

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

**Subject Inspection of Business Subjects
REPORT**

**Castlerea Community School
Castlerea, County Roscommon
Roll number: 91493P**

Date of inspection: 10 October 2014



**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

INFORMATION ON THE INSPECTION

Dates of inspection	9 and 10 October 2014
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 eight class periods• Examination of students' work• Feedback to deputy principal and teachers

MAIN FINDINGS

- High quality teaching and learning was evident in almost all lessons observed.
- Teachers' lesson planning is very good and a wide range of current business examples are used to support the development of applied business skills.
- Summative assessment practice is well established but further development is required in relation to formative assessment approaches.
- Business Studies is an optional subject in junior cycle, where students take a total of twelve subjects for certification.
- Accounting has been successfully reintroduced as a senior cycle subject.
- Good progress has been made in implementing the recommendations of a previous subject inspection report.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

- In the context of promoting development in assessment practice, further development of the range of assessment modes used in the teaching of the subject is required.
 - The business department should review the opportunities and challenges facing provision for the subjects in the context of a necessary review of curriculum provision at junior cycle.
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INTRODUCTION

Castlereagh Community School has a total enrolment of 407 students, including twenty post-leaving certificate students. The school provides a wide range of subjects at both junior and leaving certificate level. Curriculum programmes currently in place include the Junior Certificate and established Leaving Certificate programme, with a year-two Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) class group. There is currently no Transition Year (TY) programme provided.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

- Lesson pace was good and students were making good progress in the completion of syllabus topics with a number of instances of students encouraged to work at their own pace which is an effective methodology in mixed-ability settings.
- While the classrooms are laid out to facilitate pair and group work there was little evidence of collaborative learning strategies being used in lessons. To encourage students to be more actively engaged in the lessons, strategies to illicit students' prior learning and understanding of relevant business concepts should be developed and therefore inform the sequencing of the lesson outcomes.
- Teacher-led question and answer activity was often used as at the start of lessons to check recall. Greater use of structured questions with a suitable mix of global and directed questioning to check understanding throughout lessons is recommended.
- In further embedding assessment for learning approaches, additional attention is needed in reflecting on students' work and providing evaluative feedback on the quality of students' homework. This will also assist in providing guidance to students about how to improve the quality of their work.
- The use of a research project as part of the learning approaches in second year is to be commended. This approach facilitates students in developing a range of learning skills including, research, presentation and evaluation skills. Including such projects as part of reporting to students and parents would further expand the range of assessment approaches used in the subjects.
- The teachers make good use of information and communication technology in subject planning and resource preparation. Web-based research is encouraged as a homework activity for students, which promotes students' positive and critical engagement with resources available in the wider business environment.
- Classrooms are print-rich and contain examples of both commercially-sourced subject specific materials and students' work. Teachers' presentation is very clear and accessible to students. There was very good use of a check balance approach in bookkeeping to build students' confidence.
- The junior cycle programme in Business Studies is well balanced with good emphasis placed on the completion of both bookkeeping and business theory elements spread over the three years. The emphasis on the development of financial literacy in first-year, including basic money management and the evaluation of financial products, is especially beneficial.
- The subject department has developed systematic approaches to the use of summative assessment. Common tests are set for year groups. There is also evidence of the use of workbook style tests with first-year students which is a useful mechanism for guiding

students about expectations regarding the depth of treatment required for students' answers.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- An optional year-long taster programme in Business Studies is provided in first year. As a result of this arrangement, the subject has only two periods in first year and four in each of second and third year.
- Senior cycle options of Business and Accounting are provided. Currently the numbers taking the subjects are not high. However, considerable attention has been given to re-establishing Accounting within the senior cycle curriculum and the teachers involved are to be commended for this initiative. As there is some evidence within the existing cohort of gender imbalance in uptake, some analysis is needed in relation to uptake levels in the subjects.
- Currently all junior cycle students take twelve subjects for certification for Junior Certificate. Circular letter 0020/2014, which sets out the requirements for students entering junior cycle from 2015 onwards, requires that a whole-school review of curriculum provision, especially at junior cycle be undertaken. This review should also take into consideration other requirements for example daily contact in Mathematics.
- In the context of a curriculum review, consideration should be given to the introduction of the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP) at senior cycle. The skill set of the business teachers would prove beneficial in supporting its possible introduction to the curriculum.
- A previous inspection of the subjects completed in 2006 recommended that the time allocation for the subject at junior cycle be more evenly spread during the week. The provision of two single and one double period for the subject in second and third year has ensured that the spirit of the recommendation has been achieved.
- The majority of the department teachers are active members of the subject association and good systems are in place for the sharing of outcomes and learning from professional development with the full department.
- Staffing in the department has been relatively stable over the past number of years which has been beneficial from the perspective of school management as continuity in teacher allocation to class groups has been more easily achievable.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

- Subject department planning is well established and teachers have collaborated in the development of schemes of work for each of the three subjects in each year group.
- As was recommended in a previous subject inspection report, the role of co-ordinator rotates among the team. Records of meetings show evidence of planning for the regular updating of subject plans and schemes of work.
- One area requiring further development in the subject plans is the progression of literacy and numeracy development as part of teaching and learning. This could be achieved by allocating some of the department's planning time to discussing pedagogical approaches

relevant to specific topics and themes, in particular the relevant effective literacy and numeracy approaches.

- Work is commencing on the development of school self-evaluation (SSE) with the recent circulation by senior management to subject departments of a reflection questionnaire. The use of this teacher-based questionnaire with additional sources of evidence including for example, student questionnaires combined with other base-line data should provide a useful starting point for the subject department to engage with SSE.
- Individual lessons were well planned. In particular this was evident in one instance through the well-planned use of an online multimedia presentation and the extensive use in lessons of a wide range of current business examples that successfully promoted the development of students' applied business skills.

The draft findings and recommendations arising out of this evaluation were discussed with the 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 welcomes this subject inspection and its findings.

The Board is pleased to note the “High Quality Teaching & Learning” and very good lesson planning in the Business Department.

The Board acknowledges the progress which has been made in implementing previous recommendations.

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 Board of Management is committed to the continuing development of assessment modes in the teaching of business subjects.

In reviewing curriculum provision in light of the new Junior Cert reform. The Board will consider the opportunities and challenges facing this subject. The Board is committed to working with the Business Department in this regard.