development in aspects of teaching practice.

- In the majority of lessons, the teaching methodologies used facilitated development of student’s evaluation and critical thinking skills. However, in a small number of lessons, teacher talk predominated. In these lessons, it is recommended that a blend of methodologies that are co-operative and explorative be further developed so as to fully engage and motivate students in the process of learning.

- Each lesson observed was well planned. Learning objectives were clearly stated at the beginning of lessons and very good practice was observed at the end of some lessons when students recalled the key points of the lesson. However, in a small number of lessons, the material presented was pitched at a wrong level. It is advisable to restructure these lessons so that all students start with a basic understanding of material being presented.

- In the majority of lessons, students worked in pairs or small groups. Some class groups were also given opportunities to partake in project work and deliver presentations. This good practice should be expanded to all class groups so as to further develop students’ key skills.

- In all lessons, effective use was made of teacher questioning and it was most successful where it differentiated and explored student learning. It is advisable that more frequent use of higher-order questioning be targeted at students of higher ability in all lessons.

- In lessons, there was a real-life focus on subject material. Topical and relevant student-friendly examples were used to explain business concepts. Lessons were made interesting and this aided student learning.

- The TY business module is delivered in an explorative manner that provides opportunities for students to develop their key skills. TY students are encouraged to enter enterprise competitions which create a natural opportunity for cross-curricular links to other subjects. The school’s established link with Carlow County Council was evident through its use as an exemplar in senior cycle lessons. Business teachers successfully incorporated elements and resources of the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme into business education.

- Information and communication technology (ICT) was effectively used as a teaching and learning tool that allowed business education to be dynamic through the sourcing of very good video content.
• In all lessons, teachers were affirming of students’ efforts. The use of student profiling data by some business teachers deepened their awareness of students’ academic needs and abilities.

• Student’s copybooks and note books are well maintained and they are regularly monitored by teachers. It is advisable that teachers further develop comments made on students’ work so as to affirm and highlight ways of improving their work.

• Business students are encouraged to take business subjects at the highest level in certificate examinations, subject to ability. Student attainment rates in examinations are reviewed and compared with the national norms. It is advisable to also compare these results with the student attainment and profiling data that exists in the school so as to accurately inform on students’ achievements.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

• Senior management is proactive in its support of business education and in the deployment of resources. Timetabling is good for all class groups.

• The majority of students who have taken Business Studies at junior cycle and a significant number of students who are new to business education having experienced it in TY choose Business in Leaving Certificate.

• There are good displays of student-generated presentations in classrooms. Seating arrangements in all classrooms were conducive to co-operative learning and the configuration of desks to enable students to permanently sit in groups should be considered particularly where class sizes are small.

• The use of a computer room for some class groups is good as it offers immediate access to ICT and this enables further integration of real-life exemplars and skills-based learning with students’ theoretical knowledge.

• It was brought to the attention of the school’s principal during the subject inspection that the current whole-school timetabling arrangements fall short of what is required with respect to instruction time as directed in circular M29/95 Time in School.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

• Business teachers meet monthly and their coordinator, who is appointed by rotation, organises the agenda and minutes. The department frequently reviews its plans and discusses syllabus and assessment progress and outcomes.

• Planning documentation was indicative of the high standards that are in the subject department. Of particular merit is the department’s mission statement, which articulates teacher’s commitment to provide quality skills-based business education. The inclusion of key literacy strategies and the method by which numeric calculations are taught would further enhance the plan.

• The curricular plans for each business subject are very good in design. However, schemes of work are based on individual teachers’ class groups. A succinct common scheme of work for each subject should be devised.

• The business subjects department has considerable expertise and experience, which can be shared through the further development of each curricular plan. It is advisable that
business teachers collectively agree on the range teaching methodologies, and assessment modes for each topic. The very good practice observed in lessons should be documented and used as a benchmark for all business teachers.

- The sequencing of topics in junior cycle should be re-considered. It is advisable to incorporate book-keeping elements throughout the three-year cycle so as to facilitate the integration of theory elements into book-keeping.

- The majority of teachers had their own electronic resources for use in lessons. The development of a subject department electronic folder to store and facilitate sharing of electronic resources and information should be actively pursued.

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 was given an opportunity to comment in writing on the findings and recommendations of the report; a response was not received from the board.

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