

**An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna**

**Department of Education and Skills**

**Subject Inspection of Business Subjects  
REPORT**

**Bunclody Vocational College  
Bunclody, County Wexford  
Roll number: 71620H**

**Date of inspection: 30 September 2011**



**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>Date of inspection</b>	30 September 2011
<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 five class periods</li><li>• Examination of students' work</li><li>• Feedback to principal and teachers</li></ul>

**MAIN FINDINGS**

- The overall good teaching and classroom management practices created a positive and affirming learning environment for students.
- The pace of lessons was suited to students and lesson time was generally used productively.
- The cross-curricular and co-curricular activities undertaken by business teachers assist students in developing business acumen.
- First-year students are given good support in making subject choices and at Leaving Certificate students are offered a range of subjects considering the size of the school.
- Teachers' subject knowledge is good and they have availed of continuing professional development in their subject areas.
- The planning and collaborative practices of the business subjects department are of a very high standard.

**MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS**

- Teachers should endeavour to re-balance the structure of lessons in favour of additional active and co-operative methodologies, effective questioning techniques and dynamic use of information and communication technology (ICT).
  - The use of assessment for learning techniques should be expanded.
  - The possibility of team-teaching for a portion of the examination year should be considered.
  - The business subjects department should liaise formally with the mathematics department to ensure that there are similar approaches to mathematical computations.
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## **INTRODUCTION**

Bunclody Vocational College is under the auspices of Co. Wexford Vocational Education Committee, with an enrolment of 158 post-primary students. The school is involved in the Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools initiative. The school offers Business Studies in junior cycle, and Accounting and Business as optional subjects in Leaving Certificate.

## **TEACHING AND LEARNING**

- The overall good teaching and classroom management practices created a positive and affirming learning environment for students.
- Teachers varied their teaching methodologies in each lesson observed. However there is scope to reduce instances of unnecessary note-taking in favour of active and co-operative methodologies.
- In lessons that had a book-keeping focus a very good step-by-step approach was adopted with teachers ensuring that students understood concepts before moving to the next step of the accounting process.
- In all lessons teachers used questions to check students' progress and understanding. However, the questioning techniques tended to be global and lower-order. A more consistent use of targeted and differentiated questions is advisable as it would provide an additional means of assessing, affirming and increasing individual student progress.
- In all lessons teachers focused on the explanation of keywords, unfamiliar business terminology and the development of students' own knowledge and literacy skills.
- The pace of lessons was suited to the needs of students, and every effort was made to ensure that students understood key concepts, before moving on to new material.
- Each lesson observed was well prepared and had a coherent structure. Aims and objectives were outlined at the start of the lesson and key points were recapped at the end of most lessons.
- ICT was used in all lessons as a teaching aid. However, there is scope to develop its potential so as to give a real-life and dynamic focus to business education by accessing relevant case studies, websites, extracts of television programmes and interactive resources.
- In lessons where teaching aids such as handouts, posters and flashcards were used they were effective in progressing learning.
- Business teachers support and encourage students to participate in County Wexford Enterprise Board's "Xcel" programme. This co-curricular activity helps to develop students' marketing and entrepreneurial skills and business acumen, as do the business and educational links with Kerry Foods and local financial institutions.
- Students' copybooks and account books were found to be neat and labelled and additional print and visual resources were securely stored in students' folders.
- Teachers compare student attainment rates in certificate examinations with national norms. The low failure rate in examinations is consistent with the approaches taken by business teachers that affirm student progress across the ability range.

- In each observed lesson homework was corrected. Student copybooks contained some comments as to how students might improve their performance and this practice could be expanded.
- The use of a student test copybook is a good development as it allows students to profile their own performance. The occasional use of comment and comment only marking and further development of assessment for learning techniques could encourage students to improve their attainment.

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

- Business Studies is an optional subject at junior cycle. Before making their subject choices first-year students have an opportunity to experience the subject in a short taster programme and as part of the “moving on” programme while in primary school.
- Senior management ensures that students at Leaving Certificate are offered as many subjects as possible including Business and Accounting. Most students continue with business education in Leaving Certificate and currently Accounting is the favoured option with a good uptake rate.
- The small class sizes and the seating arrangements used are suited to active and co-operative methodologies, and should be fully exploited.
- The majority of teachers in the business subjects department are classroom-based. The business classroom was a good print-rich environment. Of particular merit were the displays of student-project work, the effective use of notice boards and displays of keywords.
- To support students in taking business subjects at higher level in state examinations the possibility of team teaching for a portion of the examination year should be considered.
- As part of whole-school professional development teachers have engaged with broader educational themes, including seminars on team-teaching and co-operative learning.
- All teachers of business subjects are subject specialists with up-to-date knowledge of their subject and relevant topical issues and have availed of continuing professional development in their subject areas.

#### **PLANNING AND PREPARATION**

- The planning and collaborative practices of the business subjects department are very good. The process of planning is well thought out and focused on the delivery of the curriculum in a manner that meets the learning needs of students.
- Aligned to each topic in each of the curricular plans were the range of suitable methodologies, resources and homework available for use in lessons. To further enhance these good plans the student learning outcomes that were observed in lessons should also be noted.
- Junior cycle students were completing Junior Certificate School Programme learning statements and it is advisable to include these and the keywords and their definitions in planning documentation.

- The business subjects department should liaise formally with the mathematics department to ensure that there are similar approaches to mathematical computations, and the agreed practice should also be noted in planning documentation.
- Storage and access to paper-based resources is good and a well organised electronic folder has been developed to store electronic resources.

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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 was given an opportunity to comment in writing on the findings and recommendations of the report; a response was not received from the board.

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