

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

**Subject Inspection of Business Subjects
REPORT**

**Our Lady's Secondary School
Templemore, County Tipperary
Roll number: 65440T**

Date of inspection: 12 December 2013



**AN ROINN | DEPARTMENT OF
OIDEACHAIS | EDUCATION
AGUS SCILEANNA | AND SKILLS**

REPORT
ON
THE QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN BUSINESS SUBJECTS

INFORMATION ON THE INSPECTION

Dates of inspection	11 and 12 December 2013
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 nine class periods• Examination of students' work• Feedback to principal and teachers

MAIN FINDINGS

- Some exemplary examples of active teaching and learning methodologies were used in lessons that positively encouraged students' learning and engagement with the subjects.
- There is an exceptional level of co-operation between the team centred on the development and sharing of teaching resources.
- A good range of approaches was used to monitor and correct students' written work and provide students with feedback on the quality of the work completed.
- Students' contributions were encouraged through the use of questions and the range of lesson activities used. However, in a small number of lessons an imbalance in the levels of student engagement with classroom activities was evident.
- There have been significant changes in staffing in the subject area in recent years and the team is commended for the ease with which they have developed cohesiveness in their approach to subject planning.
- The first-year taster programme for Business Studies is well structured as it provides students with a positive focus on developing financial literacy skills.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

- The teachers should further explore how tablet computers and other information and communication technology (ICT) devices can be used to enhance and support the development of students' engagement with the digital literacy elements of the subjects, especially Business Studies.
 - Where relevant, the range of strategies used to manage student inputs should be broadened to improve the students' participation in whole-class activities.
 - A minor review of subject plans should be undertaken to re-sequence the delivery of some elements in line with students' experience and to refocus the book-keeping elements.
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INTRODUCTION

Our Lady's Secondary School is a co-educational, voluntary secondary school operating under the trusteeship of Catholic Education – an Irish Schools Trust (CEIST). The school's current enrolment is 537 students. The school's senior cycle curricular programme includes an optional Transition Year (TY) programme and all three Leaving Certificate programmes.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

- Some exemplary examples of active teaching methodologies were used in lessons to maximize students' learning. These included guided pair work with whole-class feedback and the use of case studies, role-play, visual learning tools and digital media. In addition, students were challenged by the lesson content, which is good for promoting engagement with the subjects.
- On occasion the pacing of the lessons varied at junior cycle. Though common learning objectives are set, and syllabus objectives are achieved, differences in pedagogy and pacing with different class groups were evident.
- Experiential learning was evident with TY where students are following an enterprise programme. The students were encouraged to work in mixed ability as well as mixed gender groups. This approach of mixing groups on gender and ability should be extended to all class groups.
- Students' contributions were encouraged through the use of questions and the range of lesson activities used. In a small number of lessons, an imbalance in the levels of student engagement with classroom activities was evident. Broadening the range of strategies used to manage student inputs should improve the participation rates of all students in whole-class activities.
- The option of using tablet computers is available to students in first and second year, and take-up is very high. During the evaluation it was clear that students were familiar with navigating eBooks and using the devices. First-year classes have intermittent timetabled lessons for ICT and the school's upcoming building project will enhance broadband access to the classrooms.
- The availability of tablet computers provides great potential to enhance students learning through exploring the digital application of learning through topics at junior cycle for example, insurance, banking and the consumer.
- Some notes are used in junior cycle and of particular merit is that the introduction to each topic is framed through the use of learning outcomes.
- Assessment techniques used were varied. In earlier years of the cycles there was good use of teacher-developed tests. Where relevant care should be taken when using past examination material to ensure that it is current and relevant. Students' homework completion is monitored through a number of approaches including whole-class corrections and responses, and teacher corrections. These approaches, and the regularity of their use with many of the groups, is commended.
- There was widespread use of a number of literacy strategies, especially with junior cycle students. This is very much supported by the wide range of resources prepared by and shared among the team. Among the main approaches were the use of crosswords, cloze tests and key word notebooks. In addition, the print environment of each room has been

enhanced by the use of word walls. There was also evidence of the inclusion of numeracy and problem-solving approaches and strategies in teaching methods.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- Business Studies is offered as part of the taster programme in first year. The number of periods allocated to the subject increases from three in first year to four periods for each of second and third year. While slightly below the usual recommended time allocation the objective of facilitating students to experience the subject is valuable.
- Currently, Accounting and Business are offered at senior cycle and the time allocated to the subjects is very good, especially in sixth year when the number of periods increases from five to six.
- All TY students participate in an enterprise programme that focuses on Student Enterprise Awards. The number of students participating in TY has increased in the current school year necessitating an increase from two to three class groups.
- In maximising the potential of ICT as a teaching and learning tool, most business teachers have engaged in personal professional development to develop their ICT skills. Additional work is ongoing on developing spreadsheet templates for use with accounting and bookkeeping questions which will consolidate the existing work.
- The school has an agreed whole-school homework policy that has been adapted within the business subject plan. There is a high degree of consistency among business teachers with regard to the assignment of homework.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

- There have been significant changes in staffing within the subject department in recent years and the newly constituted team of subject teachers have been working very well together with a collective sense of purpose for the development and promotion of the subjects. In addition, there is an exceptional level of co-operation between the team with regard to the sharing of resources.
 - It is very positive that a role-descriptor is in place for the subject convenor. The descriptor while setting out the administrative aspects of the role also includes promotion of the subjects within the school, and planning for high achievement in the subjects.
 - The subject team analyses results of students in certificate examinations and there is a discernable pattern of improved attainment in recent years. This is evident both in the number of students taking higher level and in students' attainment overall.
 - Yearly and detailed schemes of work are available. In line with the school's priorities for school self-evaluation (SSE), the junior cycle plan includes strategies for developing literacy and numeracy within the teaching of the subject.
 - Some review of the junior cycle subject plan for Business Studies is required. Greater emphasis on the introduction of bookkeeping elements earlier in second year will promote students engagement with the higher-level outcomes of the syllabus. In addition, in Business the units could alternate in line with the Applied Business Question (ABQ) and Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP) activities, or a combination of both.
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The draft findings and recommendations arising out of this evaluation were discussed with the 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 report; a response was not received from the board.

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