

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Subject Inspection in Business Subjects

REPORT

Ainm na scoile / School name	Greenhills College
Seoladh na scoile / School address	Limekiln Avenue Greenhills Dublin 12
Uimhir rolla / Roll number	70130I

Date of Inspection: 22-11-2016



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

Date of inspection	22-11-2016
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 4 class periods• Examination of students' work• Feedback to principal and relevant staff

SCHOOL CONTEXT

Greenhills College is under the auspices of Dublin and Dún Laoghaire Education and Training Board, and has an enrolment of 179 male students. The school participates in the Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) initiative. Business Studies is an optional subject in junior cycle and Business and Accounting are offered as optional subjects to Leaving Certificate students.

SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

FINDINGS

- The quality of teaching ranged from very good to weak.
- In lessons where highly effective teaching was observed, the very good structure and pace of lessons ensured that students were engaged in their learning, attained good business knowledge and developed key skills.
- In the majority of lessons student learning was successful as teachers created a highly student-centred learning environment based on mutual respect, affirmation and trust; in the remainder of lessons a productive learning environment was not in place.
- The relatively new senior management team is actively promoting an enabling learning culture within the school and has high expectations of students and teachers as they strive for improved outcomes for students.
- The organisational, planning and collaborative practices of the business department in Greenhills College are only satisfactory.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- In lessons where teaching was less than satisfactory, business teachers should ensure that students' learning is aided by the use of effective teaching methodologies and that lesson structure and pace be contextualised to students' learning needs and differentiated for ability levels.
- Assessment for learning strategies such as the reviewing of learning intentions and tendering of formative feedback to students should be further developed.
- Collaborative subject planning should be further progressed with opportunities at formal meetings to discuss and share best practice in the teaching of business subjects.
- The content of the business subjects plan and each subject's curricular plan should be developed collaboratively as a manual for the provision of the best possible business education for students.

DETAILED FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. TEACHING AND LEARNING

- The quality of teaching ranged from very good to weak. There was considerable variation between the highest standard of teaching observed which included elements of exemplary practice and pedagogical practice that required significant improvement.
- The very good practice observed in lessons included: pre-learning activities where students had to engage in higher-order thinking skills, high quality information and communications technology (ICT) inputs, student-friendly exemplars and written formative feedback on students work.
- In general, good learning intentions were shared with students at the start of most lessons, and at the conclusion of a small number of lessons it was commendable that students had to verbalise what they had learned in the lesson.
- In lessons where high quality teaching was observed, the structure and pace of lessons was very good and well-pitched to the level of students. In these lessons, teachers strategically selected and used teaching approaches to match the learning intentions of the lesson, meet the learning needs of students and open up further relevant learning opportunities. In the remainder of lessons, it is strongly recommended that effective teaching methodologies are used and that lesson structure and pace are contextualised to students' learning needs and differentiated for ability levels.
- In one lesson, students enjoyed a very good and challenging learning activity as they worked in pairs to arrange the sequence and flow of business documents without any prior knowledge of the topic. Cooperative learning activities such as 'think-pair-share' should be further expanded in business education so that students can report and articulate their knowledge.
- ICT as a student learning tool was very good when used. In a lesson, the animated and student-friendly exemplars in presentations successfully engaged students with lesson content. It is praiseworthy that the same class group has the opportunity to use ICT to produce their own revision resources and in doing so can apply practical skills to theoretical learning. The use of video clips to relay topical information and visually-rich presentations that engage and deepen student learning should be fully exploited, where appropriate, in business education.
- It is praiseworthy that students in some class groups are encouraged and supported to participate in enterprise activities which are beneficial to students' understanding of business theory and to the development of key skills. The school's established business partnership link with a national company provides valuable learning opportunities for students through classroom and out-of-school visits.
- In most lessons, students were productively engaged through teachers' questioning. In many instances, teachers' questioning strategies were very effective and included a good balance between lower and higher-order questions.
- Students were regularly assigned homework. It is advisable, on occasion, that all students receive alternative and additional modes of assignments such as following relevant news items, research and project work.
- Students' copybooks and account books were generally found to be neat and well labelled. There was evidence of formal checking of students' homework in all lessons. In some lessons teachers had noted comments on students' work as to how they could improve their performance. This good practice should be expanded.
- The visual learning environment in the majority of classrooms where business education was delivered was of a very high standard with very good visuals and displays of students work on classroom walls.

- In the majority of lessons, student learning was successful as teachers had high expectations of students and created a highly student-centred learning environment based on mutual respect, affirmation and trust. In the remainder of lessons a productive learning environment was not evident as lessons lacked clear direction and instruction on what students were to achieve in the lesson. In addition, the available opportunities for students to assume responsibility in leading their learning were not availed of.
- Outcomes and attainment within levels is generally satisfactory in certificate examinations. In the context of the student cohort, the number taking higher level Business Studies in junior cycle is below what would be expected. This merits review by business teachers and school management.

2. SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- The relatively new senior management team is actively promoting an enabling learning culture within the school and has high expectations of students and teachers as they strive for improved outcomes for students.
- A good range of business subjects is provided for students. Accounting is a new addition to the school's curriculum this year. This good development will offer students opportunities to widen their career options.
- Commendably, student preferences generate the option bands in which students select their subjects in junior and senior cycle. Prior to this year, Business Studies was a compulsory subject. To enable first-year students to make an informed subject choice they are offered a short sampling programme of all optional subjects. This is good practice. However, the current first-year uptake of Business Studies is relatively low and this has consequences for the uptake of business subjects in senior cycle. It is advisable that the subject department monitor the uptake rates of Business Studies each year and explore strategies to promote the subject.
- Teachers are facilitated by management to access opportunities for continuing professional development (CPD). All business teachers have attended training for the implementation of the new junior cycle Business Studies specification.

3. PLANNING AND PREPARATION

- The organisational, planning and collaborative practices of the business subject department in Greenhills College are only satisfactory. At the regular business department meetings, discussions generally focus on organisational aspects of the department. Subject department planning meetings now need to achieve greater direct impact on teaching and learning; time should be allocated for a "show and tell" input where teachers could present and discuss the use of a resource or effective teaching and learning methodologies they use in their practice or have gained from CPD.
- The business subjects plan should be extended to include an agreed business department strategy to progress the school's DEIS targets and the school's self-evaluation improvement targets in literacy numeracy and assessment for learning.
- With the exception of Accounting, the curriculum plans for the remaining business subjects only outline the sequence of topics to be taught and their intended learning outcomes. The accounting curricular plan is well developed and details how each topic will be taught. All remaining business curricular plans should be further developed. All business teachers should collaboratively and incrementally plan for the delivery of the new Business Studies specification in the classroom.

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

Part A Observations on the content of the inspection report

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

The Board was very pleased with the many positive comments in the report. The Board will act on recommendations as follows:

- The Board will engage the assistance of the PDST to provide support to the Business department in relation to effective teaching methodologies.
- Assessment for Learning Strategies will be developed further in the Business department.
- Collaborative subject planning has been implemented by the Business teachers since the inspection.
- The Business plans and curricular plans for each Business subject has been developed since the inspection.

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 very good 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;