

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

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

**Saint Muredach's College**  
**Ballina, County Mayo**  
**Roll number: 64510J**

**Date of inspection: 14 September 2012**



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**

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| <b>Dates of inspection</b>  | 13 and 14 September 2012  |
| <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 eleven class periods</li><li>• Examination of students' work</li><li>• Feedback to principal, deputy principal and teachers</li></ul> |

**MAIN FINDINGS**

- The quality of teaching and learning in the majority of lessons observed was good though there is scope to broaden the range of teaching methodologies used given the mixed-ability settings.
- The time provision for the business module within Transition Year (TY) is good and the module is strongly focused on enterprise activity.
- Good use was made of information and communications technology (ICT) to support students' learning in the subjects, including the use of presentation and multimedia software.
- Positive efforts were made by teachers towards developing a range of customised worksheets, templates and notes which were varied to suit the range of learning styles.
- Business Studies has recently moved from core provision to optional provision after first year; the subject plan and associated schemes of work need to be updated to reflect this change.
- Nearly all the subject plans lack detail in relation to agreed schemes of work for each year group.

**MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS**

- There is scope to improve students' learning through greater use of teaching methodologies that focus on the differentiation of learning outcomes and the provision of additional active-learning opportunities for students.
- The objectives and outcomes of the first-year business studies programme need to be reviewed to alter its heavy emphasis on bookkeeping outcomes.
- A comprehensive review of the subject plans is recommended.
- The business department is advised to extend the practice of analysing examination results to all the business subjects and to undertake an analysis of the factors affecting students' selection of business options at key transitional stages, including first to second year and junior to senior cycle.

## **INTRODUCTION**

St. Muredach's College is a boys-only voluntary secondary school under the trusteeship of the Catholic Bishop of Killala. A range of business subjects is provided in the schools' curriculum including Business Studies at junior cycle and Business and Economics at senior cycle. Enterprise is a key element of the schools' TY programme. The school has currently 450 students enrolled.

## **TEACHING AND LEARNING**

- The quality of teaching and learning was good in the majority of the lessons observed.
- In general, preparation and pace were good. In a number of the lessons the attention given to managing the behaviour of students resulted in the lesson pace being too slow and without an appropriate degree of challenge for some of the students.
- In many of the lessons observed efforts were made to provide a range of activities to keep students attention. Where this worked best, pair work and small groups in addition to whole-class activities were effectively managed. However, in a number of lessons whole-class teaching dominated and in these instances there is scope for improvement and a need to provide structured opportunities for students to learn co-operatively and individually.
- In the majority of lessons good practice existed where lesson outcomes were shared, reviewed and summarised. This approach should be used by all teachers to ensure, that lesson content is well structured and that assessment is matched to the lesson outcomes.
- There is scope to improve the questioning styles used particularly given the mixed-ability setting and to adopt common in-class differentiation strategies including seating arrangements based on the students needs, use of visual stimuli and increased use of extension activities.
- Good use was made of ICT to support students' learning in the subjects including the use of presentation and multimedia software. Good efforts were made by teachers towards developing a range of customised worksheets, templates and notes, varied to suit the range of learning styles.
- Attention was paid to promoting the development of students' literacy and numeracy skills. Of particular merit were the frequent use of keywords during lessons and the students' use of keyword copies within the subjects.
- Subject specific terminology and good examples of teachers reinforcing subject principles were evident throughout lessons. Current and relevant business examples were used and students presentation especially in bookkeeping elements is very good overall.
- Greater exploration of the range of assessment modes appropriate to the subjects and to students' needs and interests is required. A variety and combination of assessment modes, consistent with the strategies and principles appropriate to *Assessment for Learning* approaches, should be agreed and included within the subject department plan. Existing good practice should be shared and explored.

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

- Time provision for the subject in senior cycle is good, with a recent improvement in the number of periods allocated in junior cycle. The inclusion of double periods in each year

of junior cycle provides a very good opportunity for the completion of the bookkeeping outcomes of the syllabus.

- Business Studies has recently moved from core to optional provision at junior cycle. All first-year students take a year-long taster programme of two class periods per week in the subject. This year approximately half of second-year students opted to retain Business Studies. Given this change the subject department should take a more active role in monitoring and tracking the uptake rates of Business Studies each year.
- The extent to which a correlation exists between successful participation in the TY business programme and subsequent uptake of business subjects in senior cycle should be investigated. In order to support students' decision-making processes with respect to senior cycle options, the business team should prepare short written descriptors of each of the senior cycle business options including broad course outlines, possible future third-level courses and careers. Such information could be provided at subject choice information sessions for students and parents.

### **PLANNING AND PREPARATION**

- There is a need to refocus the duties of the subject co-ordinator towards taking a greater role in directing subject development and change. Additional time should be given at subject department meetings to discussion and sharing of best practice in relation to teaching and learning.
  - The further development of subject plans and schemes of work would be enhanced by fully exploiting the range of experience and skills among the subject team. The current format of many of the plans is content focused and records what is being done rather than planning for the delivery of the syllabuses.
  - In many instances the schemes of work for the subjects are not adequate. With the exception of Economics they do not reflect subject developments or changes in the subject provision. The development of the schemes of work, in particular, would provide for continuity and agreement on effective teaching and learning strategies and facilitate the induction and mentoring of new staff.
  - There is a need to review the degree of difficulty of the agreed first-year programme. As the programme is a taster, greater emphasis should be placed on *The Business of Living* syllabus outcomes. This would provide all students, including those who will not take the subject after first year, with an understanding of how business relates to them personally.
  - The business programme within the TY programme is well designed. It emphasises the development of students' work and enterprise skills and the programme has a well established link with Moy Valley Resources, a community-based resource development organisation.
  - The methodology used in the analysis of student results in the state examinations for Economics was very good and this approach should be adopted across all business subjects.
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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.

# **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, The Parents Association, Management, Staff and the Student Council welcomes the subject inspection report on behalf of the whole school community.

The Board of Management gratefully acknowledges the contributions of the staff and students to the success of the subject inspection.

We acknowledge the professionalism of the inspectorate and the collaborative manner in which the inspectorate was carried out.

We accept the recommendations as valid and as a solid means for building on the strengths outlined and addressing areas for development.

We look forward to the challenge of addressing those recommendations and have already incorporated many of them into our programmes of work.

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

The Business Studies department has met and discussed the draft at length.

The Business Studies Department welcomes the Report and is engaged with its main findings and recommendations.

The first year business programme has been substantially reviewed and the learning outcomes modified in accordance with the inspectors guidelines.