

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Subject Inspection of Business Subjects
REPORT

St Mary's Christian Brothers School
Portlaoise, County Laois
Roll number: 63430G

Date of inspection: 28 January 2016



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	27 and 28 January 2016
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 four double and five single class periods• Examination of students' work• Feedback to principal and teachers

MAIN FINDINGS

- In almost all lessons the quality of teaching was very high, there was scope for development in a very small number of lessons.
- In lessons where very good practice was noted, teachers utilised a range of learning activities which sustained student engagement and facilitated a teaching for understanding approach.
- The participation of Transition Year (TY) students in mini-company activities provides them with very good opportunities to engage in experiential learning.
- Management's support for business subjects is commendable in the key areas of curricular provision; equality of access to business subjects for all students; timetabling; deployment of staff and subject resourcing.
- Subject department planning is well established and highly organised.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

- In the small number of lessons where scope for development was identified, student learning should be enhanced by teachers through the increased use of higher-order targeted questioning, co-operative learning methodologies and assessment for learning (AfL) strategies.
 - To further enhance collaborative planning practices, discussions on teaching methodologies should be a permanent agenda item at business department meetings.
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INTRODUCTION

St Mary's CBS is a voluntary secondary school which provides Business Studies as an optional subject in junior cycle. In the optional TY programme, business education is compulsory and at Leaving Certificate students can choose Accounting and Business. The school has a current enrolment of 795 male students.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

- In the majority of lessons the quality of teaching and learning was very good, with good practice noted in a significant minority of lessons. In a very small number of lessons, there was scope for development, primarily in the choice of teaching approaches used and their effectiveness in engaging students in meaningful learning.
- In lessons where very good practice was observed, teachers used a range of learning activities which sustained student engagement and facilitated a teaching for understanding approach. In these lessons, there was a shared ownership of learning between teacher and student.
- In all lessons, learning intentions were shared with students. Best practice was observed in lessons where learning intentions were presented as what students should be able to know, do and understand by the end of the lesson and as the lesson concluded, attainment of the learning intention was reviewed. In a small number of lessons, a list of topics rather than learning intentions was shared with students. It is advisable that best practice be adopted by all teachers.
- In lessons with a book-keeping focus, a very good step-by-step approach was adopted by teachers.
- In most lessons, students had opportunities to work in pairs or small groups. It is advisable to further develop and expand co-operative learning activities such as the use of think-pair-share activities that conclude with a plenary session.
- In the majority of lessons, good questioning strategies successfully differentiated learning and provided students with good opportunities to develop their critical thinking skills. In a small number of lessons, questioning strategies could have been used more effectively.
- At senior cycle, the cross-curricular link between Business and the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP) is very good. The participation of Business students in LCVP visits to business enterprises is beneficial to their understanding and application of business theory to practical situations.
- Participation in mini-company activities provides TY students with very good opportunities to engage in experiential learning. Teachers and students are commended for their development of the very high quality of mini-company products and services.
- In most lessons, tangible links between subject matter and references to events in the economy were made. Commendably, in some lessons students were encouraged to keep up-to-date on current affairs through the use of newspaper articles in lessons and use of exemplars in discussions. This practice merits replication in all lessons.
- Teachers in almost all lessons effectively used informative and colourful video and visual resources to embed subject material. The good practice by some teachers of uploading electronic resources to student virtual learning platforms is in development and is worthy of expansion.

- Students' work was neat, well labelled and well presented in the sample of copybooks viewed in each lesson. Some of the copybooks included graphic organisers and mind maps that encapsulated the main points of topics.
- Student homework is regularly monitored. In keeping with AfL principles, more written feedback should be provided to students.
- Uptake of all business subjects at higher level is very good as are the subsequent outcomes in certificate examinations. Some students who are opting to take the ordinary level paper are achieving very good grades and this should be carefully monitored by senior management, business teachers and their parents to ensure that students take examinations at higher level where possible. A small number of class groups based on ability levels are formed in second year. Teachers and school management should evaluate the effectiveness of this formation and determine if it is affecting outcomes for students.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- Management's support for business subjects is good in the key areas of curricular provision, equality of access to business subjects for all students, timetabling, deployment of staff and subject resourcing.
- The uptake of the optional subject, Business Studies, is good. The majority of students who have taken Business Studies at junior cycle retain at least one of the business options at senior cycle.
- There is effective communication between the school's special education department and the business department regarding student outcomes. The timetabling of a resource teacher with a business qualification together with a business teacher for some class periods in junior cycle so that team teaching can be facilitated is praiseworthy.
- Business classrooms are very good visual learning environments. The seating configuration in most classrooms were conducive to active and co-operative learning methodologies.
- All business teachers are skilled specialists and are diligent in ensuring that their subject knowledge is current. Business teachers regularly attend subject association meetings, conferences and workshops and have availed of professional development courses.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

- Subject department planning is well established and highly organised. Business teachers work in a collaborative and supportive way and are very committed to the continued development of business subjects.
- At the regular subject department meetings, initiatives related to literacy, numeracy, and analysis of certificate examination outcomes and organisational aspects of the department are discussed. It is recommended that discussions on teaching methodologies and student learning strategies be included as a permanent item on meeting agendas.
- A very good overall plan for the delivery of business education is in place. It contains relevant student-related policies, agreed practices on the setting and correction of student

homework and the business department's strategy to progress the school's self-evaluation improvement targets in literacy and numeracy.

- The curriculum plans for most subjects are developed to a very high standard. In almost all plans, the learning intentions, resources and the methodologies to be employed in the delivery of each topic are specified. The learning objectives in some plans need to be further developed to enhance incremental learning.
- The use of the curriculum plan as a working document, wherein reviews and comments are made on the success or otherwise of its implementation would be of benefit to the overall planning in the department.
- In the Business Studies curriculum plan, it is praiseworthy that the book-keeping elements of the syllabus are introduced at an early stage and given appropriate emphasis throughout the three years of the cycle.
- The business department has a dedicated folder on the school's intranet. It is common practice for business teachers to include their prepared notes, presentations, solutions to questions and other resources in this folder for all business teachers to access and utilise. It is advisable to re-organise the shared folder based on the agreed schemes of work pertaining to the various business subjects

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.