An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

Subject Inspection of Business Subjects
REPORT

Abbey Community College
Ferrybank, County Waterford
Roll number: 76082H

Date of inspection: 24 November 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	23 and 24 November 2011
Inspection activities undertaken • Review of relevant documents • Discussion with principal and teachers • Interaction with students	• Observation of teaching and learning during eleven class periods • Examination of students' work • Feedback to principal and teachers

MAIN FINDINGS

- Teaching was good overall but in a small number of lessons students were not sufficiently involved in leading their own learning.
- Students were afforded good additional paper-based resources.
- There is a mix of approaches among business teachers regarding the type of homework assigned and its correction.
- Business teachers are diligent in ensuring that their subject knowledge is current and they actively share resources.
- Business is timetabled for one single and two double class periods and in one instance these are on consecutive days.
- Planning practices are good; a few additions to the business subjects plan and an expansion of subject curricular plans would enhance them.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

- In some lessons more active and co-operative learning methodologies and effective use of information and communication technology (ICT) should be incorporated into teaching practice.
- Business teachers should consider best practice in the assigning and assessment of student work and aim for a consistent practice throughout the business subjects department.
- A review of timetable provision for Business is advisable.
- The content of the business subjects plan and each curricular plan should be developed as a manual on how to provide the best possible business education in the school.

INTRODUCTION

Abbey Community College is a co-educational vocational school under the auspices of Co. Kilkenny Vocational Education Committee, with an enrolment of 669 post-primary students. The school offers Business Studies in junior cycle, and Accounting and Business as optional subjects in Leaving Certificate. Business education is core in the school's optional Transition Year (TY) programme.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

- Teaching and learning was good overall. Some very good practices were noted, such as effective use of role play, pair and group work, and good higher-order targeted questioning.
- In a small number of lessons, there is scope for broadening the range of teaching methodologies so as to actively involve students in their own learning and to develop student's thinking skills.
- Teachers are conscientious and hardworking, as was evidenced by the preparation and well-planned approach to each lesson observed.
- In book-keeping lessons, a good step-by-step approach was adopted by teachers. Students were afforded good additional paper-based resources and in one lesson good role play was used.
- Teachers' use of business terminology and subject knowledge is good and in most lessons this was mirrored by students' contributions and questions.
- In lessons ICT and visualisers were used as teaching aids. The use of ICT should now be developed so as to give a real-life and dynamic focus to business education by accessing relevant case studies, websites, extracts of television programmes and interactive resources.
- Business teachers have compiled a booklet for student use. However, students particularly in Leaving Certificate should also be encouraged to conduct their own research and add their own findings and information to this resource.
- In a first-year lesson, students were using examination papers for homework assignments. The use of this resource at such an early point in the junior cycle should be discontinued and students should be exposed to a wide variety of assessment tools.
- Learning outcomes were shared with students at the start of each lesson. To maximise their learning potential they could be re-visited towards the end of each lesson to assess students' learning, affirm effort and clarify points of information.
- Classroom management was good and effective in all lessons. Students responded positively and courteously to teachers' instructions and they were in turn positively affirmed.
- In all lessons observed students received homework. However, in some lessons an examination of a sample of student copybooks and journals highlighted varied practice in the quantity, regularity and type of homework assigned. In a small number of class groups students were rote-learning notes; where this is a regular occurrence teachers should consider a more active and engaging method of homework.

- Some teachers regularly used evaluative comments in the correction of written homework. It is advisable that assessment for learning (AfL) be expanded within the department particularly at Leaving Certificate.
- Student uptake of Business Studies at higher level in state examinations is good as are the subsequent outcomes. However, in the context of the student cohort, the number taking business subjects at higher level in Leaving Certificate is not as high as expected. The factors involved should be identified and addressed by business teachers.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- Uptake of the optional Business Studies is at national norms. The pattern of uptake of Business and Accounting and the factors that influence student choice merit an investigation by the business subjects department.
- Timetable provision for Business Studies is good. The option band in which Business is offered contains subjects that require double periods. In one year group, lessons are on consecutive days. If double periods cannot be avoided it is advisable to ensure an even spread of classes throughout the week so as to facilitate continuity in instruction and allow adequate time for the completion of homework.
- Two of the three business teachers are classroom based. There is scope to develop both rooms as visual learning environments and to maximise the use of the rooms for the provision of business education.
- Business teachers are diligent in ensuring that their subject knowledge is current. They are members of their subject association and have attended in-service relating to their subjects.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

- Subject department planning is well organised. Business teachers work in a collaborative and supportive manner and are very committed to the continued development of business subjects.
- The minutes of subject department meetings indicate that most discussions pertain to the organisational aspects of the department. While this is necessary, it is advisable to include and note discussions on best teaching and learning strategies.
- The business subjects plan is good in design. However, the plan should be extended to include literacy and numeracy teaching and learning strategies. 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.
- There is a good blend of bookkeeping and theory topics in each year of the Business Studies curriculum plan. However, the sequencing of some topics may need to be reviewed, notably in first year.
- There is considerable expertise and experience in the business subjects department which can be shared and formalised through the development of each curricular plan. The good practices observed in lessons should be documented as a manual for current and new entrants to the subject department. This can be achieved by linking to each topic its

learning outcomes, resources, differentiated learning strategies and range of teaching and assessment methodologies.

- It is desirable that there is agreement among teachers regarding the type and quantity of homework that can be assigned. It is advisable that all students experience a similar level of homework.
- As part of ongoing subject planning, the business teachers should develop an electronic folder to store all available resources.

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.

Published May 2012.