

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

**Subject Inspection in Business**

**REPORT**

<b>Ainm na scoile / School name</b>	St. Mary's Secondary School
<b>Seoladh na scoile / School address</b>	Convent Hill Ballina County Mayo
<b>Uimhir rolla / Roll number</b>	64520M

**Date of Inspection: 12-12-2019**



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agus Scileanna**  
Department of  
Education and Skills

## **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 under the following headings:

1. Teaching, learning 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.

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.

## **CHILD PROTECTION**

During the inspection visit, the following checks in relation to the school's child protection procedures were conducted:

1. The name of the DLP and the Child Safeguarding Statement are prominently displayed near the main entrance to the school.
2. The Child Safeguarding Statement has been ratified by the board and includes an annual review and a risk assessment.
3. All teachers visited reported that they have read the Child Safeguarding Statement and that they are aware of their responsibilities as mandated persons.

The school met the requirements in relation to each of the checks above.

## SUBJECT INSPECTION

### INSPECTION ACTIVITIES

<b>Dates of inspection</b>	11, 12 December 2019
<b>Inspection activities undertaken</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Review of relevant documents</li><li>• Discussion with principal and key staff</li><li>• Interaction with students</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Observation of teaching and learning during six lessons</li><li>• Examination of students' work</li><li>• Feedback to principal and relevant staff</li></ul>

### School context

St. Mary's Secondary School is a girls' voluntary secondary school under the trusteeship of Catholic Education – An Irish Schools Trust (CEIST). It has a current enrolment of 471 students. As well as the Junior Cycle and Leaving Certificate programmes, the school has an optional Transition Year (TY) programme and offers the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP) and Leaving Certificate Applied Programme (LCA).

### SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

#### Findings

- The overall quality of teaching and learning observed was good; this included very good practice in some lessons.
- Highly effective practice was observed when teachers shared and revisited the intended learning with students in some lessons, as this provided students with a clear focus on what they should be able to do at the end of the lessons.
- The overall quality of subject provision and whole-school support is very good.
- Business Studies is an optional subject at junior cycle; the numbers opting to study Business Studies has declined in recent years.
- Accounting, Business and Economics are provided at senior cycle.
- Subject planning is good for junior and senior cycle business subjects; there is scope to develop the TY scheme of work.

#### Recommendations

- Teachers should adopt a common approach to the use and assessment of learning intentions in all lessons across the business department.
- The uptake of Business Studies at junior cycle needs to be monitored going forward with a view to implementing appropriate interventions which will seek to increase student participation.
- The TY scheme of work needs to be developed to reflect the work presently undertaken.

## DETAILED FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### 1. TEACHING, LEARNING, AND ASSESSMENT

- The overall quality of teaching and learning observed was good; this included very good practice in some lessons. Teachers demonstrated a high level of pedagogical knowledge.
- Pair work was observed in most lessons where students worked successfully in a collaborative manner which facilitated a productive learning environment. In some lessons, there were opportunities for greater engagement of students in their learning. Teachers should include appropriate opportunities for students to engage actively in their learning during all lessons, thereby supporting them to take ownership of their learning and become independent learners.
- Good use of every day real-life examples engaged students and allowed them to make meaningful links between school and the business world. In many lessons, examples of local entrepreneurs and businesses were used to illustrate key business concepts.
- In keeping with good practice, learning intentions were shared with students in all lessons. In highly effective lessons, the teacher revisited the intended learning at the end of the lesson to assess students' understanding. Strategies to assess the achievement of planned learning intentions need to be progressed and embedded in all lessons. It is recommended that all teachers in the business department establish a common approach to the use and assessment of learning intentions.
- Teachers' questioning was good in all lessons observed. The use of higher-order and lower-order questioning was employed appropriately for differentiation to occur in the mixed-ability lessons. Good targeted questioning was evident in some lessons and this ensured all learners become actively involved in the lesson or classroom activity.
- Formal reporting of Business Studies to parents uses the grading system used in the certificate examinations. It is recommended that all teachers in the department use this terminology when reporting on all in-class examinations also; this will ensure that students become familiar and fluent with the language.
- Digital resources, appropriate to supporting students' learning experiences, are available and students' access to them is facilitated. In one highly effective lesson, students used digital technology to research local and international companies to complete a group marketing activity. In another lesson, all the resources and workings were uploaded to a shared online platform which allowed students to access and review the lesson materials after the lesson, thereby supporting students to become independent learners and to engage with difficult concepts in their own time and at their own pace.
- Homework was provided in all lessons during the evaluation. Some written formative feedback for improvement was evident in students' copies. It is recommended that this highly effective practice be extended and embedded across the business department. Providing students with high-quality written formative feedback is a key strategy for developing students' learning and will complement the newly introduced reporting system for formal summative assessments.
- Teachers provided one-to-one support to students, including oral feedback where appropriate. In all lessons observed, the interactions between students and teachers were very respectful, thus promoting a positive learning atmosphere.

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

- The quality of whole-school support and subject provision is very good. School management is supportive of the subject and an appropriate time allocation is provided across junior and senior cycle. Timetabling for the subject is good across all years with the option bands for junior and senior cycle based on student choice.
- Business Studies is an optional subject at junior cycle. First-year students complete an eight-week sampling programme enabling them to make an informed subject choice. Thereafter, flexibility is provided to students who wish to transfer to, or from, other subjects.
- The number of students taking the subject at junior cycle has declined over the past years and is a cause for some concern. It is recommended that the uptake of Business Studies at junior cycle is monitored closely going forward with a view to implementing appropriate interventions which will seek to increase student participation.
- Accounting, Business and Economics are provided at senior cycle.
- The business department has specialist classrooms and access to digital learning technologies. The school has introduced an online platform, which facilitates and promotes the sharing of resources within subject departments and with students. Commendably, the use of digital resources is promoted by senior management.
- The layout of all the classrooms visited supports and facilitates collaborative student activity.
- Close links have been developed with financial organisations and other businesses in the local area. School management facilitates the engagement of students in a range of co-curricular and extra-curricular activities that encourage innovation, enterprise and initiative.

## **3. PLANNING AND PREPARATION**

- The overall quality of planning within the business department is good.
- The co-ordinator role is rotated yearly which allows for capacity building to occur within the subject department.
- Collaboration is reported as being very strong within the business department. Formal subject department meetings are held regularly and minutes are recorded for these meetings. The agendas for business department meetings should include a stronger emphasis on the discussion of teaching methodologies and student learning strategies along with practical matters.
- There is effective planning for junior and senior cycle Business. Schemes of work, which contain a valuable teacher-reflection component, are developed for junior and senior cycle business subjects. These reflections should now be used to inform and amend the schemes of work going forward, so that subject planning will become contextualised and specific to the unique context of the school.
- There is scope to develop the TY scheme of work using the same planning approach used in junior and senior cycle, where teaching strategies and assessment modes are aligned with individual units of learning. This approach to planning will also ensure that activities taking place currently in the TY programme are fully documented and recorded.
- Teachers are encouraged and facilitated to attend continuing professional development (CPD). At the moment, there is no formal system in place for teachers to share new learning from attendance at CPD events. The business department should agree a formal strategy for sharing the learning from CPD and trialling new methodologies, where relevant. Other ways to share this learning could be used such as peer observation, which is currently being introduced in the school as part of the school self-evaluation (SSE) process.

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 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 of quality the school's provision of each area.

Level	Description	Example of descriptive terms
<b>Very Good</b>	<b>Very good</b> 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 <b>outstanding</b> 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
<b>Good</b>	<b>Good</b> 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
<b>Satisfactory</b>	<b>Satisfactory</b> 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
<b>Fair</b>	<b>Fair</b> 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
<b>Weak</b>	<b>Weak</b> 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;