

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

**Subject Inspection of Business Subjects
REPORT**

**De La Salle College
Churchtown, Dublin 16
Roll number: 60310E**

Date of inspection: 5 May 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

INFORMATION ON THE INSPECTION

Date of inspection	5 May 2011
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 four class periods• Examination of students' work• Feedback to principal and teachers

MAIN FINDINGS

- Teaching and learning observed varied in quality from very good to fair.
- Learning was good in lessons where students were challenged, guided and given autonomy over learning.
- Teachers' subject knowledge is good but teachers are not active members of the subject association and have not availed of subject-related in-service courses.
- There is good provision of teaching aids and information and communication technology (ICT) in business classrooms.
- Timetable provision for Business Studies is below what is required over the duration of the three year cycle.
- While there are some very good reflective practices within the business subjects department, there is scope to improve the content and process of subject planning.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

- There should be a consistent focus on teaching methodologies and assessment for learning strategies that challenge students, access their learning styles and develop key skills.
- Business teachers should familiarise themselves with the supports that their subject association and the Professional Development Service for Teachers provide, and endeavour to avail of pertinent courses.
- The content of the overall business subjects plan and of each individual curricular plan should be developed as a manual on how to provide the best possible business education in the school.
- Senior management should pursue the provision of a double period and an additional class period in second and third year Business Studies.

INTRODUCTION

De La Salle College Churchtown is a voluntary secondary school which offers Business Studies in junior cycle, and Business as an optional subject in Leaving Certificate. Business education which includes mini-company is provided in the school's Compulsory Transition Year (TY). The school has a current enrolment of 324 male students.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

- The teaching and learning practices varied in quality. While some good practices were observed, there were certain aspects of delivery that did not engage students in their learning.
- In lessons where the teacher was the facilitator of student learning, the teaching methodologies used were good. These included sharing of learning outcomes, co-operative learning activities, targeted higher-order questioning, good use and explanation of keywords, use of ICT, class discussions, and good use of student and teacher subject knowledge and of business-related examples.
- Some teaching strategies require to be reviewed. These include practices that allowed some students to remain passive throughout the lesson and did not present them with appropriate challenges.
- In most lessons students were encouraged to keep up-to-date with current business developments by accessing news items in the print and visual media.
- ICT was used in one business classroom; in the other classroom the data projector was reportedly not accessible. Nevertheless, there is scope to integrate ICT into lessons by accessing case studies, relevant websites, extracts of television programmes and interactive media resources, thus giving a real-life, dynamic focus to business education.
- Classroom management was good. Classroom layout and seating arrangements were effective in facilitating student engagement. However, the potential for active learning was not always exploited.
- All of the lessons observed were well structured and prepared, and followed a logical sequence of activities. However, in some lessons students were transcribing notes that were available in textbooks and this was not the best use of lesson time.
- Teachers affirmed students' efforts. Students displayed good subject knowledge and information particularly at junior cycle where they were enthused by the subject matter.
- In the context of the student cohort, the number taking business subjects at higher level is below what would be expected. The factors involved should be identified and addressed.
- In a second-year class where students were using past examination papers, some had ordinary level papers and the rest were working from higher level papers. The differentiation of levels at this early stage in the junior cycle is not good practice in a school that assigns students to mixed-ability classes.
- In all observed lessons homework was assigned. While there was some evidence of formal checking of students' homework by teachers outside of class time, there were very few comments indicating to students how they might improve their performance and attainment in the subjects. A focus on assessment for learning strategies is recommended.

- There was a divergence in assessment practices. Junior cycle students were continually assessed. Outside of the four in-house formal assessments at Leaving Certificate there were no regular end-of-topic assessments except in the form of occasional quizzes.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- Business Studies is timetabled for three periods in first year and three or four periods alternating between second and third year. This relatively low level of provision makes it difficult to achieve the aims of the syllabus successfully. Second and third year lesson provision is in single lessons and it is desirable that a double period be provided so that practical book-keeping topics such as final accounts may be practised.
- First-year students select their optional subjects prior to entry. Uptake of the subject is almost at national norms. The possibility of providing a subject fair or subject sampling for new students could be considered by senior management.
- At Leaving Certificate student preferences generate the option bands. While uptake rates are good, almost one in four students is new to business education. A discussion with these students revealed that most chose the subject because the other options did not appeal to them. A review of the subject choice system might be worthwhile.
- All TY students experience a good mini-company module.
- Business teachers have their own base classrooms in which there are good ICT facilities and teaching aids. However, the potential to create visual learning environments in all business classrooms could be further exploited.
- Currently business teachers are not active members of their subject association nor were they aware of the supports and in-service opportunities available to them. In a dynamic subject area like business it is good practice for teachers to engage in continuing professional development.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

- Business teachers have a good working relationship which facilitates collaborative planning. However, the business subjects department has no co-ordinator and the appointment of one should be considered.
 - Subject plans have been developed for all business subjects and related modules. However, they do not contain all the desired elements of comprehensive planning.
 - The curricular plans listed the topics that were to be taught in each year. Some class groups were not following the topics as outlined in the plan. If there were to be a change in teaching personnel or class group formation this could impact on student learning.
 - Curricular plans are not developed sufficiently. It is advisable to align learning outcomes, resources, differentiated learning strategies and a range of assessment and teaching methodologies to each curriculum topic. A team approach to planning is desirable, as it permits the sharing of best practice.
 - Very good practice was noted in the development of a mission statement guiding the delivery of business education. The reflective and self-evaluative practice of reviewing lesson delivery and noting outcomes for future reference was also praiseworthy.
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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 evaluation; a response was not received from the board.