

**An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills**

Subject Inspection in Business Subjects

REPORT

Ainm na scoile / School name	Scoil Mhuire
Seoladh na scoile / School address	Ennistymon Co. Clare
Uimhir rolla / Roll number	61950W

Date of Inspection: 28 February 2017



WHAT IS A SUBJECT INSPECTION?

Subject Inspections report on the quality of work in individual curriculum areas within a school. They affirm good practice and make recommendations, where appropriate, to aid the further development of the subject in the school.

HOW TO READ THIS REPORT

During this inspection, the inspector evaluated learning and teaching in Business Subjects under the following headings:

1. Learning, teaching and assessment
2. Subject provision and whole-school support
3. Planning and preparation

Inspectors describe the quality of each of these areas using the Inspectorate's quality continuum which is shown on the final page of this report. The quality continuum provides examples of the language used by inspectors when evaluating and describing the quality of the school's provision in each area.

Subject Inspection

INSPECTION ACTIVITIES DURING THIS INSPECTION

Dates of inspection	27 and 28 February 2017
Inspection activities undertaken <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Review of relevant documents• Discussion with principal and key staff• Interaction with students	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Observation of teaching and learning during five lessons: one double and four single periods• Examination of students' work• Feedback to principal and relevant staff

SCHOOL CONTEXT

Scoil Mhuire is a girls-only voluntary secondary school operating under the trusteeship of Catholic Education - An Irish Schools' Trust (CEIST). The school has a current enrolment of 250 students. In addition to junior cycle and a highly-subscribed optional Transition Year (TY), the school provides the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP) and Leaving Certificate programme.

SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

FINDINGS

- The quality of teaching observed was very good and students' learning was supported by a mix of good and very good approaches in supporting learners' experiences.
- The quality of assessment was good though there is scope to further develop formative assessment strategies in line with the whole school priority of developing formative assessment approaches.
- High teacher expectations of students leads to a very supportive learning environment.
- Pair work was a feature of many lessons though there is scope to develop a broader range of strategies to encourage students to work more effectively in collaborative groups.
- Provision for the subjects is very good, in particular, all first-year students take a year-long sampling programme in Business Studies and uptake into senior cycle is strong.
- Good quality plans have been developed including a revised plan for this year's introduction of the new specification for Business Studies which, in turn, incorporates the school's co-curricular first-year enterprise programme.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Written feedback for improvement should be provided on students' extended written work and tests.
- Subject planning and lesson planning should focus on how teaching methodologies and approaches can be adapted towards developing the skills and attitudes that underpin students' engagement with the new assessment environment for Junior Cycle.

DETAILED FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. TEACHING AND LEARNING

- The quality of teaching observed was very good.
- Teachers' use of subject-specific language was very good. Teachers also used current examples to explain theory concepts and there was very good integration of accounting concepts with business theory.
- The questioning strategies used were highly effective in all the lessons observed. Teacher-led questions were well structured for differentiation and the teachers spread the questions through the class groups.
- The quality to students learning observed was either good or very good with the subject department prioritising the development of students as independent learners. There were some examples of note-making with theory aspects of the subjects, for example, when students were encouraged to re-phrase key points in their own words.
- In all lessons observed, the interactions between teachers and students were respectful and affirming.
- Class sizes, except in first year, were small and teachers circulated through the classrooms to provide support to individual students and to check students' progress. However, room layout could be adapted in the context of promoting co-operative learning. Teachers encouraged students to work in pairs in all lessons, though they need to increase the opportunities for students to work collaboratively in groups, to enhance learning and promote peer learning. Good mechanisms were observed where teachers recorded the outcomes of pair tasks and encouraged students to expand their own learning from the tasks.
- The quality of assessment was good overall with developments being initiated in the use of formative feedback and peer assessment.
- The inspector's review of the students' journals indicated that they are assigned homework frequently and that students are diligent in their completion of this work. Teacher expectations, and their oversight of the work completed, are essential drivers of this area.
- Students complete class tests in their copybooks, providing a record of attainment where the students can chart their progress. Teachers use summary comments which should be further developed by the use of success criteria, either predetermined by the teacher or negotiated with the students before commencing the task.
- In all lessons teachers demonstrated the capacity to use information and communications technology (ICT) to support teaching. Some very good up-to-date multimedia presentations were used to support student learning. ICT's effectiveness as a learning tool would be enhanced by students using digital technology more frequently to develop the skills of research and critical analysis of information sources.

2. SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- The overall quality of subject provision and whole-school support is very good.
- The time provided for the subjects is very good. In junior cycle, a year-long sampling programme in the subject is provided in first-year, with optional provision thereafter.

- The number of students taking business options after junior cycle as a percentage of the cohort is high. Both Business and Accounting are offered at senior cycle and Business is a core element of TY.
- Teachers' reflective practice is evident from the strengthened co-curricular provision for the subject in the area of enterprise. As well as promoting the subject, it also enhances the range of learning opportunities available to students.
- A whole-school system of analysing the results attained by students in the certificate examinations by department is in place. Professional accountability and responsibility is promoted through providing these reports to the board of management. The reports indicate that performance of students in the subjects is consistently very good.
- Business teachers had not at the time of the inspection availed of the continuing professional development (CPD) training to support the introduction of the new specification for junior cycle Business Studies. The reason for this was reported to be industrial action.
- Plans for the amalgamation of the school with two other local post-primary schools are well advanced. The networking of the subject departments between the schools has commenced and there are well established pre-existing links with the boys-only school for access to a number of subjects including, senior cycle business options.

3. PLANNING AND PREPARATION

- The overall quality of planning and preparation was good.
- Schemes of work were presented for each year group, including a revised first-year scheme to reflect the new junior cycle specification introduced this year. Looking forward, the first-year scheme should co-ordinate the use the strands and elements to balance the development of personal financial skills with wider elements of financial literacy including an introduction to some of the outcomes from the *Our Economy* strand.
- News boards and current news items are largely collated and disseminated by the teachers. Students should be encouraged to research current business trends to facilitate their engagement with the wider business environment.
- Teachers' individual lesson planning was very good overall.
- The process of school self-evaluation, with reflection by individual teachers and the department, is being established. The current focus on assessment for learning is manifested mostly by the adherence, in the lessons observed, to the whole-school strategy for the use of key words and learning intentions. It is an area that should continue to develop at subject department level with the emphasis on sharing experiences in relation to pedagogy and teaching 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 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.

THE INSPECTORATE'S QUALITY CONTINUUM

Inspectors describe the quality of provision in the school using the Inspectorate's quality continuum which is shown below. The quality continuum provides examples of the language used by inspectors when evaluating and describing the quality the school's provision of each area.

Level	Description	Example of descriptive terms
Very Good	Very good applies where the quality of the areas evaluated is of a very high standard. The very few areas for improvement that exist do not significantly impact on the overall quality of provision. For some schools in this category the quality of what is evaluated is outstanding and provides an example for other schools of exceptionally high standards of provision.	Very good; of a very high quality; very effective practice; highly commendable; very successful; few areas for improvement; notable; of a very high standard. Excellent; outstanding; exceptionally high standard, with very significant strengths; exemplary
Good	Good applies where the strengths in the areas evaluated clearly outweigh the areas in need of improvement. The areas requiring improvement impact on the quality of pupils' learning. The school needs to build on its strengths and take action to address the areas identified as requiring improvement in order to achieve a <i>very good</i> standard.	Good; good quality; valuable; effective practice; competent; useful; commendable; good standard; some areas for improvement
Satisfactory	Satisfactory applies where the quality of provision is adequate. The strengths in what is being evaluated just outweigh the shortcomings. While the shortcomings do not have a significant negative impact they constrain the quality of the learning experiences and should be addressed in order to achieve a better standard.	Satisfactory; adequate; appropriate provision although some possibilities for improvement exist; acceptable level of quality; improvement needed in some areas
Fair	Fair applies where, although there are some strengths in the areas evaluated, deficiencies or shortcomings that outweigh those strengths also exist. The school will have to address certain deficiencies without delay in order to ensure that provision is satisfactory or better.	Fair; evident weaknesses that are impacting on pupils' learning; less than satisfactory; experiencing difficulty; must improve in specified areas; action required to improve
Weak	Weak applies where there are serious deficiencies in the areas evaluated. Immediate and coordinated whole-school action is required to address the areas of concern. In some cases, the intervention of other agencies may be required to support improvements.	Weak; unsatisfactory; insufficient; ineffective; poor; requiring significant change, development or improvement; experiencing significant difficulties;