

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

**Subject Inspection in Business**

**REPORT**

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| <b>Ainm na scoile /<br/>School name</b>       | St. Tiernan's College                                      |
| <b>Seoladh na scoile /<br/>School address</b> | Mullinmore Street<br>Crossmolina<br>Ballina<br>County Mayo |
| <b>Uimhir rolla /<br/>Roll number</b>         | 72100J   |

**Date of Inspection: 16-01-2020**



## **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 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

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|--|---|
| <b>Dates of inspection</b>   | 15 & 16 January 2020  |
| <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 four lessons</li><li>• Examination of students' work</li><li>• Feedback to principal, deputy principal and relevant staff</li></ul> |

### School context

St. Tiernan's College is a co-educational school with a current enrolment of 209 students. It is operated under the auspices of the Mayo, Sligo and Leitrim Education and Training Board (MSLETB). The school participates in Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS), the Department's action plan for educational inclusion. The school currently provides the Junior Cycle, the Junior Certificate School Programme (JCSP), an optional Transition Year (TY) programme, the Leaving Certificate Vocational programme (LCVP), the Leaving Certificate programme and Post-Leaving Certificate courses (PLCs).

### SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

#### Findings

- The overall quality of teaching and learning observed was very good.
- The learning intentions were shared with students in all lessons, and highly effective practice was noted when the planned learning intentions were revisited to assess students' learning and affirm understanding.
- Some written feedback for improvement was evident in student copies; this effective practice is a key strategy for developing student learning.
- The overall quality of subject provision and whole-school support is very good.
- Subject planning is satisfactory with adequate schemes of work available for junior and senior cycle including regular teacher reflections in most schemes; the junior cycle units of learning require development.
- The subject learning and assessment review (SLAR) facilitator's reports are included in the business plan; this is good practice as it supports future planning for the classroom-based assessment (CBA) process.

#### Recommendations

- Teachers should develop and embed a departmental approach to the provision of written feedback for improvement to students on their work.
- Subject planning should be progressed by using the teachers' collective reflections to support the development of an action plan with short, medium and long term goals for the business department.
- At junior cycle, teachers should plan units of learning collaboratively using a common approach for the three years, which links learning outcomes from across the three strands of the Business Studies specification.

## DETAILED FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### 1. TEACHING, LEARNING, AND ASSESSMENT

- The overall quality of teaching and learning observed was very good.
- Lessons were well prepared with effective group and pair work observed in all lessons, facilitating students to work successfully in a collaborative manner that had a productive effect on learning. Peer assessment was also observed where students assessed each other's work and provided written feedback. This highly effective practice allows students to view and assess each other's work so that they develop their understanding of success criteria and how to achieve success in their own work.
- In all lessons, and in keeping with good practice, learning intentions were shared with students. In highly effective lessons, the teacher revisited the intended learning at the end of the lesson to assess students' understanding. Various exit strategies such as post-its, questioning and personal student reflections were used successfully to assess the achievement of the learning intentions.
- Teachers made good linkages to local and topical business exemplars, past learning and other subjects. Students displayed good subject knowledge and an ability to apply their knowledge to everyday business-related contexts when provided with opportunities.
- In all lessons observed, there was an emphasis placed on the development of students' literacy skills, as outlined in the subject plan and supported by the school self-evaluation (SSE) process. Teachers worked diligently to ensure that students identified and fully understood key words and terms used during the lessons.
- While there was evidence of formal checking of students' homework, there were few written feedback comments evident in students' copies. Providing students with high-quality written formative feedback for improvement is a key strategy for developing students' learning. It is recommended that this highly effective practice be extended and embedded across the entire business department.
- Teachers provided one-to-one support to students, including oral feedback, where appropriate. Consideration should be given to developing strategies to encourage students to engage purposefully with oral feedback.
- In all lessons observed, the interactions between students and teachers were very respectful, thus promoting a positive learning environment.
- Teachers questioning in all the lessons observed was very good. There was an appropriate mix of oral and written questions which were well dispersed. The use of higher order and lower order questioning was appropriately employed for differentiation to occur in the mixed ability lessons.
- A stimulating learning environment that included colourful displays of student generated work was evident in all classrooms visited. Of particular note, was the display of a past classroom-based assessment (CBA1) project in the business classroom. Such practices provide students with a sense of ownership and encourages their development as independent learners while also helping students to prepare for their own CBA.
- The effective use of digital technologies to support student learning was observed in the majority of lessons. Examples of its appropriate usage included providing students with research tasks relating to CBA2, gathering student prior knowledge on a new topic and using a software application to summarise students' learning at the end of a unit of learning.
- Formal reporting of Business Studies to parents uses the grading system used in the Junior Cycle certificate examinations. It is recommended that all teachers use this terminology when grading class examinations.

## **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 and uptake is very good. Students select the subject prior to entering the school in first year. Thereafter, flexibility is provided to students who wish to transfer to or from other subjects. At senior cycle, students have the option of taking Business.
- The business department has a specialist classroom and access to digital learning technologies. The use of such technologies is promoted by senior management. The school is introducing a shared online platform which will facilitate and promote the sharing of resources within the subject department and with students.
- Enterprise education is strongly supported within the school. Students at junior and senior cycle have the opportunity to participate in enterprise activities with external organisations and local businesses.
- Teachers have engaged actively in subject-specific continuous professional development (CPD).

## **3. PLANNING AND PREPARATION**

- The overall quality of planning within the business department is satisfactory.
- Formal subject department meetings are held 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.
- Adequate plans and schemes of work are available for junior and senior cycle. At junior cycle, it is recommended that teachers plan units of learning collaboratively using a common approach for the three years, which links learning outcomes from across the three strands of the business studies specification.
- Most schemes of work contain a teacher reflection component. The teacher reflections are currently completed individually by teachers. Teachers should use the shared online platform for departmental planning to support the efficient development of collaborative and collective planning and reflection.
- Subject planning would benefit from the development of an action plan based on teachers' collective reflections, which would identify short, medium and long-term goals for the business department. This action plan should be linked with the review of student attainment in certificate examinations which takes place annually within the department.
- There is scope to develop the TY scheme of work to ensure that all the learning and assessment activities taking place currently in the TY business programme are documented and recorded.
- The subject learning and assessment review (SLAR) facilitator's reports are included in the business plan; this is good practice as it supports future planning for the CBA process.

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 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;   |

# **Appendix**

**SCHOOL RESPONSE TO THE REPORT**

**Submitted by the Board of Management**

## **Part A Observations on the content of the inspection report**

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## **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 of Management welcomes the Inspection Report of its Business Department.

1. The school plans to review its S.S.E. on formative assessment to ensure to embed a departmental approach to the provision of written feedback to students on their work.
2. All staff are now engaged with Office 365 with the aim of increasing collaboration across all departments.
3. The Business Department plans to use a common approach at Junior Cycle in relation to Planning Units of Learning.