Subject Inspection of Business Subjects
REPORT

Presentation Secondary School
Kilkenny City, County Kilkenny
Roll number: 61590S

Date of inspection: 22 September 2011
REPORT
ON
THE QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN BUSINESS SUBJECTS

INFORMATION ON THE INSPECTION

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MAIN FINDINGS

- Teaching and learning was good overall but in some lessons students were not encouraged to take sufficient responsibility for their own learning.
- Effective practice included good explanation of business terminology, use of active methodologies, good higher-order targeted questioning and good linkage of topic to student knowledge.
- Students are motivated to take higher level in state examinations and the outcomes are very good.
- Business subjects have a high profile on the curriculum.
- There were varied practices in the type of homework assigned to students and in its assessment.
- Planning practices are good and planning documents are well designed.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

- Students should be encouraged to compile their own notes outside of class time and this could form part of the assessment process.
- Business teachers should consider best practice in the assigning and assessment of student work and aim for a consistent practice throughout the business subjects department.
- Plans should be sufficiently detailed to record the good teaching practices and to serve as a manual for the provision of business education in the school.
INTRODUCTION

Presentation Secondary School, Kilkenny is a voluntary secondary school which offers Business Studies as a core subject in junior cycle. Accounting, Business and Economics are offered as optional subjects in Leaving Certificate. Business education is provided in the school’s optional and heavily subscribed Transition Year (TY). The school has a current enrolment of 651 female students. 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.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

- Teaching and learning was good overall. While some very good practices were noted there is potential to change some methodologies so that students take more responsibility for their own learning.

- In almost all lessons an appropriate range of methodologies ensured students were fully engaged in learning. Effective practice included good explanation of business terminology, use of active methodologies such as role play, pair and group work, good higher-order targeted questioning and good linkage of topic to student knowledge.

- In some lessons students were transcribing sample answers and information that was available in their textbooks. To maximise lesson learning time students should be encouraged to be responsible for their own note-making outside of class time and this could form part of the assessment process.

- In almost all lessons the newly installed information and communication technology (ICT) was used as a teaching aid. The use of ICT should now be developed so as to give a real-life and dynamic focus to business education by accessing relevant case studies, websites, extracts of television programmes and interactive resources.

- In all lessons, learning outcomes were shared with students at the start of the lesson and at the end of some lessons they were recapped.

- There was a focus on development of literacy skills, explanation of keywords and exploration of unfamiliar business terminology in lessons.

- Business teachers should now identify commonly used mathematical calculations and liaise with the Mathematics department to ensure that computations are carried out in a similar way throughout the school.

- In the current third year an additional class group has been formed to offer additional support to Junior Certificate students. The methodologies used with this group were very effective.

- All lessons observed were well structured, prepared and followed a logical sequence of activities. Classroom management was good and effective in all lessons.

- An examination of a sample of student copybooks and journals highlighted varied practice in the quantity and type of homework assigned. Business teachers should consider best practice in homework and aim for a consistent practice throughout the business subjects department.

- There were varied practices in assessing of students’ work. The best practice observed was where teacher corrections included guiding comments at Leaving Certificate.
• Students are motivated to take higher level in state examinations and the outcomes are very good.
• From a discussion with the TY teacher and some of last year’s students it is obvious that the delivery of modules concurs with the ideals of the TY programme.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

• Business subjects have a high profile on the school’s curriculum. A high percentage of students continue with business education from Junior Certificate to Leaving Certificate.
• Business Studies is allocated four single class periods in year one and year three and three periods in year two. While this time provision is adequate senior management should consider the provision of a double period at some point, as some book-keeping topics may require a double period to ensure completion.
• The allocation of time periods to business subjects at Leaving Certificate is good.
• In this current academic year teachers have their own base classrooms. In some of these classrooms visual print resources were displayed. To maximise this good development a print-rich visual environment should now be developed in all classrooms where business teachers are based.
• The business subjects department is afforded a yearly budget that is wisely spent.
• Teachers are up-to-date in their knowledge of business subjects. At least one member of the business subjects department attends their subject association meetings and conference. In the context of a dynamic subject like Business, teachers should avail formally of continuing professional development in their subject area.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

• The nine teachers in the business subjects department willingly share best practice. The regular meetings and planning activities are co-coordinated by two of the business teachers. The rotation of these posts might now be considered so as to build leadership skills within the subject department.
• The business subject plan is good in design. However, the plan should be extended to include the supports offered for students with special educational needs and English language support. The plan should also articulate the method by which numeric calculations are taught so as to ensure that practices are similar to those in the mathematics department.
• There is considerable expertise and experience in the business subjects department which can be shared and formalised through the development of each curricular plan. The effective practice observed in lessons should be documented as a manual for current teachers and new entrants to the subject department. This can be achieved by linking to each topic its learning outcomes, resources, differentiated learning strategies and range of teaching and assessment methodologies.
• The sequencing of topics in junior cycle should be re-considered. Year three of the cycle is heavily weighted towards book-keeping topics. It is advisable to incorporate book-keeping elements throughout the three-year cycle.
• All business teachers follow a commonly agreed programme of work that facilitates common assessment.

• It is advisable that the business subjects department develop an electronic folder to store electronic resources and information.

• An examination of a sample of student copybooks and journals highlighted varied practice in the quantity and type of homework assigned. Business teachers should consider best practice in homework and aim for a consistent practice throughout the business subjects department.

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.

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