

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

**Subject Inspection of Business Subjects
REPORT**

**Coláiste Pobail Acla
Achill, County Mayo
Roll number: 76150V**

Date of inspection: 15 October 2013



**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

INFORMATION ON THE INSPECTION

Dates of inspection	15 October 2013
Inspection activities undertaken <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Review of relevant documents• Discussion with principal (acting) and teachers• Interaction with students	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Observation of teaching and learning during six class periods• Examination of students' work• Feedback to principal (acting), deputy principal (acting) and teachers

MAIN FINDINGS

- The quality of teaching and learning was good in the lessons observed with some exemplary approaches used in one lesson.
- Teachers referenced current business examples and incorporated student-sourced material in lessons, which aided in contextualising business theory to its practical application.
- Written homework is regularly assigned and some very good approaches to monitoring its completion were observed.
- The number of students taking business subjects is good and the subject department is actively involved in promoting uptake in the subjects.
- The content and materials in the Transition Year (TY) Accounting module are taken from the Leaving Certificate Accounting syllabus and past certificate examinations.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

- More use of active learning methodologies, especially in relation to topics that are current, will build on existing strengths in teaching.
 - The TY Accounting module should be reviewed to meet the guidelines issued by the Department of Education and Skills for the development of TY programmes.
 - Where relevant, teachers should decrease the reliance on examination material as a guide to teaching and learning.
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INTRODUCTION

Coláiste Pobail Acla operates under the auspices of Mayo Sligo Leitrim Education and Training Board (MSLETB). The current enrolment is 225 students and the school provides a wide curriculum programme, including the Junior Certificate Schools Programme (JCSP) in junior cycle and an optional Transition Year (TY) programme in senior cycle.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

- Good quality teaching and learning was evident in the lessons observed.
- Current examples from the business world were used to contextualise business theory to students' lives and thereby increase their understanding of the subjects. This was especially evident in junior cycle classes.
- In one excellent example used with first-year students, the teacher used a local business example, including till receipts to introduce key concepts including, pricing strategies, product sourcing and value added tax (VAT) for students. The students also provided their own examples for this task which was then integrated with key numeracy concepts. This approach was very effective in strengthening both students applied business and numeracy skills.
- Given the timing of the inspection each lesson included reference to Budget 2014. Two main approaches were used to present the topic, one based on students' expectations of the main elements of the budget and the second involved students using the print and visual media to research the main elements. This diversity is good as it challenges students to learn in a variety of ways.
- A good range of information and communication technology (ICT) resources is available to teachers and there was some good use of visual imagery, using presentation software to stimulate learning across the range of students' learning styles.
- The inspector's review of a sample of students' copybooks indicated that additional attention should be paid to students' presentation of the bookkeeping elements of the subject at junior cycle. It also indicated that in a number of cases there is frequent use of questions from past certificate examinations for class work and homework.
- Teachers used notes to support students' learning. In a number of instances the more beneficial technique of students developing their own support notes within guidelines, set by the teacher, was observed. This was further positively supported by the teacher correcting the notes to check for accuracy and quality.
- Written homework is frequently assigned by the teachers. Homework is referred to in follow-on lessons, though there is scope to improve how the teachers record homework completion rates.
- The most effective approach to homework correction was used in one junior cycle class where it centred on a 'show and tell' approach. Students' learning and the assessment process were supported by a follow-up question and answer session. It was also supported by the teacher recording homework completion rates and periodic monitoring of the quality of the work produced by students.
- Interactions between students and teachers were respectful and there were a number of good examples of guided discussions in lessons which is a useful strategy for developing applied business skills and students' oral skills.

- A whole-school initiative is in place in relation to the use of key words as an approach to developing students' literacy skills. The main keyword strategies used in the teaching of Business Studies were keyword journals and posters.
- In Business, students' comprehension skills were developed by students' pre-reading text that formed the basis of lesson content. This approach works very well when supported by a range of strategies, especially differentiated questioning strategies.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- Timetable provision for the subjects is very good, especially in TY where the students take a core Business programme and they can take an optional programme in Accounting which has a time allocation of three periods per week.
- Business Studies is a core subject at junior cycle and the number of students taking the senior cycle business options of Accounting and Business has increased in recent years. The subject teachers are actively involved in the successful promotion of uptake in the subjects at senior cycle.
- Teachers are classroom-based and very good use is made of the specialist business rooms to display students' work and promote aspects of the key word strategy.
- The teachers have availed of continuing professional development (CPD) opportunities provided by the subject association and the Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST).
- Until recently, junior cycle classes were organised on a gender basis. The move to mixed gender and mixed-ability classes is welcome as it allows for a richer interaction between students, which is beneficial for the applied aspects of the subject.
- The whole-school approach to assessment is well-established and the subject department has been considering the implication of the introduction of the Junior Cycle Framework through its recent completion of a strengths, challenges, opportunities and threats (SCOT) analysis.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

- The subject teachers are actively engaged in the ongoing development of the overall subject plan.
 - There is a great level of variance in the teachers' individual schemes of work. Achieving a greater degree of consistency among the team in relation to the schemes will assist in advancing the overall planning objectives of the subject department.
 - Daily lesson planning incorporates planning for the use of key words. In developing the agreed schemes of work for the subjects, the teachers should consider how to broaden the range of approaches used to strengthen students' engagement with keywords as a means of developing literacy.
 - The learning outcomes for the TY Accounting module are all taken from the leaving certificate syllabus. This is contrary to the Department's guidelines for TY and thus the Accounting module requires a fundamental review.
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The draft findings and recommendations arising out of this evaluation were discussed with the principal (acting), deputy principal (acting) 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.

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