

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

**Subject Inspection of Business Subjects
REPORT**

**Blackrock College
Blackrock, County Dublin
Roll number: 60030V**

Date of inspection: 4 April 2014



**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

Date of inspection	3 and 4 April
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 ten single class periods• Examination of students' work• Feedback to principal and teachers

MAIN FINDINGS

- High quality teaching that ranged from good to exemplary was observed.
- A positive and supportive learning environment that encompasses a range of co-curricular and cross-curricular activities is provided for students.
- The uptake of business subjects at higher level in certificate examinations is very good as are the subsequent outcomes.
- The stated aim of the subject department to provide an education that equips students with skills required for the 21st century is being achieved and students have many opportunities to develop these key skills.
- The planning, organisational and collaborative practices of the business subject department are very good, and the focus is on students' learning needs.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

- To further enhance the high standard of teaching, teachers should consider increased use of student learning activities that further challenge and stimulate students' higher-order thinking skills.
- In keeping with assessment for learning principles, more formative feedback should be provided to students on their written work.
- The content of each business subject curricular plan should be developed so that it can serve as a best practice manual on how business education is delivered in the classroom.

INTRODUCTION

Blackrock College is a voluntary secondary school which provides Business Studies as an optional subject in junior cycle. In the compulsory Transition Year (TY) programme, business education is optional and at Leaving Certificate students can take Accounting, Business and Economics. The school has a current enrolment of 999 male students.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

- High quality teaching that ranged from good to exemplary was observed. It is the stated aim of the subject department to provide an education that equips students with skills required for the 21st century. In lessons where exemplary practice was noted, students had opportunities to develop these key skills.
- All lessons observed were well structured and prepared. Learning outcomes were shared with students from the outset. In a small number of lessons, the attainment of learning outcomes was evaluated as the lesson concluded and it is advisable to extend this practice to all lessons.
- In lessons, there was a sense of shared ownership of learning between teacher and student. The very good student-teacher discussions and questioning techniques helped develop students' communication and higher-order thinking skills.
- In most lessons, students had opportunities to work in pairs or small groups. In one lesson, students presented a research project which was particularly effective in developing students' key skills. To further involve students in leading their own learning, an increased use of student project work, debates and presentations is advisable, where appropriate.
- In all lessons, relevant exemplars aided student understanding and learning. A particular strength of business education is the wide range of co-curricular and extra-curricular activities that are organised by teachers and students. These activities are beneficial to students' application of business theory to practical situations. In addition, students' social and personal competencies are enhanced.
- In all lessons observed, information and communication technology was an effective teaching aid. The use of video clips in some lessons gave a dynamic focus to business education. Commendably, some teachers are using email to set and collect student assignments and the trialling of a blended learning programme in fifth-year has the potential to extend and expand student's knowledge base.
- TY students experience business education in an explorative manner. Trips to relevant businesses allow students to explore career options while deepening their business acumen. Students are responsible for all aspects the school's tuck shop and for the sale of tickets for the musical and this helps to embed an ethos of financial accountability and enterprise. Student involvement in national enterprise competitions is supported and encouraged. Classroom activities such as evaluation of topical news items and portfolio assessment help to develop students' key skills.
- All business teachers regularly assign and monitor homework. In some class groups, students' work was returned with affirming and formative comments which provided students with direction as to how they could improve their work. To support student learning, it is recommended that more detailed formative feedback be given on longer

assignments, and that students experience criteria-based peer-assessment and self-assessment practices on a regular basis.

- Assessment of student's business attainment takes place regularly. There is a high degree of reporting to parents as they receive weekly application reports and monthly academic progress reports for their child.
- Students of business subjects are encouraged to aim for high academic standards and to take business subjects at the highest possible level in the certificate examinations. Uptake of business subjects at higher level is very good, as are the subsequent outcomes.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- The first year of junior cycle is completed prior to entry to Blackrock College and students can sample Business Studies for two class periods each week. The consequence of this is that delivery of the Business Studies syllabus is completed in two years.
- There is very good provision of business education in the school and the time allocated to teaching all business subjects from second year is good.
- Senior management is supportive of business education. The commerce and economics society which was set up twenty-eight years ago to foster interest in the business world is active at a whole-school level and organises evening discussions and seminars.
- The majority of students who have taken Business Studies at junior cycle retain at least one of the business options at Leaving Certificate. A number of students new to business education choose a business subject option for Leaving Certificate, having experienced it in TY.
- As most classrooms are student-based, the provision of the business specialist room is a valuable visual learning environment for students. The potential to create a print-rich environment in other classrooms where business education is delivered should be fully availed of.
- All business teachers are skilled specialists and are diligent in ensuring that their subject knowledge is current. It is admirable that business teachers have organised teacher visits to universities, businesses and financial institutions to keep up-to-date on economic trends. Business teachers regularly attend subject association meetings, conferences and workshops and have availed of professional development courses.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

- The eleven business teachers work in a collaborative and supportive manner and are committed to the continued development of business subjects.
- The business department has a junior and senior cycle co-ordinator as part of the school's established practice. The use of an electronic platform to aid communication and share resources is a good development.
- From a review of the minutes, it was noted positively that there are discussions pertaining to teaching and learning at department meetings. The evaluation of previously set targets and setting of new targets at each meeting is also good practice.

- Planning documentation was indicative of the very high standards that are maintained within the business department. Of particular merit is the informative differentiation and literacy strategies for use in the classroom and the detailing of teaching techniques for students with additional learning needs.
- The design of most TY business-related modules maintain an explorative ethos that is consistent with the principles of TY. However, the use of Leaving Certificate textbooks and syllabus content in some modules should be reviewed and kept to a minimum so that the ethos of TY is maintained.
- The good practice observed in lessons should be documented as a manual for current and new entrants to the subject department. This can be achieved by aligning to each topic its learning outcomes, resources, differentiated learning strategies and range of teaching and assessment methodologies.

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.