

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Subject Inspection of Business Subjects
REPORT

Bridgetown Vocational College
Bridgetown, County Wexford
Roll number: 71610E

Date of inspection: 16 April 2013



AN ROINN | DEPARTMENT OF
OIDEACHAIS | EDUCATION
AGUS SCILEANNA | AND SKILLS

**REPORT
ON
THE QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN BUSINESS SUBJECTS**

INFORMATION ON THE INSPECTION

Dates of inspection	15 and 16 April
Inspection activities undertaken <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Review of relevant documents• Discussion with principal and teachers• Interaction with students	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Observation of teaching and learning during seven lessons; two double and five single class periods• Examination of students' work• Feedback to principal and teachers

MAIN FINDINGS

- Teaching and learning observed varied in quality from good to fair.
- In the majority of lessons, there was an overemphasis on instructional teaching, but all business teachers have both the skills and opportunities to establish additional methodologies that engage students in their learning.
- A cordial, respectful and positive rapport was evident in lessons between teachers and students.
- Students are encouraged to take business subjects at the highest level possible subject to ability in certificate examinations, wherein outcomes are good.
- There is good provision of business subjects in the school but the uptake of Business Studies is low while uptake of Accounting is good.
- A Business Studies plan is in place but it does not fully inform and reflect on teaching and learning practices in the business subjects department.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

- The good teaching practices observed in some lessons should serve as the minimum baseline standard of provision for all business students.
 - There should be a consistent focus on improving teaching by using methodologies that challenge students, access their learning styles and develop their key skills.
 - Business teachers should familiarise themselves with the supports that their subject association and the Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST) provide.
 - The approach to business subjects planning should be one that informs and reflects on teaching and learning practices in an organised, developmental and collaborative manner.
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INTRODUCTION

Bridgetown Vocational College, a co-educational school, under the auspices of Co. Wexford Vocational Education Committee, has a current enrolment of 584 students. The school is involved in the Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) initiative. The school provides Business Studies in junior cycle, and Accounting and Business as optional subjects in Leaving Certificate

TEACHING AND LEARNING

- The quality of teaching and learning ranged from good to fair. In the majority of lessons, there was scope for further development of effective teaching practices so as to fully engage students in learning
- In the most effective instances of teaching, as observed in some lessons, strategies included: good use of learning outcomes, good sharing of knowledge and questioning strategies, a good step-by-step approach, appropriate pacing and the creation of high expectations.
- While students were actively involved in some lessons through questioning strategies and presentation of work on the whiteboard, in most lessons there was an overemphasis on instructional teaching. In one lesson, there was an instance of students working in pairs. Although many opportunities were available in almost all lessons for students to work in a collaborative manner, they were not availed of.
- In a few lessons, there was good linkage of the topic being taught to real-life situations. However, students own awareness and knowledge of the business environment was generally low. Students should be encouraged and supported to take an interest in current affairs.
- While board work was good there is scope to use the overhead or data projector to display workings so as to facilitate a more efficient use of lesson time.
- Questioning strategies were most effective when differentiated and targeted at named students. This good practice should be further developed and used in all lessons.
- In some lessons, students were transcribing information that was available in their textbooks. While there is some merit in providing students with notes as additional learning supports, it is not an effective use of lesson time. Students could be motivated to generate their own summary notes.
- The use of information communication technology (ICT) to support teaching and learning should be developed. Where ICT was used it mainly supported presentation of lesson content. In one lesson, a video clip was shown and it successfully engaged and deepened learning for students. The possibilities that ICT can provide to access relevant news stories, case studies, and to provide a visual stimulus should be fully exploited by all teachers.
- In some lessons, learning outcomes were clearly stated at the beginning and reviewed as the lesson concluded and this is good practice. However, the structure in some lessons was based on the sequencing of content in the textbook which started at too high a level for students. It is advisable to restructure these lessons so that all students start with a basic understanding of material being presented and that the textbook be viewed as resource to support classroom learning.

- There was a cordial, respectful and positive rapport between teachers and students. Students were positively affirmed and supported in all their interactions.
- On inspection of a sample of students' work, neatness, layout, headings and labelling required attention in some instances. It is advisable that teachers devise strategies to improve students' presentation of work and develop their use of evaluative and affirming comments when annotating students' written work.
- Students are encouraged to achieve to their highest potential and to take business subjects at higher level in certificate examinations, wherein outcomes are good.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- There is good provision of business subjects in the school. However, uptake of Business Studies is below national norms. The factors involved merit an analysis by senior management and the business subjects department so that an action plan can be devised to increase uptake. A high percentage of students continue with business education from Junior Certificate to Leaving Certificate. Uptake of Accounting in Leaving Certificate is very good.
- The banding arrangement in the junior cycle is designed to meet the needs of all students, including those who have special educational needs.
- The visual learning environment in the specialist business classroom should be further developed by business teachers with displays of student-generated presentations and projects and other relevant and informative learning aids.
- Teachers are facilitated by management to access opportunities for continuous professional development (CPD). Currently business teachers are not active members of the subject association or have recently availed of subject-related CPD. In the context of a dynamic subject like Business, it is advisable that teachers engage formally in subject-related CPD.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

- Subject plans have been developed for all business subjects and contain aspects of good planning. However, the approach to planning needs to be more collaborative, organised and developmental. The business subjects plan should inform the school community including current and future business teachers on how business education is delivered in the school. It is advisable to agree a protocol on how mentoring of new business teachers occurs.
- The inclusion of how JCSP learning statements are enacted, the details of how numeracy and literacy strategies are deployed within the suite of business subjects and the linking of DEIS targets to the practices used in business education would further enhance the plan.
- The list of topic-related keywords that teachers used in lessons could be developed as a learning resource for students new to business education in Leaving Certificate and students with additional needs by adding explanations and definitions. The business subjects department should liaise formally with the mathematics department to ensure that there are similar approaches to mathematical computations, and should note the agreed practice in planning documentation.

- The expertise and experience in the business subjects department should be shared through the development of each subject's curricular plan thus ensuring that all business students experience the curriculum in a similar and consistent manner. This can be achieved by linking to each topic to its learning outcomes, resources, differentiated learning strategies and range of teaching and assessment methodologies.
- Business teachers are in the process of developing an ICT resource folder for each business subject.

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 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.

1. The percentage of students studying Business Studies at Junior Certificate level may be lower than in some post-primary schools but this may be because Business Studies is mandatory in some post-primary schools and many post-primary schools offer a more limited range of subjects and fewer practical subjects for the Junior Certificate.
2. At Leaving Certificate level there is a Business class every year and depending on demand, an Accountancy class. When both subjects have been on the Leaving Certificate curriculum, the Business class has almost always been the larger of the two classes.
3. Teachers of Business subjects have asked that C.P.D. in Accountancy and/or Business be provided in the Wexford Education Centre.

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

1. Teachers will again request that C.P.D. in Accountancy and/or Business be arranged, if possible, in our local Education Centre.
2. Subject Plans are being updated to take account of advice given by the inspector.
3. Business teachers are in the process of updating their ICT resource folder for each business subject.
4. Whole-school in-service on '*Active Methodologies*' was held on the 9th October and a Workshop on '*Differentiation and the Continuum of Support*' was held on the 24th September.
5. Business teachers hope to get additional support from PDST