An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

Subject Inspection of Business Studies and Accounting

REPORT

Saint Joseph’s Community College
Kilkee, County Clare
Roll number: 70880F

Date of inspection: 24 November 2014
REPORT
ON
THE QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN BUSINESS STUDIES AND ACCOUNTING

INFORMATION ON THE INSPECTION

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date of inspection</th>
<th>24 November 2014</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Inspection activities undertaken</strong></td>
<td><strong>Observation of teaching and learning during five class periods</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Review of relevant documents</td>
<td>Examination of students’ work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discussion with principal and teachers</td>
<td>Feedback to principal, deputy principal and teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interaction with students</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

MAIN FINDINGS

- High quality teaching and learning was evident in the lessons observed.
- Very good individual lesson planning was evident with teachers having developed and customised a broad range of support materials for students.
- Pair and group work activities were threaded through lessons, although there is scope to improve their effectiveness.
- Teachers paid considerable attention to adapting their methodologies and the resources used to accommodate the range of students’ learning styles.
- A number of very good examples of teachers’ providing students with written formative feedback on their work were observed.
- A large bank of additional resources and materials is available, though there are some materials included which should be updated to reflect current business practice.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

- Teachers should further develop pair and group work activities as a strategy for differentiation.
- The subject department should work more closely with the guidance department and school management to promote uptake of business subjects at senior cycle.
- The subject teachers should develop a protocol for ensuring that the relevant subject support materials are updated to reflect current business conditions.
INTRODUCTION

St. Joseph’s Community College, which operates under the auspices of Limerick Clare Education and Training Board (ETB), has a current enrolment of 169 students. Following junior cycle, students can opt for either the established Leaving Certificate or the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP). The Transition Year (TY) programme is not offered in the school.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

• Very good student-centred teaching was observed where the teaching strategies were adapted to reflect the range of student abilities. In particular, the lessons were planned to accommodate a wide range of learning styles, through the range of resources used.

• Visual, oral and written activities were incorporated very successfully into lessons and these approaches are well suited to the mixed-ability settings in the subjects. In one lesson students completed a cash sorting and counting exercise. This provided a tactile learning experience with a computational dimension, which is very good practice.

• Group and pair work opportunities were facilitated. To strengthen these approaches additional attention should be given to the seating arrangements for students, the timing of the activity, the inclusion of adequate discussion time for students and adequate time for feedback.

• In junior cycle bookkeeping, in order to check students’ knowledge and understanding of key concepts, a very good approach of introducing deliberate errors to question solutions was used. This approach was beneficial in challenging learners and promoting upward differentiation.

• New material was generally introduced by getting students to reflect on their own experience and previous learning. This is a very effective approach to use with business theory. Business examples used were also gender balanced which is good in the co-educational setting.

• An extensive range of additional resources has been developed and collated over the years but there is a need to keep these under review to ensure for example, that relevant legislation is updated.

• In providing feedback to students on their written work a number of approaches were used including comment-only marking and comments with an associated grade. This indicates that very good progress is being made in developing assessment processes as part of assessment for learning (AfL) within the teaching of the subjects.

• Building on the existing AfL approaches some initial efforts are ongoing in encouraging students to generate their own questions and examples. Linked with the existing approach of providing formative feedback to students, teachers are also customising work sheets for use with peer assessment.

• In line with the whole-school approaches, a mixed approach is used to the structure of assessments. Class tests include definitions tests and short-answer questions. Business Studies students are encouraged to complete longer more complex questions using ‘long-term homework’ copybooks. This combined approach is good for promoting higher-order learning.
SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- Business Studies is included in the first-year option taster programme. At senior cycle, traditionally Accounting is the business subject most opted for by students, although the teaching team has the capacity to teach the full range of business options.

- At junior cycle the subject is allocated two periods per week in first year and four periods per week subsequently. While this allocation is lower than previously was the case when an earlier subject inspection was completed, this can be balanced with the positive upward trend in uptake in the subject in the last two years.

- The main challenge facing the department is maintaining viable class groups for senior cycle in years when the junior cycle uptake is low. The subject teachers should enhance their promotion of the subject, in co-operation with school management and Guidance department, thereby increasing the subjects profile among students.

- A very good range of information and communication technology (ICT) resources is available to support teaching and learning and good use is made of these in lessons.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

- The subject department is well-established and over the years has developed good systems and processes to support the work of the teachers. The senior member of the department has recently retired and this transition has been well managed.

- The subject plan has been updated to incorporate objectives as to how Business Studies, especially in first year, can support students’ engagement with a wide range of learning experiences. The first-year taster programme has a very strong life skills focus and a good number of outcomes are delivered despite the reduced time allocation.

- The schemes of work are well presented using a tabular format. This format provides considerable scope for updating the schemes as new initiatives in planning for example, planning for literacy and numeracy developments are undertaken.

- The teachers were exceptionally well-prepared for lessons and it is evident that the department has developed a significant bank of resource materials over the years.

- The quality and variety in the range of additional resources used demonstrates an excellent understanding of the need to vary the presentation of materials to promote students engagement.

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 in writing on the findings and recommendations of the report, and the response of the board will be found in the appendix of this report.

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Appendix

SCHOOL RESPONSE TO THE REPORT

Submitted by the Board of Management
Area 1  Observations on the content of the inspection report

- The Board of Management of Kilkee Community College welcomes this subject inspection and its findings.

- The Board is pleased to note the “high quality of teaching and learning” and “very good lesson planning” in the Business department.

- The Board acknowledges the “very good progress” being made in the Business department in developing assessment processes as part of assessment for learning (AFL).

Area 2  Follow-up actions planned or undertaken since the completion of the inspection activity to implement the findings and recommendations of the inspection

- Teachers are committed to further developing pair work and group work activity as a strategy for differentiation.

- Teachers will develop a protocol for updating relevant materials for Business Studies teaching.

- The Board of Management is committed to working with the guidance department regarding the uptake of Business Studies subjects at senior cycle.