

**An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna**

**Department of Education and Skills**

**Subject Inspection of Business Subjects  
REPORT**

**Saint Kieran's College  
Kilkenny City, County Kilkenny  
Roll number: 61560J**

**Date of inspection: 15 November 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 SUBJECTS**

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**SUBJECT INSPECTION REPORT**

This report has been written following a subject inspection in St. Kieran's College. It presents the findings of an evaluation of the quality of teaching and learning in Business Subjects and makes recommendations for the further development of the teaching of this subject in the school. The evaluation was conducted over one day during which the inspector visited classrooms and observed teaching and learning. The inspector interacted with students and teachers, examined students' work, and had discussions with the teachers. The inspector reviewed school planning documentation and teachers' written preparation. Following the evaluation visit, the inspector provided oral feedback on the outcomes of the evaluation to the principal and subject teachers. The board of management of the school was given an opportunity to comment on the findings and recommendations of the evaluation; the board chose to accept the report without response.

**SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT**

In St. Kieran's College, students can avail of business education through the provision of Business Studies at junior cycle; business modules in the compulsory Transition Year programme (TY); and Accounting and Economics at Leaving Certificate. The school also provides the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP) in which the Enterprise module is delivered by business teachers. The management of the school is committed to offering students the widest possible subject choice and is actively considering the introduction of Business onto the Leaving Certificate curriculum.

All first-year students sample Business Studies for the duration of the year. On entering second year students have an open choice of two subjects from six optional subjects. Uptake of the optional subject of Business Studies in the school is good.

The school's Transition Year programme (TY) is compulsory for all students and all TY students complete the business-related modules. Accounting and Economics are optional subjects on the Leaving Certificate curriculum and there is a good uptake of both subjects. The majority of students who take Business Studies continue with a business subject for the Leaving Certificate.

For the duration of first year, Business Studies is timetabled for two class periods, and four class periods are provided thereafter. While the provision for first-year Business Studies is less than normal, this is balanced against the breadth of subject provision for first-year students. The good practice of subject sampling allows students to make an informed choice in the selection of subjects for second year and affords all students the opportunity to attain some financial life skills. TY students experience Accounting and Economics as two half-year modules. Timetabling of both subjects is satisfactory in Leaving Certificate.

The majority of teachers in the business subjects department are classroom based and as a result their classrooms have become *de facto* business specialist rooms. Most of these classrooms are good print-rich environments with commercial, teacher and student-generated posters. Of

particular merit are the displays of student-project work and the effective use of business notice boards in classrooms and in the main school building. The school's management responds on a needs basis to teachers' requests regarding the acquisition of additional resources. Business resources are stored in individual teachers' classrooms. It would be prudent to catalogue these and note their location in the business subjects plan so as to facilitate their shared use.

The school's information and communication technology (ICT) facilities are good. All business classrooms have ICT equipment, access to the internet and recently installed data projectors. The business subjects department has a folder on the school's intranet system and updates the 'Moodle' facility with resources, lesson notes and business-related topics that can be accessed internally by teachers. Senior management is providing ongoing professional development for teachers in the use of ICT as a teaching tool.

The majority of business subjects teachers teach Business Studies and teachers remain with their class group throughout the junior cycle. The allocation of subjects to teachers at Leaving Certificate reflects their individual interests and competencies in the different aspects of the business curriculum. All business teachers are subject specialists and members of the Business Studies Teachers Association of Ireland (BSTAI). Senior management facilitates attendance at in-service and gives support for professional development activities, as required.

#### **PLANNING AND PREPARATION**

Business teachers meet formally once a term to discuss issues relating to the delivery of business education in the school, and the outcomes of these meetings are recorded and filed. These meetings are chaired by the subject coordinator and this role is rotated among the business teachers.

There is a plan for each business subject offered on the school's curriculum. These plans are developed as per School Development Planning Initiative template. However some sections of the plans require more detail, notably curriculum planning and the provision of business education for students with special educational needs.

The strategies outlined in subject plans for students with special educational needs include provision of simplified notes, paired learning and work. In the context of ongoing subject planning, it is recommended that commonly-used business terms and calculations be identified, and listed in the planning documentation with explanations. A copy should be made available to learning-support and resource teachers. It is advisable to liaise with the Mathematics department in relation to financial numeracy and calculations thus ensuring that there are similar whole-school pedagogical approaches.

The curriculum plan for each business subject outlines the sequence that topics are taught in each year and this facilitates common assessment. To further develop curriculum plans it is recommended that the student learning outcomes that were observed in lessons be documented along with the methodologies, resources, differentiation techniques and assessment of and for learning that relates to each topic. A collaborative team approach to the development of the curriculum plans will facilitate the sharing of best practice and knowledge and will ensure that students will receive a similar teaching and learning experience in all class groupings.

TY students are introduced to the world of enterprise and business management through teacher guided participation in the Young Entrepreneur competition. In addition the TY business

programme aims to develop student money-management skills by participation in the 'Get Smart with your money' programme provided by the financial regulator and Money Advice and Budgeting Service. TY students also have an opportunity to hone their investment prowess by participation in the 'Stock Market Investment Challenge Competition'. Students are introduced to some Accounting and Economic topics. The content of the module conforms to the ethos of the TY programme. However, the range of interactive and explorative methodologies used in the teaching of the module is not detailed in planning documentation and it is advisable to list these.

## **TEACHING AND LEARNING**

Five lessons were observed as part of this inspection; they included three double and two single class periods. Lessons observed included a second-year and third-year Business Studies lesson, a TY business lesson and a lesson each of sixth-year Accounting and Economics. Teaching and learning was good in all lessons observed.

Teachers were well prepared for lessons which had a coherent structure. At the start of each lesson aims and objectives were outlined and homework was corrected. On conclusion of each lesson observed, homework was assigned that reinforced learning in the lesson. The resources, teaching aids and ICT used were prepared in advance and effectively enhanced teaching and learning. Lessons were paced appropriately for the mixed ability nature of class groups. Teachers as skilled practitioners maintained good levels of student engagement in lessons.

The methodologies used in lessons included pair work, questioning, group work, teacher-led class discussions and the use of ICT. While there were some instances of active and co-operative learning, the teaching methodologies observed during the course of the evaluation were mainly traditional and teacher-led. To access and maximise the varying learning styles of students, it is desirable to have a blend of traditional and active methodologies in lessons. It is therefore recommended that more active, co-operative and discovery learning be introduced into lessons.

A very good step-by-step approach was adopted in lessons that had a book-keeping focus. Business teachers have developed the very good practice of teaching book-keeping to every year group in junior cycle. To enhance this good practice it is advisable to integrate theoretical aspects of the syllabus into these lessons. Teachers offered individual support to students in addition to checking progress on questions. Students' presentation of work was neat and good as it mirrored teachers' practice. Data projectors were effectively employed by teachers to display worked examples and solutions to questions.

Effective teacher questioning was used in most lessons, and it successfully differentiated learning. In most lessons observed, a range of global, targeted, higher-order and lower-order questions were used. Teachers supported and affirmed student responses.

It was evident from student interactions with teachers and the inspector that students had good business knowledge and understanding. Students were proficient in applying this knowledge and understanding to everyday business life situations. In some lessons teachers made good references to local and national business enterprises, entrepreneurs and issues. There is scope to develop this practice by incorporating a review of topical economic issues in daily lessons. The weekend previous to the inspection the city of Kilkenny had its first economics festival 'Kilkenomics'. Business teachers made good use of this resource by inviting a leading economist to speak to senior cycle students and linking the festival discussions to classroom learning. This good practice allows students to develop their business acumen.

Classroom management and atmosphere was positive and affirming. A high level of mutual respect between teachers and students ensured good lesson engagement. Seating arrangements in classrooms are conducive to active methodologies such as group, pair and role play. The layout of the classrooms supported teacher movement as they monitored and assisted students in their learning.

## **ASSESSMENT**

In each lesson observed homework from previous lessons was corrected by oral answers from teacher or students and written solutions displayed on boards. From an observation of a sample of homework copybooks it was noted that student homework assignments were generally corrected in class with some teacher annotations. However, there were few evaluative comments on students' work. As this is a valuable student learning tool, its use should be introduced particularly in Leaving Certificate. Information can be assessed on the website of the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment ([www.ncca.ie](http://www.ncca.ie)) that pertains to assessment for learning. Student copybooks were well maintained and found to be very neat and labelled.

Planning documentation states that homework procedures are at the discretion of the individual teacher. To ensure that practices are consistent among business teachers it is recommended that the business subject department discuss and decide on the type and quantity of homework to be assigned for each topic in each year group for all business subjects. As junior cycle students have a lower number of lesson periods than normal throughout the three-year cycle, teachers should ensure that homework assigned is of high calibre to maximise learning opportunities.

Journals are used to record assigned homework and as a means of communication between teacher and parent. However, from an observation of a sample of homework journals it was noted that not all students are recording homework; strategies should be put in place to address this.

Students are formally assessed twice a year and informally at the conclusion of a chapter. It is advisable to conduct common assessment in first and second year. Students' outcomes in tests and progression in business subjects are communicated via a written report to parents. Each year group has a parent-teacher meeting which facilitates discussion on student's progress in business education.

Students are encouraged to take business subjects at their highest level in state examinations. Decisions about examination levels are generally delayed until the examination year ensuring that as many students as possible have the opportunity to take the subject at higher level. Student attainment in certificate examinations is good at all levels. Outcomes in certificate examinations are analysed by the principal. It is advisable that the business subject department conduct its own analysis and review of state examinations outcomes, as this will assist the business subject department in its own self-evaluation. As part of this review it would be prudent to compare attainment outcomes with national norms in certificate examinations.

## **SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

The following are the main strengths identified in the evaluation:

- The management of the school seeks to offer the widest subject choice possible for its students.
- The business subjects department is well organised and its long-term plan contains all the elements of good planning.
- There is good provision and effective use of newly installed ICT equipment.
- Teachers gave good individual support to students where required and were affirming of students' input in lessons and this helped to create the innate sense of mutual respect in lessons.
- In all lessons observed, teachers were well prepared and lessons had a coherent structure with effective teacher questioning. Teaching and learning was good.
- Students are encouraged to take business subjects at the highest level in certificate examinations.

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

- A list of commonly used business calculations and defined terms should be compiled and used as a learning resource for students with special educational needs.
- Learning outcomes, methodologies, resources, differentiation and assessment techniques that relate to each curriculum topic should be documented in the curriculum plan of each business subject.
- The introduction of more active, co-operative and discovery learning into teacher repertoire of methodologies is recommended.
- The business subjects department should discuss and decide on the type and quantity of homework to be assigned for each topic in each year group for all business subjects.

Post-evaluation meetings were held with the teachers of business subjects and 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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