Subject Inspection in Business Studies

REPORT

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aímn na scoile / School name</th>
<th>Ardscoil na Mara</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Seoladh na scoile / School address</td>
<td>Tramore, Co Waterford</td>
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<tr>
<td>Uimhir rolla / Roll number</td>
<td>68141B</td>
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Date of Inspection: 13-09-2018
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 Studies 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 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.

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dates of inspection</th>
<th>12 &amp; 13-09-2018</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Inspection activities undertaken</strong></td>
<td><strong>Observation of teaching and learning during two double and four single lessons</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>● Review of relevant documents</td>
<td>● Examination of students’ work</td>
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<tr>
<td>● Discussions with principal and key staff</td>
<td>● Feedback to principal, deputy principals and teachers</td>
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<tr>
<td>● Interaction with students</td>
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### School context

Ardscoil na Mara is a co-educational secondary school with an enrolment of 1184 students. Business Studies is an optional subject in junior cycle. Students can choose Accounting, Business and Economics for Leaving Certificate. Business education is provided in the optional Transition Year (TY). Business Studies at junior cycle is the focus of this inspection.

### SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

#### Findings

- The overall quality of teaching and learning was good; this ranged from very good to fair in a few instances.
- In the majority of lessons observed, the teaching methodologies used supported active student learning, in some lessons, there was scope for development in pedagogical practice.
- The overall quality of formative assessment was satisfactory; individual teacher’s questioning strategies ranged from good to fair while in the majority of lessons, teachers did not challenge students to sufficiently demonstrate or deepen their learning.
- The overall quality of subject provision and whole-school support is very good, but the uptake of junior cycle Business Studies is declining.
- The overall quality of planning and collaborative practice of the subject department for the implementation of the new junior cycle Business Studies specification is fair.

#### Recommendations

- In lessons where there was scope for development, Business teachers should re-appraise their teaching methodologies and ensure they are providing a pedagogical practice that delivers rich learning experiences for students.
- The good practices of setting learning intentions, use of effective questioning and provision of formative feedback to include written feedback as observed in some lessons should be adopted by all Business teachers.
- An analysis and review of factors influencing subject choice in first year should be conducted by senior management and the Business teachers with a view to providing strategies to increase the uptake of Business Studies.
- Collaboratively, business teachers should build on their experience of planning for the first-year sampling programme by selecting teaching, learning and assessment practices in accordance with the Junior Cycle Business Studies specification.
DETAILED FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. TEACHING, LEARNING, AND ASSESSMENT

- The overall quality of teaching and learning was good; this ranged from very good to fair in a few instances. In the majority of lessons, the teaching methodologies used supported active student learning. In the other lessons, there was scope for further development of pedagogical practice to engage students more fully in developmental learning.

- Most lessons were well planned. In all lessons, an outline of intended work was shared with students. It is recommended that learning intentions in the form of what students should be able to know, do and understand by the end of the lesson be used in lessons. In most lessons, learning was reviewed by teachers before the lesson concluded.

- The teaching methodologies used in some lessons were textbook focused with an overemphasis on instructional teaching; the dominant voice in the classroom being that of the teacher. In all lessons, a blend of methodologies that provide students with rich learning experiences should be used.

- In lessons that had a book-keeping focus, the very good step-by-step method was underpinned by a teaching for understanding approach which helped students’ to attain concepts.

- The good use of local exemplars in some lessons encouraged students to take an interest in current affairs and topical business matters.

- In most lessons, information and communications technology was used as a tool to present lesson material and to provide customised templates for book-keeping questions. A small number of presentations were enhanced with the use of visuals. Where appropriate, the use of visual exemplars should be further developed as should the use of video clips, case studies, websites, extracts of television programmes and interactive resources to give a dynamic focus to business education.

- The development of a student learning platform for some class groups to access resources, complete some assignments and store research projects is good practice and could be progressed further.

- Classroom management in all lessons was of a high quality. As students worked on tasks, teachers circulated checking on students’ progress and they offered good one-to-one support where required.

- In all lessons, students had an opportunity to work in pairs or small groups. There was a variance in the quality of productive tasks in some class groups. The potential to further expand co-operative learning strategies such as group work and think, pair, share tasks should be more fully exploited, where appropriate. In addition, activities such as project work, debates and presentations could be established in all class groups so as to further involve students in leading their own learning and the development of their key skills.

- In some lessons, students gave oral presentations of their homework and outcomes of co-operative learning activities to their peers. This good practice of promoting the student voice should be extended in order to improve learner autonomy, confidence and competence.

- The quality of teacher questioning strategies varied in lessons. In a few lessons, the very good differentiated questioning facilitated deeper student engagement with lesson content. However, in the majority of lessons teachers predominately used lower-order and global questioning which did not challenge students to sufficiently demonstrate or deepen their
learning. All teachers should use a range of effective questioning techniques for a variety of purposes including stimulating substantial student responses.

- Students’ works is mostly assessed by whole-class corrections and teachers’ review of work. Some very good examples of oral formative feedback were observed. Teachers should devise a mechanism to ensure that, when correcting copies, regular written formative feedback is given to students.

- Strategies to progress the school’s improvement plan (SIP) targets in the monitoring and setting of homework were evident in most lessons. However, agreed whole-school numeracy and literacy improvement targets, were not as evident in the lessons observed. Business teachers should implement the school’s agreed literacy and numeracy strategies in business education.

2. SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- The overall quality of subject provision and whole-school support for the subject is very good.

- All first-year students have the opportunity to sample Business Studies in a short taster programme. However, the uptake of Business Studies is declining year-on-year and this has consequences for the uptake of business subjects in senior cycle. An analysis and review of factors influencing subject choice should be conducted by senior management and the business subject department with a view to providing strategies to promote the subject.

- The allocation of class periods for Business Studies is very good. First-year students have three periods a week while second and third-year students are provided with four periods.

- There is good communication between the school’s learning support department and the business department with regard to the educational needs of students. In some lessons, support in Business Studies for students with special educational needs or in need of learning support is provided through team teaching with in-class support.

- There were good displays of visual learning resources in some of the teacher-based classrooms. The potential of creating visual learning environments that includes student generated work should be further exploited.

- Business teachers have accessed subject-specific continuing professional development from the Junior Cycle for Teachers (JCT). Business teachers are also members of their subject association; a formal means of sharing information from these activities should be devised.

3. PLANNING AND PREPARATION

- The overall quality of planning and collaborative practice of the subject department for the implementation of the new junior cycle Business Studies specification is fair.

- Discussions at business department meetings generally focus on organisational matters. Deliberations on the effective use of teaching methodologies and assessment strategies that will further enrich student learning should be included in meetings.

- In general, a devolved model of subject department planning is in place, where teachers take specific responsibility for individual yearly curriculum plans; this has led to a lack of consistency and understanding in the planning process for Business Studies.
• Collaborative curriculum planning for first-year sampling programme is good; however, much work remains for the business department to engage fully with planning for the remainder of the new junior cycle Business Studies specification. To ensure students benefit from a full range of effective learning experiences, teachers should fully familiarise themselves with the new specification and the JCT resource materials, and then work collaboratively to prepare a teaching, learning and assessment plan based on the strands and learning outcomes of the new specification.

• No review or evaluation of the operation of the business subject department takes place. It is advisable that reviews regularly take place; following the reviews and appraisal an agreed action plan should be put in place with timed, targeted strategies to progress the perceived area for development.

• Teachers review students’ attainment in certificate examinations and compare them with national norms. It is advised that student attainment be reviewed using the schools own records of students’ ability assessments and that a narrative on students’ achievement be noted in planning documentation.

The draft findings and recommendations arising out of this evaluation were discussed with the principal, deputy principals and subject teachers at the conclusion of the evaluation.
Appendix

SCHOOL RESPONSE TO THE REPORT

Submitted by the Board of Management
Part A Observations on the content of the inspection report

Please note: The Religious Sisters of Charity are no longer trustees of Ardscoil na Mara. ERST are now the sole trustees.

Part B Follow-up actions planned or undertaken since the completion of the inspection activity to implement the findings and recommendations of the inspection.

- Inspection report given to all stakeholders for consideration and response.
- Inspection report presented at whole school staff meeting for all to take learnings from the report.
- Inspection report given to Board of Management for consideration and discussion. Plans to support the Business Department communicated to them.
- Review of school taster system to be conducted later this year – analysis of factors effecting subject choice to be included in review.
- Appointment of an Academic Monitor at AP1 level to monitor achievement and attainment in all subjects including Business.
- As a Department, the Business teachers are looking at ways to improve collaboration and planning across the board.
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.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Example of descriptive terms</th>
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<tr>
<td>Very Good</td>
<td><strong>Very good</strong> 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 <strong>outstanding</strong> and provides an example for other schools of exceptionally high standards of provision.</td>
<td>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</td>
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<tr>
<td>Good</td>
<td><strong>Good</strong> 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 very good standard.</td>
<td>Good; good quality; valuable; effective practice; competent; useful; commendable; good standard; some areas for improvement</td>
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<tr>
<td>Satisfactory</td>
<td><strong>Satisfactory</strong> 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.</td>
<td>Satisfactory; adequate; appropriate provision although some possibilities for improvement exist; acceptable level of quality; improvement needed in some areas</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fair</td>
<td><strong>Fair</strong> 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.</td>
<td>Fair; evident weaknesses that are impacting on pupils’ learning; less than satisfactory; experiencing difficulty; must improve in specified areas; action required to improve</td>
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<tr>
<td>Weak</td>
<td><strong>Weak</strong> 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.</td>
<td>Weak; unsatisfactory; insufficient; ineffective; poor; requiring significant change, development or improvement; experiencing significant difficulties;</td>
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