

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

**Subject Inspection of Business Subjects
REPORT**

**Saint Gerald's College
Newport Road, Castlebar, County Mayo
Roll number: 64580H**

Date of inspection: 26 March 2015



**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

Dates of inspection	24 and 26 March 2015
Inspection activities undertaken <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Review of relevant documents• Discussion with principal, deputy principal and teachers• Interaction with students	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Observation of teaching and learning during twelve class periods; four double and four single periods• Examination of students' work• Feedback to principal, deputy principal and teachers

MAIN FINDINGS

- High quality teaching and learning was evident in the lessons observed with excellent practice in a significant number of lessons.
- In a few lessons there was scope to restructure collaborative learning opportunities to maximise students' learning from the tasks.
- The use of information and communication technology (ICT) and data analysis to support teaching, subject planning and resource development is exceptional.
- A number of the teachers have developed very good practice in the use of formative feedback.
- All business subjects are provided and the uptake is exceptionally high given that the subject is optional at both senior and junior cycle.
- Subject planning is well advanced though work remains on developing the short-term schemes of work for Economics.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

- A subject-specific approach for the provision of formative feedback to students on their written work should be developed.
 - The short-term schemes of work for Economics should be completed in line with existing practice.
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INTRODUCTION

St Gerald's College is a boys-only voluntary secondary school located in Castlebar. The school operates under the trusteeship of the Le Chéile Trust and its current enrolment is 508. A traditional curriculum comprising of Junior Certificate, Leaving Certificate and Transition Year (TY) programme is provided.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

- High quality teaching and learning was evident in the lessons observed with excellent practice in a significant number of lessons.
- In a few lessons there was scope to restructure learning opportunities to maximise students' learning from the tasks.
- A significant number of well-structured, appropriately paced, student-centred lessons were observed. Among the strategies used with junior class groups were show-me boards and placemat exercises. These approaches facilitated collaboration and discussion and encouraged the development of the range of student learning styles.
- Questioning was very good, in almost all cases. A combination of targeted and global questions was used, enhanced by good use of wait time. Additionally, nearly all teachers used a hands-up approach to managing whole-class responses. There were a number of effective examples of differentiated questioning. For example, students who responded confidently to short-answer questions were further challenged with supplementary higher-order questions.
- In many instances the environment was print-rich and included student developed materials for example, learning grids. The teachers' presentation was very clear and in almost all cases mirrored in the presentation of students' work. Solutions to questions were well laid out and support materials often colour coded for ease of reference.
- In many lessons business theory was commonly introduced through using static digital presentations to trigger questions. Across all the subjects, emphasis was placed on mixing theory and practice. With accounts questions emphasis was placed both on the accuracy of solutions and students' presentation of the accounts.
- Good use was made of additional resources and of particular merit is the adaptation by a number of the teachers of additional resources including certificate examination material for use with students. For theory aspects, students were challenged to frame their written and oral responses using a state, explain, example (SEE) approach.
- To promote upward differentiation, and balance collaborative with independent learning opportunities, teachers should extend the use of 'working towards' or 'check balance' approaches to the completion of class or homework questions. This will also support the school's encouragement of peer and self- assessment.
- Homework is frequently assigned and where best practice was observed, corrected by the teacher with directions for improvement. A number of the teachers' included comments on students' work that positively referenced students' capability and the teacher's expectations. Students indicated to the inspector how valuable they found this approach and how they learned from it.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- Provision for the subjects is very good. All three senior cycle options are provided and the uptake is exceptionally high given that the subject is optional at junior cycle.
- Business options form a substantial element of the subject sampling layer of the TY programme as well as the TY specific layer through the enterprise element. Recent changes to the structure of TY, specifically the introduction of a one-day per week work experience will likely result in changes to the programme. The impact of these changes will need to be monitored by the subject department and any alterations to the business programme should be structured to achieve the maximum benefit to the students and the continuity in subject provision.
- A number of the students indicated that they had changed to business options after initial subject selections had not suited and both the school and the business teachers are commended for this approach to accommodating students.
- Considerable efforts are made by teachers to maximise the value achieved from the range of resources, particularly ICT, provided by the school to support the teaching of the subjects. It is evident that many of the teachers have engaged in personal professional development to enhance their teaching practice.
- A whole-school assessment policy is in place where assessment for, of and as learning are the underpinning principles. Some additional consideration of the balance and format of formative and summative assessment is required, in particular the type of feedback provided to students on how to improve their learning.
- Considerable work has been completed at whole-school level in analysing student attainment against national norms and in junior cycle Business Studies the assessment scores of incoming first-years are being profiled against their progress in the subject. This is an excellent example of the use of data to support contextualising student achievement.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

- Long-term schemes of work have been in place for an extended period and there is evidence that these schemes have been updated following teacher review and discussion. The migration of resources to a web-based learning platform by the subject department has facilitated increased collaboration among teachers in relation to subject planning and the sharing of a range of resources already developed.
- The development of short-term schemes in for example, Business Studies, has provided for continuity and agreement on effective teaching and learning strategies and facilitates the induction and mentoring of new staff. It also facilitates the integration of whole-school approaches within teaching of subjects for example, literacy and numeracy and assessment for learning. Work should now be completed on the development of short-term schemes of work for Economics.
- The subject department has recently conducted a teaching and learning questionnaire with business students. The responses of students are overwhelmingly positive and the department's evaluation of the responses has targeted collaborative learning and formative feedback as strategies for further developing teaching approaches.

- The lessons observed during the evaluation were well planned with consideration given to the range of resources required to support the achievement of lesson objectives.
- Planning for the use of ICT to support students' learning across a range of areas is excellent. Students are facilitated with access to a web-based learning platform which includes for example, access to homework and teachers' notes. A regularly updated blog is maintained by a number of teachers in the department and this is an excellent mechanism for updating the students with current business developments including key business trends and statistics.
- Key staff in the department have been working very hard to promote and develop the subjects over a number of years and the benefit to students understanding of business and their perception of business has been positively supported by the efforts of those involved.

The draft findings and recommendations arising out of this evaluation were discussed with the principal, deputy principal and subject teachers at the conclusion of the evaluation. The board of management of the school was given an opportunity to comment in writing on the findings and recommendations of the report, and the response of the board will be found in the appendix of this report.

Appendix

SCHOOL RESPONSE TO THE REPORT

Submitted by the Board of Management

Area 1 Observations on the content of the inspection report

The Board of Management accepts the findings of the report and acknowledges the 'excellent practice' of the teachers in the Business Department.

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 school will continue to address and develop the identified areas of improvement.