

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Subject Inspection of Business Subjects
REPORT

**Dominican College,
Sion Hill, Blackrock
Roll number: 60070K**

Date of inspection: 05 March 2013



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

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| Date of inspection | 05 March 2013 |
| 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 three lessons; one single and two double class periods• Examination of students' work• Feedback to principal and teachers |

MAIN FINDINGS

- The teaching observed was of a high standard overall.
- The good learning activities observed, ensured that students were engaged in their learning, attained good business knowledge and developed key skills.
- Students are encouraged to take business subjects at higher level in certificate examinations, wherein outcomes are good.
- A good system is in place to assess and monitor students' academic effort.
- Student uptake of Business Studies at junior cycle is increasing while the uptake of Business at senior cycle is very good.
- The planning, organisational and developmental practices of the business subjects department are of a high quality; the focus is on the learning needs of students.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

- In keeping with assessment for learning (AfL) principles, more written feedback should be provided to students, and their project work should be displayed on classroom walls.
- The factors involved in determining subject choice by students in junior cycle merit an analysis by senior management and the business subjects department so that an action plan can be devised to increase uptake of Business Studies.

INTRODUCTION

Dominican College, Sion Hill is a voluntary secondary school which offers Business Studies in junior cycle and Business in Leaving Certificate, as optional subjects. Business education is a core module in the school's compulsory Transition Year (TY) programme. The school has a current enrolment of 374 female students.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

- Teaching practices observed were of a high standard overall. All business teachers used teaching strategies that sought to challenge and deepen student learning.
- Throughout all lessons observed, a good range of teaching methodologies were used. Students had the opportunity to work in small groups or in pairs in each lesson. The setting of tasks, such as the completion of a word definition pyramid, successfully recapped and deepened prior learning.
- Effective differentiated questioning was used frequently and appropriately in lessons. Higher-order questions were directed to named students and sufficient time was given to students to articulate their answers. The use by students of "show me" boards and "traffic lollipops", in some lessons, allowed the teacher to instantly and effectively assess the level of student understanding and knowledge.
- Information and communication technology (ICT) was used in most lessons. ICT was effectively used when it allowed business education to attain a stimulating real-life focus through the viewing of pertinent film clips, visual images and WebPages. However, there was scope for greater integration of ICT in some lessons.
- During one lesson, students read, discussed and marked the main points of the textbook. To maximise lesson learning time, students should be encouraged to highlight main points outside of class time and this could lead to comprehension-based discussions in the following lesson to determine learning.
- In the lessons observed, teachers' planning and preparation was very good. Each lesson observed had a coherent structure with learning outcomes outlined at the outset. At the end of some lessons, students recapped the learning of the lesson and this good practice should be expanded.
- Teachers are classroom based and have developed visual learning environments that include posters and learning squares that display business keywords. While there were some displays of students' work, this is an area that should be developed as it would enhance the learning experiences of students in a practical and interesting way.
- Student learning was enhanced through the very good atmosphere, high expectations and affirmative environment evident in all lessons. The good variety of learning activities ensured that students' interest was maintained throughout. Students were confident to display their knowledge.
- Students are encouraged to participate in a range of co-curricular and enterprise activities which are beneficial to students' understanding of business theory and to the development of key skills.

- A range of student copybooks was viewed by the inspector in each lesson visited. Copybooks were very neat, well labelled, dated and in some instances included graphic organisers to recap on the main points of topics.
- Homework was regularly assigned and monitored by teachers. However, more written comments from teachers that affirm and highlight ways of improving students' work should be expanded, particularly on the answers to long questions.
- Practices indicated that students are encouraged to achieve to their highest potential. Uptake of business subjects at higher level in state examinations is very good as are the subsequent outcomes.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- First-year students select their optional subjects prior to entry. While the uptake of Business Studies is increasing year on year, there scope to further increase the uptake of Business Studies in first year. The factors involved merit an analysis by senior management and the business subjects department so that an action plan can be devised to increase uptake.
- The uptake of Business in Leaving Certificate is very good as the majority of students who have taken Business Studies at junior cycle continue with business education as do a number of students new to business education having experienced it in TY.
- 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 continuing professional development (CPD) courses. Of particular merit is the formal recording and sharing of information from CPD events among the team.
- The business subjects department follows the school's assessment policy which provides for the administering of monthly class tests and formal in-house examinations in October, February and May. The use of e-portal to record assessment outcomes facilitates the tracking of each student's grades and it, along with the monitoring of student effort, creates a very useful student academic profile.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

- Subject department and individual planning is well organised. Business teachers work in a collaborative and supportive manner and are very committed to the continued development of business education in the school. For example, each year, a developmental target, such as the provision of learning activities that are diverse and challenge students, is set and subsequently evaluated.
- There are regular formal and informal meetings held by the business subjects department, of which minutes are maintained. It is praiseworthy that, in addition to discussions pertaining to organisational aspects of the department, conversations are also held on effective teaching methodologies and on the development of students' literacy skills.
- The business subjects plan is comprehensive and contains all the elements of good planning. Of particular merit in each curriculum plan is the linking of learning outcomes,

resources, and the methodologies to be employed in the teaching of each topic. To further enhance the plan, the details of how and where specific methodologies can be used for each topic could be noted.

- Business teachers are aware of the importance of the development of student literacy and numeracy skills. To further enhance provision for students it is advisable to develop a list of commonly-used business terms and keywords and their explanations for students use particularly in senior cycle.
- A well-organised paper-based and electronic folder has been developed containing resources and subject-related information that is regularly updated.

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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