An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

Subject Inspection of Business Subjects
REPORT

Waterpark College
Waterford City, County Waterford
Roll number: 64940L

Date of inspection: 13 May 2011

AN ROINN OIDEACHAIS AGUS SCILEANNA | DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND SKILLS

REPORT
ON
THE QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN BUSINESS SUBJECTS

INFORMATION ON THE INSPECTION

Dates of inspection	12 and 13 May
Inspection activities undertaken • Review of relevant documents • Discussion with principal and teachers • Interaction with students	• Observation of teaching and learning during eight class periods • Examination of students' work • Feedback to principal and teachers

MAIN FINDINGS

- Overall teaching and learning was good, but in some lessons students were not sufficiently involved or challenged to lead their own learning.
- Teachers used good questioning techniques which helped develop learning in lessons.
- The volume, variety and assessment of students' homework ranged from good to fair.
- There is a good provision of business subjects on the school's curriculum.
- Planning practices are good and a few additions to the business subjects plan and an expansion of subject curricular plans would make them complete.
- A significant portion of the third-year curricular plan is dedicated to revision and this reduces the time available for students to experience the content of each topic in an explorative manner.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

- Teachers should use a variety of methodologies and learning strategies that will challenge students, access their learning styles and develop key skills.
- Students should receive homework after each lesson of a sufficient calibre that builds on the learning outcomes of lessons.
- In each business subject curriculum plan the learning outcomes, methodologies, differentiated teaching strategies, resources and homework modes should be aligned to each topic.
- The sequencing of topics in the Business Studies plan and the content of the Transition Year (TY) module should be re-considered.

INTRODUCTION

Waterpark College is a voluntary secondary school which provides Business Studies as a core subject in junior cycle. Business education is compulsory in the optional Transition Year. At Leaving Certificate students are offered Accounting, Business and Economics. The school has a current enrolment of 262 students, all male. 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 generally good overall. While some very good practices were noted there is potential to develop and use methodologies that actively involve students in their learning.
- Teachers used good questioning strategies in all lessons. Students were targeted with a mix of lower-order and higher-order questions and there was very good development of students' answers.
- Where information and communication technology (ICT) was used is was good. It was particularly effective in a lesson where a clip of a television programme was used as a springboard for a class discussion. This good practice should be expanded in lessons where pertinent.
- In lessons that had a book-keeping focus there was a good step-by-step approach to the teaching of concepts. Teachers skilfully taught book-keeping with good integration of theory elements in the syllabus.
- There was a small amount of pair work in lessons. However no other active or co-operative methodologies were used to engage students. The incorporation of these methodologies and the judicious use of ICT into teachers' pedagogical practice will allow business education to assume a dynamic real-life focus.
- Lessons had a good structure. At the start of most lessons an outline of work was shared with students. This should now progress to the articulation of learning outcomes in terms of what students need to know.
- Classroom management was good and teachers affirmed students' efforts.
- Teachers have adopted the good practice of comparing examination results with national norms. However, the numbers taking business subjects at higher level is below what would be expected for the student cohort. It is advisable to challenge students in the classroom and to encourage an ownership of learning in order to raise expectations and attainment.
- Copybooks were generally neat and well labelled. It is advisable that specialist account books should be used by all students for book-keeping so as to improve presentation of accounts.
- A review of a selection of journals indicated that students' homework in some class groups often consisted of reading or learning notes and in some lessons no homework was allocated. Where this is a regular occurrence, teachers should initiate a more active and engaging method of homework.
- In all observed lessons homework was corrected. In a small number of lessons there was some evidence of formal checking of students' homework by teachers outside of class

time and comments were noted as to how students might improve their performance. This practice should be expanded particularly for Leaving Certificate students and the introduction of peer assessment should also be considered.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- There is good provision in business education. Business Studies at junior cycle is a core subject on the curriculum. The uptake of business subjects at Leaving Certificate is high.
- The time allocated to teaching all business subjects is good. However, consideration should be given to the provision of a double period at some point in the junior cycle, as book-keeping has a practical focus with topics such as final accounts requiring a double period to ensure completion.
- All teachers of the business subjects are subject specialists with up-to-date knowledge of their subject and relevant topical issues. Business teachers have participated in continuing professional development and are aware of current CPD provision.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

- Teachers in the business subjects department have a good working relationship and meet formally once a term.
- A business subjects plan has been devised and is good in design and content. However, the plan should be extended to include the supports offered for students with special educational needs. 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.
- One aspect of the subject plan that requires review is the TY programme. While it is good that all students can develop their entrepreneurial skills, business teachers are advised to review the modules and re-design them with an emphasis on the development of applied skills through self-directed learning opportunities.
- The curriculum plan for Business Studies details the sequencing of topics to be taught. In third year a significant portion of the year is dedicated to revision and this reductive approach may not allow students to experience the breadth and balance of the syllabus as intended.
- All curricular plans can be further developed by aligning learning outcomes, resources, differentiated learning strategies and a range of assessment and teaching methodologies to each curriculum topic.
- Business teachers are in the process of developing a resource pack for each business subject and the planned addition of non-examination resources will enhance the pack.
- Business teachers are classroom based. Although there are some business resources displayed there is potential to develop rooms into a visual learning environment that includes displays of students' project work.

The draft findings and recommendations arising out of this evaluation were discussed with the principal and subject teachers at the conclusion of the evaluation.

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