

**An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna**

**Department of Education and Skills**

**Subject Inspection of Business Subjects  
REPORT**

**St Raphaela's Secondary School  
Stillorgan, County Dublin  
Roll number: 60361V**

**Date of inspection: 06 November 2015**



**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**

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**INFORMATION ON THE INSPECTION**

<b>Dates of inspection</b>	5 and 6 October
<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></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Observation of teaching and learning during six double and one single lessons</li><li>• Examination of students' work</li><li>• Feedback to principal and teachers</li></ul>

**MAIN FINDINGS**

- In the majority of lessons, teaching of a very high quality was observed and in the remaining lessons teaching was of good quality.
- An enabling and supportive learning environment enhanced student motivation and participation.
- Students displayed very good knowledge of subject material, topical business and economic affairs.
- The planning, organisational and collaborative practices of the business subjects department are of a very high quality with the focus on students' learning needs.
- The layout and detail of subject curriculum plans for each year group is exemplary.

**MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS**

- The very good teaching practice observed should serve as a benchmark for all lessons in business subjects.

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## **INTRODUCTION**

St. Raphaela's Secondary School is a voluntary secondary school, with an enrolment of 565 female post-primary students. Business Studies is a core subject in first year and an optional subject thereafter. Business education is compulsory in the optional Transition Year programme (TY). Accounting, Business and Economics are offered to Leaving Certificate Students.

## **TEACHING AND LEARNING**

- In the majority of lessons, teaching of a very high quality was observed and in the remaining lessons teaching was of good quality. There was a consistent focus on teaching for understanding in almost all lessons
- Students exhibited very good comprehension of subject matter as they answered higher-order probing questions. Of particular merit, was the depth of knowledge that students displayed on topical business and economic affairs. Very good, active, autonomous and enjoyable learning was a key feature of most lessons. Teachers, through the setting of challenging tasks, sought to further the whole school target of developing a growth mindset in students.
- The very good teaching and classroom management practices observed created a partnership approach in a positive and affirming student learning environment.
- In almost all lessons, teachers used a very good range of teaching methodologies that sustained student interest and engagement. All lessons were well planned. A good range of resources including worksheets and handouts were used in lessons. It was evident that teachers actively share resources and discuss methodologies within the business department.
- In most lessons, high quality pair work included 'think pair share' activities that encompassed differentiated tasks. Team-based student group activities and debates, where used, were highly effective in stimulating and deepening student learning. In a very small number of lessons there was scope to reconfigure the practice of note taking in order to ensure student learning is more active.
- Teachers expertly made tangible links between the subject matter and real-life events including students' own experience of entrepreneurial activities. It is praiseworthy that students are encouraged to look at the world around them and follow business stories in the media. In one lesson, the use of a quiz format skilfully expanded student knowledge on topical matters.
- Information and communications technology was used as a teaching and learning tool in almost all lessons. The use of very good visual resources and video clips reinforced student understanding. In some lessons, students were assigned the task of conducting internet research on lesson material which they then presented to their peers. This good practice should be expanded.
- Learning intentions were shared with students in all lessons. Best practice was evident in lessons where they were presented as what students should be able to know, do and understand by the end of the lesson. Some teachers referred to the intended learning intentions during lessons. In the majority of lessons, teachers recapped on learning through methodologies such as student-targeted questions, a quiz and student-generated lists of what they learned.

- It is praiseworthy that there is a strong focus on enterprise activities within the business department. It was evident that students enjoyed participating in enterprise activities which will benefit their understanding of business theory and aid development of key skills.
- Most students are assigned regular homework as evidenced from a selection of students' journals and copybooks. However, in a small number of class groups there was scope to assign more regular homework, particularly at junior cycle, since there are only two lessons per week.
- Very good practice was observed where students' homework was returned with affirming and formative comments which provided students with direction as to how they could improve their work. Of particular merit is the practice by which students are assigned the task of grading their effort level in preparation for class tests and predicting the subsequent grade that they hope to achieve.
- Students of business subjects are challenged and encouraged to aim for high academic standards and, where possible, to take subjects at the highest possible level in the certificate examinations. Student uptake at higher level and subsequent outcomes are generally very good.

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

- Management's support for business subjects is commendable in each of the following key areas: curricular provision; equality of access to the subject for all students; facilitation of co-curricular activities including business-related trips.
- All first-year students have the opportunity to complete a year of Business Studies and in doing so attain some financial literacy skills. The uptake of the optional Business Studies in second year is very good as is the uptake of the three optional Leaving Certificate business subjects.
- Class-period provision for Business Studies is satisfactory. While the provision of a weekly double-class period for first-year Business Studies students is less than normal, it is balanced by the provision of the taster programme of optional subjects for junior cycle. Double-class periods are provided for business subjects for the final two-years of the junior cycle and in some instances these are on consecutive days which may militate against homework completion. In this context, it is advisable that class periods be evenly spread and distributed across the school week.
- The teacher-based classrooms are good visual learning environments with some very good exhibits of student-generated posters on display.
- Business teachers are active members of their subject association, have availed of subject-specific continuing professional development and are diligent in ensuring that their subject knowledge is current and shared within the business department.
- A weekly meeting with student teachers is convened by the business co-ordinator to discuss progress, provide appropriate advice and share good practice and resources.

## **PLANNING AND PREPARATION**

- Planning documentation was indicative of the very high standards that are maintained within the business department. Diligent business teachers work in a collaborative and supportive manner and are very committed to the continued development of business education in the school.
- Teachers have regular professional contact with each other through formal and informal meetings, and minutes revealed the wide range of pertinent topics discussed. The use of a shared folder on the school server facilitates communication and collaboration within the business department.
- High quality curriculum plans are generated in terms of the teaching and learning needs of the student cohort. The layout and detail of curriculum plans for each year group is exemplary.
- The business modules within the TY programme are very well planned and delivered. The three business modules further develop students' work-life and enterprise skills, in addition to developing students' financial literacy skills. The aims of the TY programme are promoted through the active methodologies used in delivering the modules.

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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 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.

# **Appendix**

**SCHOOL RESPONSE TO THE REPORT**

**Submitted by the Board of Management**

**Part A Observations on the content of the inspection report**

The board of management of St. Raphaela's Secondary School is very happy that the hard work, skills and collaborative approach of the teaches in the Business Dept has been recognised in such a positive way. The report is a testimony to the commitment and professionalism of the department as a whole.

**Part B Follow-up actions planned or undertaken since the completion of the inspection activity to implement the findings and recommendations of the inspection.**

The school will provide opportunities for sharing of best practices and high quality teaching observed during the inspection with other teachers in the school.