

**An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna**

**Department of Education and Skills**

**Subject Inspection of Business Subjects  
REPORT**

**Saint Mary's Knockbeg College  
Knockbeg, County Carlow  
Roll number: 61130H**

**Date of inspection: 23 March 2011**



**A N R O I N N | D E P A R T M E N T O F  
O I D E A C H A I S | E D U C A T I O N  
A G U S S C I L E A N N A | A N D S K I L L S**

**REPORT  
ON  
THE QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN BUSINESS SUBJECTS**

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**INFORMATION ON THE INSPECTION**

<b>Dates of inspection</b>	<b>22 and 23 March 2011</b>
<b>Inspection activities undertaken</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Review of relevant documents</li><li>• Discussion with principal and teachers</li><li>• Interaction with students</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Observation of teaching and learning during eight class periods</li><li>• Examination of students' work</li><li>• Feedback to principal and teachers</li></ul>

**MAIN FINDINGS**

- Overall teaching and learning was good, but in some areas students were not sufficiently involved in leading their own learning.
- The good provision of information and communication technology (ICT) was used effectively and the development of the ePortal system to inform parents of students' academic progress is a good concept.
- Many students were not using their journals to record homework and in some lessons the completion of homework was not monitored by teachers or students.
- Business subjects are well represented in the school curriculum and a majority of students take a business subject in Leaving Certificate.
- The practice of setting in third-year Business Studies and over-emphasis on examination levels in mixed-ability fifth-year Economics is not desirable, given the negative effect that setting may have on student motivation, attainment and opportunity.
- The inclusion of subject-specific objectives in curricular plans is good; each curricular plan can be further developed.

**MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS**

- In all lessons learning outcomes should be outlined; in some lessons higher-order questioning, co-operative methodologies, monitoring of homework and guiding evaluative comments on corrections are necessary.
  - Students of business subjects should be taught in a mixed-ability setting until as late as possible in all cycles and concurrent timetabling arrangements should be reviewed.
  - Business teachers should create visually rich learning environments in classrooms.
  - In each business subject curriculum plan the learning outcomes, methodologies, differentiated teaching strategies, resources and homework modes should be aligned to each topic.
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## **INTRODUCTION**

St Mary's Knockbeg College is a voluntary secondary school which offers Business Studies as a core subject in junior cycle and Business and Economics as options in Leaving Certificate. In the school's optional Transition Year (TY) a life skills module, incorporating good financial life skills and enterprise, is provided for all students. The school has a current enrolment of 352 male students.

## **TEACHING AND LEARNING**

- Good teaching and learning overall was observed. Effective practice included the sharing of good subject knowledge, linkage to real-life business situations and clear explanations of concepts.
- Teachers used a variety of methodologies. However in a small number of lessons higher-order questioning and active and co-operative methodologies should have been used more frequently.
- In most lessons students were encouraged to keep up-to-date with current business developments.
- There was effective use of ICT and subject-specific terminology in almost all lessons.
- In TY there was good development of students' analytical, evaluative and ICT skills.
- Teachers gave students additional paper-based resources in each lesson. Students should be encouraged to retain these in a suitable manner.
- Classroom management practices were good in almost all lessons.
- In most lessons teachers recapped learning from the previous lesson. However, there was no sharing of learning outcomes with students.
- There was a divergence in the maintenance of student copybooks. In some instances neatness, layout, headings and labelling required attention. Presentation skills are important in business and it is advisable that procedures be put in place to improve presentation skills.
- Many students were not using their journals to record homework. Strategies should be put in place to develop good practice in this regard.
- Business teachers use different practices to assign, monitor and correct homework. Good practices were noted in half of the lessons visited and these included peer correction of homework, teacher monitoring of completed homework and teacher corrections that included guiding evaluative comments.
- The number of students taking business subjects at higher level is good and outcomes in state examinations are good.
- Business teachers are developing a student assessment profile system through which students' assessment outcomes are continuously recorded and demonstrated in a bar chart. The use of ePortal will facilitate the reporting of these to parents from 2011/12 on.

## **SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT**

- Business subjects have a high profile on the curriculum. A high percentage of students continue with business education in Leaving Certificate.
- ICT facilities are good, data projectors are installed in classrooms, each business teacher has the use of a laptop and there are two computer rooms in the school.
- Students are taught in mixed-ability settings for the first two years of junior cycle, and on entering third year are organised into set ability groups. Economics students are also divided into ability groupings based on Junior Certificate results. The negative effect that setting may have on student motivation, attainment and opportunity should be considered.
- There are six business subjects teachers. Two teachers deliver the majority of business education and are based in their own classrooms. Senior management tries to ensure that maximum use is made of these classrooms. However, concurrent timetabling in second and third year limits their availability and also restricts teacher deployment.
- The majority of teachers are business specialists. In assigning teachers to subjects, senior management should try at all times to ensure that teachers are qualified in the relevant business subject area.
- Subjects are allocated to teachers at Leaving Certificate according to seniority. Junior cycle classes rotate between four members of the teaching team. There should be increased involvement of qualified teachers in the teaching of Leaving Certificate subjects as this will expand the capacity within the business subjects department.
- Business teachers have partaken in whole-school continuing professional development courses provided by senior management, and courses delivered externally.

## **PLANNING AND PREPARATION**

- The business subjects department has a junior and senior cycle co-ordinator as part of the school's established practice. The appointment of an overall rotating co-ordinator should be considered as it would allow each teacher to assume a leadership role in the development of business education within the school.
  - Subject plans have been developed for all business subjects and related modules; these are good in design having all the elements required for good planning.
  - The TY business module has developed good cross-curricular links and school-home links, and provides students with the opportunity to develop key skills.
  - The inclusion of subject-specific aims and objectives in the Economics, Business and Business Studies curricular plans is good. The detailing of the specific resources to be used to deliver each topic in the Business Studies plan is a worthy development and it can be enhanced with the addition of suitable teaching methodologies, homework modes, differentiation strategies and learning outcomes.
  - The two main classrooms where business education is delivered should be further developed as a resource base for business subjects. An effective display of business materials and a good visual and print-rich environment is required for business students.
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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 evaluation, and the response of the board will be found in the appendix to this report.

*Published November 2011*

# **Appendix**

## **School response to the report**

### **Submitted by the Board of Management**

#### **Area 1: Observations on the content of the inspection report**

The Board would like to express its satisfaction with the report. It has taken note of certain concerns outlined in the inspection report. It would like to comment on some of the findings. In teaching and learning, all staff members have undertaken extensive CPD in active learning methodologies so, although they may not have been used as frequently in class as was deemed desirable they are regularly and routinely used by teachers.

Under subject provision it is stated that Economics students in Leaving Certificate classes are divided based on Junior Certificate results. This is not the case. There is one Senior Economics class and students are taught at a common level until such time as some decide that they may want to take the subject at Ordinary level in the Leaving Cert.

In relation to the recommendation to create a visually rich learning environment in the classroom there is a problem with their physical makeup. While there are visual displays in each room, a more expansive display is hindered by the fact that one is a prefab with windows on three sides which take up almost all the wall space, while the other is a converted 1847 dormitory which has windows on two and a half sides.

The appointment of a Design Team for a significant extension is in progress and when our building project has come to fruition then we will be able to have the kind of learning environment in Business that will optimise the experience for our students.

#### **Area 2: Follow-up actions planned or undertaken since the completion of the inspection activity to implement the findings and recommendations of the inspection**

The Board has noted the comment about homework not being written in and a number of revised strategies have already been implemented to ameliorate this shortcoming.

The Senior Business teacher has been assigned to a first year class in 2011/2012 so the kind of rotation between senior and junior classes requested has commenced. In addition concurrent timetabling will cease in 2012/2013