

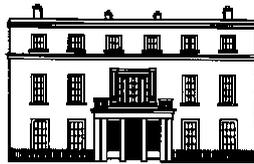
An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

**Subject Inspection of Business Studies
REPORT**

**Ramsgrange Community School
Ramsgrange, County Wexford
Roll number: 91431Q**

Date of inspection: 16 April 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 STUDIES

SUBJECT INSPECTION REPORT

This report has been written following a subject inspection in Ramsgrange Community School. It presents the findings of an evaluation of the quality of teaching and learning in Business Studies at junior cycle and makes recommendations for the further development of the teaching of this subject 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 and examined students' work. The inspector reviewed school planning documentation. Following the evaluation visit, the inspector provided oral feedback on the outcomes of the evaluation to the principal. 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

Ramsgrange Community School provides the full spectrum of curricular programmes for its students - Junior Certificate, Junior Certificate Schools Programme (JSCP), Transition Year (TY) programme, Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA), Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP), the established Leaving Certificate (LC) and Post Leaving Certificate courses (PLC). Business education forms an integral part of most of these programmes.

Students can avail of Business Studies in junior cycle; a business module in TY; and Accounting, Business and Economics in senior cycle. The LCVP is delivered by business teachers. The school is highly commended for the range of programmes and business subjects it provides for its students. Business Studies in junior cycle is the focus of this report.

First-year students sample Business Studies for the duration of that year. This good practice gives students a good working knowledge of the subject so that they can make an informed decision on subject choices for second year. The uptake of the optional subject Business Studies in second year is excellent with most students choosing to continue the subject.

Time allocated for the teaching of Business Studies is good. Students have three single periods in first year, two single periods and a double period in second year and two double periods and one single period in third year. From second year, teachers remain with their class group for the duration of the junior cycle.

The annual business subjects department budget is used to purchase relevant resources such as visual teaching aids and stationery for class use. Senior management is commended on the provision of three dedicated business classrooms. These rooms are situated near each other, thus facilitating the sharing of resources and use of Information and Communication Technology (ICT). Most business classrooms are furnished with overhead projectors (OHP) and share audio visual equipment. All the business classrooms are print-rich environments, displaying topical business-related newspaper articles, commercially produced posters and excellent student-generated posters and project work. The business subject department has access to a press in the staffroom that is used for the storage of business resources. The school intranet is used effectively

by the business subject department to share and store electronic-generated resources, teaching aids and planning documentation.

The school has two dedicated computer rooms which are accessible for business teachers and students and these can be availed of when not timetabled. There are some mobile data projectors and these can be used by business teachers in tandem with their own laptops to access ICT in their classrooms. To access the internet, a wireless broadband system is available throughout the school. Senior management has facilitated the provision of school-based professional development courses in ICT. The recent Web 2.00 in-service was delivered by a business subject teacher to all teachers in the school. Senior management's ongoing commitment to the provision of ICT in the school is commendable.

All business teachers in the school are skilled specialists and are diligent in ensuring that their subject knowledge is current. There is an array of specialist skills within the department; it may be prudent to note these in the business subject plan. As a means of building capacity within the subject department, business teachers could provide peer mentoring so as to share expertise. Most 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) and external business and education-related courses.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

The organisational, planning and collaborative practices of the business subject department in Ramsgrange Community School are exemplary. The process of planning is one that is focused on the teaching and learning needs of the student cohort. The comprehensive business planning folder details the provision of business education in the school. In the folder the department has documented the rationale for its existence and provides its own strategy for best work practices. The subject department meetings are chaired by a business subject co-ordinator, who is responsible for ensuring that the department works in a collaborative manner with regular communication between all stakeholders. Good practice has been established as the position of co-ordinator rotates within the business subject department. The department meets at least once a term in a formal capacity. It was observed from the minutes of previous meetings that the items discussed involved good evaluation and reflection on current and future practices of the teaching team.

A long term plan is in place for the teaching and learning of Business Studies. In addition to the planning elements outlined in the School Development Planning Initiative (SDPI) template, the plan has documented the key business terms required for attainment in business studies and contains a checklist for Assessment for Learning (Afl) practices. Of particular merit in the plan were the prepared worksheets that could be administered to students should a teacher be absent.

The Business Studies yearly curriculum plan outlines the sequencing of taught topics, and aligned to each topic are the methodologies and resources that could be utilised in the delivery of subject matter. This is good practice as it facilitates common assessment and allows each year group to have a unified teaching and learning experience. From observation of lessons and of student journals it is evident that all teachers in the subject department follow the same curriculum plan. It was laudable that the plan also documented the precise location of each available resource for use in the teaching of each topic. To further enhance the plan it is recommended that learning outcomes outlined in lessons be documented along with the methodologies and resources utilised for each topic.

Teachers' short and medium term planning was very good. All handouts, ICT and supplementary paper-based resources were prepared in advance of lessons. A very good system is in place for the storage of students work. For the duration of the junior cycle each student maintains a lever arch folder which is kept in the classroom. The folder is divided into topics under which students file class notes, project work, handouts, corrected homework and assessments.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

The overall standard of teaching and learning in Business Studies is very good. All of the lessons observed were well structured and prepared, and followed a logical sequence of activities. In all lessons the learning outcomes were communicated to students through the use of OHP or data projector and in most lessons they remained visible for the duration of the lesson. This sharing of learning goals is helpful. In some lessons teachers involved the students in summarising the learning of the lesson and made references to the intended learning outcomes. This good practice is worthy of replication in all business lessons. In the majority of lessons observed effective use was made of visual aids, ICT and supplementary resources such as handouts.

Five lessons were observed. All class groups were of mixed ability and lessons were appropriately paced and differentiated for the various ability groupings in the class. Students remained on task and were involved in learning throughout the lessons observed. Teachers regularly checked that students understood material presented before moving on to new learning. It was noteworthy in some business classrooms posters displayed common business terms that were translated from English to the home languages of students learning English as an additional language.

In most lessons observed teachers used a good blend of active and traditional methodologies that were seamlessly incorporated, sought to engage the student in the learning process and included teacher-led input, questioning, pair work, linkage to real life experiences, ICT, graphic organisers and class discussions. In all lessons teachers gave individual student assistance when required in a kind and affirming manner.

In a lesson that looked at personal borrowing the use of a cartoon at the start of the lesson was particularly effective as it set the scene to why we need to borrow and prompted students to express their views on the banks' role in lending money. The teacher guided the class discussion that ensued. The discussion successfully incorporated prior learning and experiences with the new learning outcomes for the lesson. Students in this lesson also worked in pairs on a task and a PowerPoint presentation demonstrated how simple interest was calculated and the different types of borrowing.

In lessons that had a book-keeping focus, homework was corrected and new material was presented using visual aids such as an OHP or data projector. The good preparation of material in advance of lessons ensured that lesson time was effectively managed.

In most classes teachers made very good references to local, national and international business people, organisations and topical business issues. Teachers are commended on this good practice as it allowed students to link classroom learning to real life situations and in doing so to deepen their business acumen. With regard to first-year where Business Studies is a core subject, the content of taught curriculum is good. Topics such as household budgeting, good consumer practices and financial planning are, for the minority of students who don't continue with the subject, valuable life skills.

In lessons observed students were motivated in their learning. When questioned by the teacher, students displayed good subject knowledge and their responses to higher-order questioning were reasoned and succinct. It was evident from student interactions with the inspector that students had a good understanding of everyday business life situations.

Classroom management and rapport was good and effective in all lessons. Students responded positively and courteously to teachers' instructions and they were in turn positively affirmed. Learning activities were well managed and sought to engage all students in the classroom. The classroom atmosphere created a positive learning environment where students were enthused about their learning.

Seating arrangements in classrooms facilitated group work and ease of movement for the teachers when they tendered individual support and guidance to students. The dedicated business classrooms are attractive and the print-rich environment this helps to provide a good learning environment.

ASSESSMENT

The business subjects department has devised its own homework and assessment policy and this is good practice as it is specific to business subjects. Commendably, there is common assessment of students up to third year. Formal assessments are administered twice a year. In addition to these assessments, examination-year students sit 'mock' examinations in spring. Students are also assessed at the end of each topic. Exemplary practice was observed in students' folders. At the end of a topic, students completed a worksheet for homework. Questions were related to the learning outcomes of the topic. In the next lesson students were given a written test that mirrored the questions on the worksheet. Teachers asked students to have the corrected test signed by a parent and on the test was a note explaining to parents that this test was pre-seen. This assessment procedure is a good learning tool.

In all observed lessons homework was assigned and was compatible with the learning outcomes of the lesson. Good homework correction practices were observed. The students' work was monitored and formative feedback was used to help students to identify areas for improvement. In lessons that required a display of a written solution, teachers modelled good practice in neatness and labelling of answers. The vast majority of observed students' account books, folders and journals were neat and well maintained. Students and teachers are commended for the high standards demonstrated in this important aspect of school work.

There are good communication links between the students' homes and the business teachers. In addition to the sending of corrected assessments to parents, students are also given a list of revision topics and parents are asked to monitor their completion. A written formal report is sent home twice a year and students' progression in business subjects is discussed with parents at parent-teacher meetings.

Students are encouraged to achieve to their highest potential. Outcomes are good in certificate examinations. A review of these outcomes is conducted by the principal and is communicated to the teachers in the business department. The outcomes are used to compile graphic charts that compare school results with national norms. The charts are maintained in the subject planning folder.

SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The following are the main strengths identified in the evaluation:

- The uptake of Business Studies is excellent in the school.
- Senior management is to be praised for its ongoing commitment in the provision of ICT in the school and for the provision of specialist business classrooms that are print-rich and good learning environments.
- The organisational, planning and collaborative practices of the business subject department are exemplary. The focus of planning is one that has the learning needs of its students at its core.
- Lesson planning, structure, content and delivery were very good in observed lessons. A blend of traditional and active methodologies was used to engage and enthuse the learner.
- The assessment practices of the subject department are very good and communication with home exemplary.

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

- To further enhance planning, the student learning outcomes in lessons should be documented along with the methodologies and resources utilised for each topic.

Post-evaluation meetings were held 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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