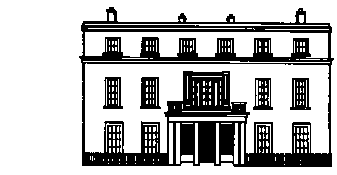
An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

Subject Inspection of Business Subjects
REPORT

Presentation Secondary School
Wexford Town, County Wexford
Roll number: 63661C

Date of inspection: 23 September 2014



REPORT
ON
THE QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN BUSINESS SUBJECTS

INFORMATION ON THE INSPECTION

Dates of inspection	22 and 23 September
Inspection activities undertaken • Review of relevant documents • Discussion with principal and teachers • Interaction with students • Discussion with senior cycle students	• Observation of teaching and learning during nine class periods: one double and seven single lessons • Examination of students' work • Feedback to principal and teachers

MAIN FINDINGS

- The overall quality of teaching was of a high standard.
- The very good learning activities in most lessons ensured that students were motivated to assume ownership of their learning.
- The process by which senior management has embedded the use of active learning methodologies in all teachers' practice and the use of the student journal as a learning tool are highly commended.
- The planning, organisational, and evaluative practices of the business department are of a very high standard, with a commendable focus on collaboratively providing the best possible learning experience for students.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

- The very good teaching practice observed should serve as a benchmark for all business teachers in their lessons.
- To further develop active student learning, business teachers should expand the use of project work, role play, debates and presentations, where appropriate.

INTRODUCTION

Presentation Secondary School is a voluntary secondary school with a current enrolment of 788 female students. Business Studies is a core subject in junior cycle, and Accounting and Business are optional subjects in Leaving Certificate. Business education is provided in the school's optional Transition Year (TY). Business Studies at junior cycle and TY business education is the focus of this inspection.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

- The overall quality of teaching observed was of a high standard as teachers taught for understanding. There were instances of excellent practice in many lessons. In a very small number of lessons, some teaching methodologies required re-framing so as to make effective use of lesson time and to fully engage students in the process of learning.
- The very good learning activities in most lessons ensured that students were motivated to assume ownership of their learning, while acquiring good business acumen and working co-operatively. In these lessons, students had many opportunities to develop key skills.
- A range of methodologies such as good pair and group work, student compilation of revision aids with differentiated questions and critical thinking activities were in evidence in lessons inspected. However, in one lesson students were transcribing questions and this was an ineffective use of class time. To further develop active learning, an increased use of student project work, role play, debates and presentations is advisable, where appropriate
- The sharing of learning outcomes with students varied in effectiveness. Best practice was noted in the majority of lessons where learning outcomes in terms of what students should and could know were visible throughout the lesson. At the conclusion of almost all lessons, students were involved in recapping the key learning points and displaying their level of understanding by using 'traffic light' cards. It is advisable that this good practice is expanded.
- The very good mini-company programme is delivered by highly motivated and enthusiastic teachers in a manner that provides students with opportunities to develop enterprise skills and learn in an experiential way.
- In most lessons, a good mix of higher-order and lower-order student-targeted questions were used effectively to differentiate between ability levels and to challenge students. The very good use by students of 'show me boards' in many lessons successfully informed teachers on the level of student knowledge.
- Most teachers used ICT in book-keeping lessons as an aid to display computer and hand-written solutions to worked written questions. To further integrate the use of ICT into teaching, the use of spreadsheet applications is advisable. It is admirable that some business teachers are sharing with students their learning resources through an internet hosting site.
- Students' use of ICT in the classroom is evolving. In one lesson, students used their electronic devices to conduct research. It is recommended that teachers further develop student use of ICT as a learning tool.

- Strategies to enhance students' literacy and numeracy skills were integrated into all lessons. In several lessons, students had to identify spelling, calculations and process errors in a final document. This learning activity consolidated business, numeracy and literacy skills.
- Homework is regularly set and corrected. Best practice was observed where written evaluative and affirming comments were noted on student copybooks. To further support student learning and progress and assessment for learning (AfL) strategies, it is advisable that criteria for assessment be set and that students evaluate their own work, on occasion.
- Student uptake of business subjects at higher level in state examinations is very good as are the subsequent outcomes. The school has developed good practices to support and advise students, especially where it is believed that students are choosing levels that are below their potential.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- Business education has a good profile on the school's curriculum. A high percentage of students continue with business education from junior cycle to Leaving Certificate.
- Teachers have their own base classrooms in which good visual learning environments are provided. In some classrooms, seating was configured to facilitate co-operative learning activities.
- Whole-school continuing professional development (CPD) that is centred on the learning and pastoral care of students is provided for all teachers. The process of embedding the recently attained CPD in active learning methodologies in teachers' practice is highly commended. Teachers, students and parents were involved in the process.
- The inclusion of items such as literacy and numeracy aids, AfL tools, and learner reflection sheets enables students to use their journal as a learning tool.
- The use of notice boards to provide information for students on mini-company and business-related activities is good as is the use of a television that relays news headlines and prompts students to be aware of current and business affairs.
- The progressing of a mentoring programme in the school underpins the development of reflective teacher practice. As observed from planning documentation, business teachers reflect on the impact of the lessons they deliver. Business teachers are embracing peer evaluation and have agreed protocols and criteria that are grounded in mutual respect with the aim of ensuring an enriching experience for all involved. This is a praiseworthy development.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

- The organisational, planning and collaborative practices of the business subject department are of a very high quality.
- Business teachers have regular department meetings and are willingly to share best practice and resources to ensure that business education of a high standard is consistently provided for students.
- The ethos that underpins the compilation of the business subject's department plan is the provision of very best teaching and learning experience for students.

- The sequencing of topics in the curriculum plan follows a logical progression and facilitates the integration of book-keeping elements and theory. Of particular merit is the linking of learning outcomes, resources, AfL, literacy and numeracy strategies to each topic. This facilitates common approaches to teaching, learning and assessment for each class group. The addition of homework modes and a continuation of the expansion of specific methodologies for each topic would further enhance the plan.
- The development of a discrete folder specific to how teaching and learning practice is deployed within business education is exemplary. Included in the teaching and learning development folder are the whole-school literacy and numeracy strategies, a catalogue of exemplars of lesson plans specific to active learning methodologies, a rubric for group work and teacher reflection sheets.
- A well-organised shared electronic folder containing resources and subject-related information is in development. It is advisable to develop further common resources such as templates for book-keeping.

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 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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