Subject Inspection of Business Studies
REPORT

Gorey Community School
Gorey, County Wexford
Roll number: 91492N

Date of inspection: 11 March 2011
REPORT
ON
THE QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN BUSINESS STUDIES

SUBJECT INSPECTION REPORT

This report has been written following a subject inspection in Gorey Community School. It presents the findings of an evaluation of the quality of teaching and learning in Business Studies and makes recommendations for the further development of the teaching of this subject in the school. The evaluation was conducted over two days 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 was given an opportunity to comment in writing on the findings and recommendations of the evaluation, and the response of the board will be found in the appendix to this report.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

Gorey Community School provides the full spectrum of programmes for its 1620 students. Business education forms an integral part of most of these programmes. Students can avail of Business Studies in junior cycle; a business module in Transition Year (TY); and all three business subjects at Leaving Certificate. The Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP) is delivered by most of the business teachers. Business Studies in junior cycle is the focus of this report.

First-year students select their optional subjects prior to entry. In addition to core subjects students take three optional subjects in first year and on entry to second year this decreases to two. Students’ preferences generate the subject option bands as they rank their five preferred subjects out of a list of thirteen subjects including Business Studies. The uptake of Business Studies is below the national norm, and this sets a low base for progression to business education in Leaving Certificate. Business teachers are aware of this and have sought to address the situation. It is advisable that business teachers in association with the guidance department provide additional information regarding business education to students and parents prior to entry. This information should emphasise the objectives and benefits involved in the study of business. The possibility of providing a subject fair for new students could also be considered by senior management.

Time allocated for the teaching of Business Studies is good. Each year group in junior cycle has a double and two single class periods. From second year on, teachers remain with their class group for the duration of junior cycle.

The business subjects department receives an annual budget, which is used to purchase relevant resources such as visual teaching aids, portable overhead projectors, paper and electronic resources. Many of these resources are stored in a press in the staff workroom. A good system exists for the sharing and maintenance of these resources. The school intranet is effectively used.
by the business subjects department to share, update and store electronically-generated resources, teaching aids and planning documentation.

Most business teachers have their own base classrooms and have access to information and communication technology (ICT) facilities, overhead projectors (OHP) and audio visual equipment. Two teachers are each based in computer rooms and this facilitates immediate individual student access and use of ICT. All business classrooms had visual displays of learning resources and in one classroom there were very good student-generated posters and project work. There is scope in some business classrooms for further development in the creation of a stimulating visual business learning environment.

All business teachers in the school are skilled specialists and are diligent in ensuring that their subject knowledge is current. Most of the business teachers are members of the Business Studies Teachers Association of Ireland (BSTAI) and regularly attend subject association meetings, conferences and workshops. Business teachers have partaken in whole-school continuing professional development (CPD) and business-related in-service courses.

**PLANNING AND PREPARATION**

A good supportive working relationship exists within the well-organised business subjects department which has a co-ordinator whose position rotates on an annual basis. Senior management affords all subject departments planning time at the start of the academic year, and meeting time once a term. In addition to this, business teachers meet informally to discuss issues that pertain to the provision of business education. As evidenced from minutes of these meetings there is good dialogue, collaborative planning and evaluation of activities within the business subjects department. An informative booklet has been prepared for new teacher entrants into the business subjects department.

A business subjects plan has been developed as per the School Development Planning Initiative (SDPI) template and contains all the elements of good planning. The listing of effective techniques that a teacher may use to progress learning for students with special educational needs is particularly good. The business subjects department’s own mission statement states that “The overall principle of the Business Department is to develop a clear understanding of the role of enterprise”. This good aspiration merits the consideration of introducing students in junior cycle to practical enterprise activities.

The Business Studies curriculum plan details the sequence in which topics are delivered so as to facilitate common assessment. However, two different textbooks are currently being used and the sequencing of topics has changed to coincide with chapter content in both textbooks. This has resulted in some small changes. Within first-year class groups one class may have fully covered a topic and the other may not. As teachers and class groups may change after first year this should be amended. Consideration should also be given to placing the topic of business documents before double entry book-keeping and final accounts.

In the curricular plan for Business Studies, learning outcomes are listed for each topic. To build on this good planning practice, the addition of the teaching methodologies, resources available, intended modes of homework, assessment tools and differentiated teaching strategies in the main body of the plan should be aligned to each Business Studies topic. This will ensure that common teaching approaches are used so that students in each year receive a similar learning experience.
Teachers’ short-term and medium-term planning is very good. All handouts, ICT and supplementary paper-based resources were prepared in advance of lessons.

**TEACHING AND LEARNING**

In all lessons observed, teachers were well prepared. Lessons had a coherent structure, aims and objectives were outlined at the start of the lesson, and homework was corrected. On conclusion of each lesson, homework was assigned and it served to reinforce learning. One double and five single lessons of Business Studies were observed in a range of class groups from each year of junior cycle. Teaching and learning was good in all lessons observed.

The range of methodologies used included teacher-led discussions and instructions, pair work, student input, questioning, use of ICT and graphic organisers. The business subjects department plan lists effective teaching methodologies that can be used in lessons and encourages teachers to have “active learning through practical examples so as to ensure involvement of all students”. In some lessons there were some very good examples of pair work that enthused students. To maximise the learning experience for all students, it is advisable that more use of active methodologies such as group work be used in lessons.

A predominance of book-keeping topics was taught in all lessons observed. Teachers skilfully taught practices while integrating theory aspects of the syllabus. Business teachers have developed the very good practice of teaching book-keeping to every year group in junior cycle. Teacher use of specific terminology and explanation of book-keeping concepts was good. A step-by-step approach was adopted by all teachers and this helped students to become familiar with concepts and practice. Teachers modelled good question layout and reminded students of the need for clear labelling and neatness in their work.

ICT resources were employed in several lessons, and data projectors were used to display documents and completed answers. However, in a small number of lessons there was potential to use data projectors as a medium to display worked solutions as it would have created efficiencies in class time for teachers.

In lessons where it was appropriate there was good linkage to students’ own knowledge of local and national business issues and activities. It was laudable that in a lesson students scanned the morning newspaper for business-related topics. This provided the focus of a short class discussion. This good practice helps develop a general interest in the business environment.

In all lessons observed, teachers made good use of questioning to deepen business acumen. Teachers used global and student-targeted questions. Targeted questions were good as they were mainly higher-order and served to differentiate learning in the lesson. Teachers affirmed student responses, which demonstrated good business terminology and knowledge.

Classroom management was good in all lessons observed and there was very good rapport between teachers and students. The positive classroom atmosphere created a positive learning environment. Seating arrangements in classrooms facilitated group work and ease of movement for the teacher to give individual support and guidance to students.
ASSESSMENT

The business subjects department adheres to the school’s assessment and homework policies. Formal house examinations are administered twice a year and informal tests are normally conducted after the completion of a topic. Samples of tests were made available to the inspector; they contained a good spread of short and long questions which facilitates the development of higher-order skills. Students in junior cycle are given common formal tests. Teachers maintain records of students’ attainment outcomes and progress and these are communicated via a written twice-yearly report to parents and at the annual parent-teacher meeting.

In all observed lessons, good-quality homework was assigned to students. A sample of students’ account books, folders and journals were viewed in each lesson and these were found to be very neat and well maintained. Students and teachers are commended for the high standards maintained in this important aspect of school work. Teachers had adopted the good practice of noting guiding evaluative comments on students’ work.

Students are encouraged to achieve to their highest potential and to take Business Studies at higher level in certificate examinations and outcomes are good. A review of the outcomes is conducted by the deputy principal and is communicated to the teachers who compare them to national norms.

SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The following are the main strengths identified in the evaluation:

- The business subjects department is well organised and its long-term plan contains all the elements of good planning. It portrays the reflective and collaborative way that the department operates.
- There is an effective system in place for the updating, storage and shared use of electronic and paper-based resources.
- In all lessons observed, teachers were well prepared and lessons had a coherent structure. Teaching and learning was good.
- Good homework practices were observed, students received regular well-monitored homework and teachers used guiding comments on students’ work.
- Students are encouraged to achieve to their highest potential and uptake of higher level and outcomes in state examinations are good.

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

- The sequencing of topics in year one of the Business Studies plan should be followed by all class groups irrespective of which textbook is being used.
- The teaching methodologies, resources available, intended modes of homework, assessment tools and differentiated teaching strategies that are in the main body of the plan should be aligned to each Business Studies topic.
Post-evaluation meetings were held with the teachers of Business Studies 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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Appendix

School response to the report

Submitted by the Board of Management

Area 1: Observations on the content of the inspection report

The Business Studies teachers’ and the management of the school welcome the very positive report received from the Inspectorate. In particular, the very positive findings with regard to organisation, planning, teaching and learning are very welcome and are extremely encouraging. It is evident from the report that the Department is working very effectively and in a collaborative manner. We also welcome the fact that Business Studies students are achieving excellent results in the state examinations. This reflects the effective and positive modern teaching methods employed by Business Studies teachers.

The Business Studies department welcomed the opportunity to engage in the inspection process and the Department feels that the outcome reaffirmed and encouraged the teachers in the Department.

Area 2: Follow-up actions planned or undertaken since the completion of the inspection activity to implement the findings and recommendations of the inspection

The Business Studies teachers welcome the Inspector’s recommendations regarding the sequencing of topics in Year One. This will be implemented. We have already incorporated the recommendations regarding methodologies, resources, homework, assessment and differentiated teaching methods across all topics of Business Studies.