An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

Subject Inspection of Business Subjects
REPORT

Presentation de La Salle
Bagenalstown, Co. Carlow
Roll number: 61150N

Date of inspection: 8 and 9 February 2010
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 de La Salle, Bagenalstown. 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 report; a response was not received from the board.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

Presentation De La Salle has a choice of business subjects on the junior and senior cycle curriculum. Students can choose Business Studies in junior cycle and Business is on the curriculum for Transition Year (TY) students. In senior cycle, Accounting and Business are subject options. Students in senior cycle also have the option of completing the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP). The Enterprise module of LCVP is taught by business teachers who seek to expose and introduce the students to the world of enterprise and business. It is praiseworthy that the expertise of business teachers is employed in the delivery of the LCVP course.

For the duration of first year, students are timetabled for two class periods to sample Business Studies. This is good practice, as it allows students to make an informed choice in the selection of subjects for second year. Uptake of the optional subject of Business Studies in the school is good at junior cycle. Timetabling for Business Studies is satisfactory in second and third year with four class periods per year. At senior cycle, student uptake in Accounting is good and in Business, the uptake level is improving. Timetabling of both subjects is satisfactory, as it meets the time allocation requirements of the accounting and business syllabuses.

Classrooms are mainly teacher-based. This facilitates the use of resources for teaching and learning in business subjects. There are two classrooms which are used almost exclusively by the business department, one of these rooms has a data projector and information and communication technology (ICT) equipment. Senior management is in the process of fitting a data projector and an interactive whiteboard in the other business-based classroom. A stimulating print-rich environment has been created with commercially-produced posters which were attractive, professional and informative and student work displayed on the walls. In one of the business
classrooms, there was an open shelved area with resources and books. This facilitates the storing and sharing of resources among the business teachers which is good practice. Senior management is to be commended on the provision of teaching materials and ICT resources.

All teachers of business subjects are subject specialists and most are members of the Business Studies Teachers Association of Ireland (BSTAI). The school is actively involved in the BSTAI student quiz. This is a praiseworthy activity for students. The board of management facilitates attendance at available in-service as a means of updating skills and knowledge and gives support for professional development activities, as required.

**Planning and Preparation**

Senior management is proactive in facilitating and encouraging collaborative planning among business teachers. There is a subject co-ordinator in place and the role rotates among personnel in the business department. This is good practice, as it allows for sharing of expertise. The subject department is assigned time to meet twice a year. The business department has worked collaboratively in developing a plan for each of the business subjects. The business plans contain the required elements for good planning and include a curriculum plan for each year group, a list of methodologies that could be employed and a homework policy for business subjects. To enhance the plans, the student outcomes for each topic should be documented. It is also recommended that the resources and materials available in the business department should be included in the plan and referenced to each curriculum topic. The plans were electronically generated. This is good practice, as it allows updates and modifications to be made, if and when needed. Appended to the plan for each subject was a bank of resources. These resources comprised of a range of assessments, handouts for students and notes on various curriculum topics. This facilitates a common approach to the teaching and assessment of business subjects. The resources were also prepared electronically, which facilitates ease of access, amendment, storage and sharing within the department.

As students in first year spend the year sampling business studies, they do not use a text book. Students maintain a notes copybook and homework copybook which are supplemented by handouts produced by the teacher. It may be useful to have a set of textbooks in the classroom which could be used as a resource by the students. A similar situation occurs at senior level, where it may be useful to have some textbooks available for student use as reference and study aids. Teachers were well prepared for each lesson observed and they employed a variety of resources such as textbooks, handouts, question sheets, ICT and edited television programmes. It is recommended that the business department include the website addresses for these and other resources within the subject plan. If at some time in the future the school develops an e portal system, it could facilitate the use and sharing of electronically generated resources.

**Teaching and Learning**

In all lessons observed, teachers were well prepared. Lessons had a well-thought out structure with the aims of the lesson outlined at the start of class, a review of homework, which often provided the link with previous learning, and introduction of material that matched the learning aims. Homework was clearly explained and assigned at the end of each class. Lessons were paced at a level that suited the mixed-ability class groups observed.
There was good use of questioning techniques. Questioning was used to elicit information, to determine understanding, to assess student progress and to advance learning of the material being taught. In all lessons visited, a range of global, targeted, higher-order and lower-order questions were employed. This ensured differentiation and facilitated student learning at an appropriate level within the class. Students’ answers were positively affirmed. Of merit was the use of higher-order questioning at junior cycle, where students were asked to apply their knowledge to a range of customer complaints and give the possible reasoned solutions. The students were able to make informed judgements and rationalise other scenarios that became part of a general class discussion. The approach adopted is highly commended.

A very good step-by-step approach to the preparation of a final account question was observed in a further lesson. This involved drawing the students’ attention to a manufacturing firm in the locality and looked at the costs involved for outsourcing versus direct production. In this way, the students were enabled to develop an understanding of the theory. There was good linkage to previous learning with references to marginal costing and its use in the topic being taught. Teachers modelled answers to questions with guidance from the students and there was good explanation of new material. Students received positive affirmation throughout the class and they clearly benefited from the teacher’s approach.

The inclusion of ICT as a methodology for teaching and learning is to be highly commended. The use of ICT was particularly good, as the resources used were directly linked to the learning aims of the lesson. In one junior cycle lesson observed, ICT was used to display key points of the lesson. Also, the teaching in the classroom was supplemented by the introduction of a video clip which played real life scenarios and allowing the topic to come alive in the minds of the student.

At senior cycle, there was also very good use of two internet video clips that brought to life the case study of an enterprise. The video clips facilitated class discussion on the topic, with the students engaged and motivated in their learning. The use of ICT in this manner is highly commendable, as it encourages students to apply their business knowledge to real life scenarios and deepen their understanding of the world of business. This practice also facilitates the sourcing of current and relevant business knowledge that is particularly beneficial to senior cycle students. In a further senior cycle lesson observed, students were given a handout that summarised the material from previous lessons. It was well prepared, clear and succinct and encapsulated the key learning points for the student. Handouts, which provide good revision aids for the student, are kept in a folder.

Classroom management was good in all lessons observed and an effective learning environment and atmosphere was created. There was good rapport between students and teacher, and where individual help was required or explanations sought, such support was provided in an affirming manner. Students are encouraged to be active participants and to be confident in their own learning. This was evident in a TY lesson observed where students gave a presentation to the class on their mini-company project. The presentation was well planned and executed. There was a caring culture in the classroom; this was evident in the supportive atmosphere in the room as the students presented their respective projects to the class.

ASSESSMENT

In each lesson visited, homework was assigned and corrected in each lesson. From examination of a sample of students’ homework, it is evident that a variety of assignments are given. In
general, completed homework assignments were well presented, neat and labelled. An examination of copies completed showed that homework was regularly annotated. Some homework assignments had useful teacher evaluative comments. This practice should be expanded within the business department, as it helps the student to make progress in the subject. At junior cycle, where the students were given an assignment that required them to conduct research using the internet, teachers acknowledged that not all students in the class had internet access. Therefore alternative appropriate work for these students was assigned. This is good practice. Journals were used to record assigned homework and as a means of communication between teacher and parent. Students in junior cycle were more proactive in using the journals than in senior cycle. This should be addressed and a common strategy to promote use of the journal by senior cycle students agreed by the business teachers.

Formal tests are held twice a year, the results of which are communicated to parents through a written report. Teachers also administer class tests throughout the year, usually at the completion of a topic. In a visit to a junior cycle class, it was observed that students maintained a folder for resources, handouts and corrected tests. The folder also contained a record of the students test results, which is commendable. In Business at senior cycle, students are given a class test at the conclusion of each unit. It may prove beneficial and help to reinforce student learning if tests were administered after each chapter instead of units as there is a shorten time span between chapters.

Teachers maintain records of students’ test results. Students’ outcomes in tests and progress are communicated via a written twice-yearly report to parents. Each year group has a parent-teacher meeting which facilitates discussion on student’s progress in the subject.

Student attainment in state examinations is good at all levels. Results achieved in certificate examinations are analysed by the principal and deputy-principal and communicated to subject teachers. Senior management has attained a software programme that will produce a report on the analysis of examination results for each subject taught in the school. This development is part of the school’s improvement planning programme. This is praiseworthy.

**SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

The following are the main strengths identified in the evaluation:

- Senior management is proactive in the support they give to the teaching and learning and the provision of ICT and resources to the business department.
- The incorporation of ICT into teaching and learning is very good, which helps to expand students’ understanding and learning.
- Teachers with business expertise are involved in the teaching of LCVP.
- Classroom management was good and contributed to a positive learning environment.
- Effective lesson planning, preparation and the use of a variety of methodologies by teachers were observed in the course of lessons.
- Students exhibited a good understanding of business concepts and were able to apply them to real-life situations.
- Student attainment in state examinations is good at all levels.

As a means of building on these strengths and to address areas for development, the following key recommendations are made:
• It is recommended that the resources and materials available in the business department should be catalogued and included in the plans for business subjects and referenced to each curriculum topic.
• The business department should include the website addresses for ICT and other resources in the subject plan.
• It is recommended that a common strategy to promote use of the homework journal by senior cycle students should be agreed by the business teachers.

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.

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