Subject Inspection of Business Subjects
REPORT

Kilkenny College
Kilkenny City, County Kilkenny
Roll number: 61570M

Date of inspection: 21 November 2013
REPORT
ON
THE QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN BUSINESS SUBJECTS

INFORMATION ON THE INSPECTION

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<th>Dates of inspection</th>
<th>20 and 21 November</th>
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<td>Inspection activities undertaken</td>
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<td>• Review of relevant documents</td>
<td>Observation of teaching and learning during ten class periods; three double and four single lessons</td>
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<td>• Discussion with principal and teachers</td>
<td>Examination of students’ work</td>
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<td>• Interaction with students</td>
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MAIN FINDINGS

• Teachers’ delivery of business education was of a high standard overall with some instances of exemplary practice but there was potential to further develop some aspects of teaching practice.

• Learning activities provided by business teachers ensured that students were engaged in their learning, attained good business knowledge and developed key skills.

• There is good provision of business education in the school and all first-year students study Business Studies; however, the uptake of the subject in second year is low.

• The planning, organisational and collaborative practices of the business subjects department are good.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

• Teachers should further integrate co-operative teaching methodologies and assessment for learning strategies into classroom practice.

• An action plan to increase uptake of Business Studies should be devised by senior management and the business department.

• In the curricular plan for each business subject, the learning outcomes, resources, differentiated learning strategies and range of teaching and assessment methodologies used to teach each topic should be documented.
INTRODUCTION

Kilkenny College is a voluntary secondary school, with an enrolment of 788 post-primary students. Business Studies is a core subject in first year and an optional subject thereafter. Business education is optional in the compulsory Transition Year programme (TY). Accounting, Business and Economics are offered to Leaving Certificate students.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

- The quality of teaching in lessons was of a high standard as teachers gave a real-life focus to business education, taught for understanding and maintained high expectations for students. In some lessons, there were instances of exemplary practice. Nevertheless in a small number of lessons, some teaching methodologies used required re-framing so as to fully engage and motivate students in the process of learning.

- All lessons were well planned, prepared and organised. Of particular merit was the sourcing and use of topical and current economic exemplars. Teachers and students use of business language and terminology was very good in all lessons.

- Learning outcomes were written on the board at the start of each lesson. This proved effective in setting the scene and engaging students with lesson content. However, it is advisable to re-visit the stated learning outcomes towards the end of each lesson to assess students’ learning, affirm effort and to clarify points of information.

- In lessons where information and communication technology (ICT) was used, it was an effective teaching and learning tool. The use of video clips and pertinent websites encapsulated learning and deepened business acumen for students. In some lessons, teachers encouraged students to conduct internet research as part of assigned homework.

- In all lessons, very good questioning strategies successfully linked prior learning, assessed student knowledge and facilitated the development of class discussion. In many lessons, higher-order questioning allowed students to apply and develop their critical thinking skills.

- It is laudable that, in some lessons observed, strategies to promote independent student learning were established; in some lessons, students were responsible for their own note making outside of the classroom and this was being monitored by their teachers.

- In half of the lessons observed, well planned group or pair work was used and it was successful in promoting learning; further use of this strategy is recommended in all lessons, where appropriate.

- In some lessons, there was very good use of graphic organisers, mind maps and worksheets to summarise information and these served as good revision aids. Business teachers skilfully incorporated elements and resources of the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme into business education at Leaving Certificate.

- The delivery of business education in TY is explorative and befits the programme’s Guidelines. Students’ key skills are developed through a variety of learning activities such as critical review of news items and data on websites, project work, student presentations and enterprise.

- Homework is regularly set and monitored by teachers. In some lessons, very good practice was observed where students’ work was returned with affirming and formative comments and these provided students with direction as to how they could improve their
work. This is worthy of replication particularly on long questions for all class groups. On occasion, students should also evaluate and assess their own work so as to apply their own critical skills and to internalise learning.

- A sample of students’ account books, folders and journals from each lesson were observed and found to be neat and well maintained. Students and teachers are commended for the high standards maintained in this important aspect of school work.

- Classroom management and atmosphere in all lessons was very good and was characterised by very good teacher support and affirmation of students’ efforts.

- Students are encouraged to achieve to their highest potential. Uptake of business subjects in certificate examinations at higher level is very good, as are the subsequent outcomes. Business teachers review student certificate examination outcomes and compare them with national norms with a view to developing their teaching practice.

**SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT**

- All first-year students study Business Studies and in doing so have the opportunity to attain financial literacy skills and to make a well-informed decision on subject choice for second year. However, the school’s uptake of Business Studies is below the national norm, thus providing a low base for selection of business subjects at senior cycle. It is advisable that senior management and business teachers devise strategies to increase uptake.

- The majority of students who have taken Business Studies at junior cycle retain at least one of the business options at Leaving Certificate. A number of students new to business education have also taken a business subject option for Leaving Certificate, having experienced it in TY.

- Business education in the TY programme is well designed. Students have a variety of options to choose from including sampling senior cycle business subjects, Enterprise and a short module in Financial Literacy Skills.

- There were some very good exhibits of student’s work in the business classrooms. The potential to further develop a visual learning environment in all business classrooms should be further exploited.

- The majority of business teachers are members of their subject association and some have availed of subject-specific professional development. A formal means of sharing and recording information from in-service activities should be devised.

**PLANNING AND PREPARATION**

- The business department meet formally each fortnight. An annual report is produced on the main issues discussed at these meetings. Minutes provided evidence of a collaborative approach to teaching within the business subjects department.

- Individual subject plans have been developed for each business subject. Of particular merit in some subject plans is the linking of assessment and homework modes to each topic. The considerable expertise and experience that exists in the business department can be shared through the further development of each subject’s curricular plan. It is recommended that for each syllabus topic, its learning outcomes, the range of resources,
teaching methodologies, and assessment modes be documented. The very good practice observed in lessons should be used as a benchmark for all business teachers.

- The importance of the development of student literacy and numeracy skills was stated as an objective in planning documentation. Business teachers have adopted the good practice of liaising with the mathematics department to ensure that mathematical computations are similar.

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 of the school was given an opportunity to comment on the findings and recommendations of the report; the board chose to accept the report without response.

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