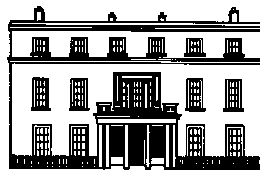


**An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna**  
**Department of Education and Skills**

**Subject Inspection of Business Subjects**  
**REPORT**

**Athy Community College**  
**Athy, County Kildare**  
**Roll number: 70650L**

**Date of inspection: 7 February 2014**



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

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

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**INFORMATION ON THE INSPECTION**

<b>Dates of inspection</b>	5 and 7 February
<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; two double lessons and three single lessons</li><li>• Feedback to principal and teachers</li></ul>

**MAIN FINDINGS**

- Teaching was good overall with some instances of very good practice, but in some lessons students were not sufficiently involved in leading their own learning.
- There was variance in the quality of teachers' assessment of student's work.
- Senior management is supportive of business education but the uptake of Business Studies is low.
- The school's very good provision of information and communication technology (ICT) was used effectively as a teaching tool but its potential to support inquiry-based learning was under realised.
- The overall plan for business education is very good but there is scope to further develop each subject's curriculum plan.

**MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS**

- Where there is scope to further involve students in their learning this should be approached by the increased use of active, explorative and co-operative learning methodologies.
  - Business teachers should increase their use of formative assessment methods.
  - An analysis and review of factors influencing the uptake of Business Studies should be conducted and an action plan be devised to increase uptake.
  - The inclusion of exemplars of topic-specific teaching methodologies, differentiation strategies and modes of homework and a review of the scheduling of topics in junior cycle is required for good planning.
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## **INTRODUCTION**

Athy Community College is under the auspices of Kildare and Wicklow Education and Training Board with an enrolment of 339 students. The school is involved in the Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) initiative. Business Studies is provided in junior cycle and in Leaving Certificate Business is provided as an optional subject.

## **TEACHING AND LEARNING**

- Teaching was good overall with some instances of very good practice, but in some lessons teacher talk predominated. There is potential in all lessons to further develop methodologies that actively involve students in their learning.
- In all lessons, students were given the opportunity to work in pairs. However, there is potential to further expand co-operative learning activities such as group work, where appropriate. In addition, activities such as project work, enterprise activities, debates and presentations could be established in all class groups so as to further involve students in leading their own learning and to further develop key skills.
- In a small number of lessons, students were transcribing key points that were in textbooks. Teachers should re-frame this activity by making it an explorative student learning experience.
- In the majority of lessons, the use of news stories, case studies and YouTube videos which were topical and student friendly helped to progress student understanding. While ICT was used as a good teaching aid its use could be further exploited by adopting an inquiry-based focus to learning in lessons.
- Each lesson observed was well planned. At the outset of lessons, learning outcomes and aims were clearly noted on whiteboards and reviewed as the lesson concluded. Students responded positively and courteously to teachers' instructions and they were in turn positively affirmed.
- In the majority of lessons, there was a very good balance between global and targeted questioning. Where questioning was appropriately differentiated, students had opportunities to develop higher-order thinking skills by critiquing their answers.
- Strategies to enhance students' literacy and numeracy skills were integrated into all lessons. Key words were emphasised and explained and there was a good focus on correct pronunciation and spelling of words. The development of mental arithmetic was particularly good in one lesson.
- The sample of student copybooks and workbooks viewed by the inspector were very neat, well labelled, dated and included graphic organisers to recap on the main points of topics. Good practice was observed in some lessons as students' secured additional paper-based resources in their copybooks.
- While all teachers regularly assign homework, there is a mix of approaches to its assessment. In the majority of lessons, student's work was regularly annotated, but only in some instances were affirming comments noted by teachers. This good practice, where it exists, supports student learning and should be extended throughout business education, particularly in senior cycle.

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

- The uptake of Business Studies is currently low. Senior management is to be commended for maintaining the subject as a curricular option for students. It is advisable that an analysis and review of factors influencing subject choice be conducted by senior management and the business subjects department so that an action plan can be devised to increase uptake. The possibility of providing a subject fair, subject sampling or student-generated option bands should form part of the review.
- Students following the Junior Certificate School Programme are given the opportunity to avail of Business Studies and in doing so can attain good financial literacy and life skills.
- The majority of students who have taken Business Studies at junior cycle continue with Business at Leaving Certificate. However, this year's fifth-year group had to make a choice between the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP) and Business. This anomaly merits a review by senior management.
- The specialist business classroom is a very good visual learning environment. The displays of paper-based resources act as a motivating influence for students, especially as student projects are displayed. ICT facilities are very good in the school as students have access to three computer rooms, mobile laptops and iPads.
- Senior management is proactive in the provision of whole-school continuing professional development (CPD) in areas pertaining to classroom teaching strategies. Business teachers' participation in subject association events benefits the whole subject department.

## **PLANNING AND PREPARATION**

- Regular subject department meetings are held and from a review of the minutes, it was noted that an agreed agenda is followed and at each meeting there is an evaluation of previously set targets.
- Planning documentation indicated that high standards that are maintained within the business subjects department. The business subjects plan is comprehensive and contains all the elements of good planning and includes targets as set out in the DEIS and school improvement plan.
- The layout of each curricular plan is good. The subject department should work collaboratively to note exemplars of topic-specific teaching methodologies, differentiation strategies and modes of homework in the plan.
- In junior cycle, many of the bookkeeping outcomes are contained in the third-year scheme. It is advisable to incorporate book-keeping elements throughout the three-year cycle.
- Many teachers outside of the business department have created good business cross-curricular and co-curricular activities. Students can avail of Enterprise Education as part of the LCVP programme. As part of the School to Business programme the school has established a link with Athy International Concentrates which is beneficial to business students. The teachers that support students in the annual Shackelton Challenge are to be commended for the high quality of enterprising and innovative products produced.

Business teachers could investigate the possibility of students entering other enterprise competitions as this will provide a very practical dimension to business theory.

- 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.
- An analysis of results in the certificate examinations is carried out each year by senior management. Business teachers should also monitor and review student attainment and use baseline data to measure progress.

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