

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

**Subject Inspection of Business Subjects
REPORT**

**Dominican College
Wicklow, County Wicklow
Roll number: 61860V**

Date of inspection: 14 September 2010



**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

SUBJECT INSPECTION REPORT

This report has been written following a subject inspection in Dominican College, Wicklow town. 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 this subject in the school. The evaluation was conducted over one day 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 of the school was given an opportunity to comment on the findings and recommendations of the report; the board chose to accept the report without response.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

In Dominican College all first-year students take Business Studies and, when optional subjects are selected at the end of the year, a majority of students retain the subject to Junior Certificate level. After junior cycle, all students participate in the Transition Year (TY) programme. Students can opt to do the Enterprise or World of Work module.

Accounting and Business are offered on the Leaving Certificate curriculum. Students choose four subjects from a list of twelve optional subjects. The majority of students who have taken Business Studies at junior cycle retain at least one business subject option in the Leaving Certificate. While there is very good uptake of Business, in recent years the number of students opting for Accounting at senior cycle has declined, and currently there is no sixth-year class. Nevertheless, the school is commended for the continued commitment and support given to the subject at senior cycle. Students at the school can also avail of the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP) in which the enterprise module is delivered by business teachers.

The time allocated for business subjects at junior and senior cycle is good. In first year the subject is part of the core curriculum for all students and three periods are allocated. This is balanced by the provision of five periods per week in second year and four periods in third year. TY students have a triple period and Leaving Certificate students have five periods which are a good blend of double and single periods.

The business subjects department receives an annual budget from senior management and this is used to purchase relevant resources such as visuals and teaching aids. A press is provided in the staff workroom for the storage of shared business resources. Resources including equipment and paper-based resources are stored in teachers' own classrooms. It is recommended that an inventory of all available resources and their location be included in planning documentation so as to facilitate their sharing and use within the business subjects department.

The majority of teachers in the business subjects department are classroom-based and as a result their classrooms have become *de facto* business specialist rooms. Most business classrooms have visual teaching aids such as overhead projectors and multimedia equipment. The majority of business classrooms are print-rich environments with commercial, teacher-generated and student-generated posters. However, there is scope in some of these classrooms to develop a more visually stimulating business environment.

Information and communication technology (ICT) facilities in the school are in development. At the time of the inspection new ICT equipment was being installed. Senior management is providing school-based professional development in the use of ICT in the classroom. A business teacher's base classroom is one of the school's two ICT rooms. However, this provision in this classroom was ineffective as many of the computers are not in working order. This situation is being addressed by senior management.

All business teachers in the school are subject specialists and are diligent in ensuring that their subject knowledge is current. Some of the teachers in the business subjects department are members of the Business Studies Teachers Association of Ireland (BSTAI) and regularly attend subject association meetings, conferences and workshops. Business teachers have partaken in whole-school continuing professional development (CPD) courses arranged by senior management and courses delivered by the Second Level Support Service. Good practice noted in relation to attendance at CPD courses is that the materials and notes from courses are filled in the planning folder and available for all to use.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

The business subjects department meets formally twice a year and informally as the need arises to discuss issues pertaining to the running of the department. The proceedings of the formal meetings are noted. The position of subject co-ordinator is clearly defined and there is good practice in the rotation of the post among the team on a voluntary basis.

There are subject plans for all of the business subjects taught in the school. These plans show elements of good planning and contain copies of relevant school policies. The yearly curriculum schemes of work articulate the topics to be taught to each year group. It is praiseworthy that a book-keeping topic is included in the scheme of work for each Business Studies year group.

Included in the planning documentation is a list of effective teaching methodologies. While these are good, the business subjects department should collaboratively agree on what is the most suitable methodology to use for each curricular learning outcome. This will help to build a unified and consistent approach to the teaching of business education in the school. It is recommended that the addition of learning outcomes and the linking of active methodologies and resources that can be used for each curriculum topic be included in the curriculum schemes of work of each business subject.

While there was no interaction with TY students as part of this inspection visit, planning documentation indicates that both modules are in keeping with the aims and ethos of the TY programme. The Enterprise module gives a business and enterprise perspective to students new to business while building and developing expertise in students who studied Business Studies at junior cycle. The planning documentation for this module is a copy of the *Get up and go* programme developed by the TY support service. It is advisable that the business subjects

department develop this programme for its own student cohort by including envisaged learning outcomes and appropriate teaching methodologies so as to further develop students' applied business skills. The World of Work module seeks to involve the students in evaluating their current skills, gaining experience of job application procedure and knowledge of personal budgeting.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

Five lessons were observed as part of this inspection. They comprised a Business Studies lesson in each year of the junior cycle and double lessons in Accounting and in Business in Leaving Certificate. The methodologies used to impart learning were a blend of active and traditional and they suited the pace of the mixed-ability setting. The good practice of recapping the key points of the lesson was observed in some lessons and should be extended to all lessons. Teaching and learning was good in all lessons observed.

In four of the lessons observed bookkeeping-based topics were taught. Teachers used a good step-by-step approach and endeavoured to ensure that each step was understood by students before moving on to new learning. Students in book-keeping lessons were actively involved in their learning. In a lesson, groups of students were given envelopes containing elements of a trial balance and they had to match the elements under the various headings. In another lesson students were invited up to the board to compute, display and explain the solutions to various questions. A good example of 'think, pair share' was seen in a lesson where students had to find answers to theory elements of a household budget. The teachers' presentation of material was good and this was mirrored in students' presentation of work in account books. Teachers visually checked on students' progress and tendered individual support and advice in a calm and affirming manner.

Teachers' and students' use of business language and terminology was good in all lessons visited. In some lessons teachers made good use of teaching aids such as posters to expand learning outcomes and this was enhanced by good references to real-life business scenarios. At senior cycle the use of current and topical economic and business issues was particularly effective. Teachers made good use of current economic resources such as RTÉ's *Freefall* programme to progress understanding and learning. It is advisable that students also take responsibility for their own knowledge of business developments by keeping up-to-date on current economic issues.

Overhead projectors were used effectively to display lesson notes and solutions to questions. ICT equipment is currently being installed in classrooms. This development will facilitate the judicious use of ICT to enhance teaching, address various student learning styles and build students' knowledge of the business environment that they live in. This medium should be fully utilised in the classroom and students should be encouraged to use the ICT facilities to research projects and assignments. The business and enterprise pillar on the website of the Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST), www.pdst.ie, contains resources that may assist in the use of ICT as a teaching tool in the classroom.

Good questioning techniques were used to determine student attainment 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 and often served as a means to differentiate learning in the lesson. In some lessons teachers looked not only for an answer but also for a reasoned explanation. This good practice should be commonly used throughout the department.

Classroom management was good in all lessons observed and an effective learning environment and atmosphere was created. All business classrooms had good seating arrangements that supported active learning methodologies. There was a good rapport between students and teacher, and where individual help was required or explanations sought, such support was provided in an affirming manner. Students were encouraged to be active participants and to be confident in their own learning.

In all lessons observed, teachers were well prepared and used resources such as textbooks, handouts, prepared acetates and ICT presentations. Some of the resources were prepared electronically and this good practice facilitates their storage, amending and sharing within the department. Lessons had a good structure and the aims of the lesson were outlined at the start of most lessons.

ASSESSMENT

The subject department follows the school's homework and assessment policies and in doing so administers regular informal class tests and formal examinations three times a year. Samples of some senior cycle assessment tests were made available to the inspector and they were well designed. They contained short and long questions and this encourages the development of higher-order skills. Teachers maintain records of students' test results. Students' outcomes in tests and progress are communicated via a written twice-yearly report to parents and at the annual parent-teacher meeting.

In all of the lessons visited homework was assigned and it was evident from a review of homework journals that this is a regular practice. Homework was corrected by oral answers tendered by teacher or student and written solutions on the board. An inspection of a sample of homework copybooks found very few evaluative comments on students' work. The use of evaluative comments to guide and encourage students in their learning is a principle of assessment for learning and is beneficial to students and it is recommended that such practices be used by the business subject department.

Students are encouraged to achieve to their highest potential. Outcomes are good in certificate examinations. Results in state certificate examinations are analysed by the business subject department, which communicates the results of this analysis to the board of management and the relevant business students in the school. The results are used to inform teaching and learning practices.

SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The following are the main strengths identified in the evaluation:

- All first-year students can avail of Business Studies and a high percentage of students continue with the subject to the Junior Certificate. There is a good follow through with business education from junior to senior cycle.
- Planning documentation contains elements of good planning.
- The use of ICT as a methodology is in development with good support from senior management.

- Teachers used good classroom management techniques and activities and successfully used a blend of traditional and active methodologies to engage students in their learning.

As a means of building on these strengths and to address areas for development, the following key recommendations are made:

- An inventory of all available resources and their location for inclusion in planning documentation should be compiled so as to facilitate sharing and use within the business subjects department.
- Each topic in curriculum plans should be linked to its learning outcomes and the methodologies and resources that can be used for its delivery.
- Assessment for learning practices should be used by the business subjects department.

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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