

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Subject Inspection in Business Subjects

REPORT

Ainm na scoile / School name	Mountmellick Community School
Seoladh na scoile / School address	Mountmellick Co Laois
Uimhir rolla / Roll number	91426A

Date of Inspection: 05-12-2019



**An Roinn Oideachais
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 Subjects 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.

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

Dates of inspection	04 & 05-12-2019
Inspection activities undertaken <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Review of relevant documents• Discussion with principal, deputy principal and key staff• Interaction with students	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Observation of teaching and learning during three double lessons• Examination of students' work• Feedback to principal and relevant staff

School context

Mountmellick Community School is a co-educational post-primary school with an enrolment of 535 students. The school participates in the Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) action plan. Business Studies is an optional subject in the Junior Cycle programme, as are Accounting and Business in the Leaving Certificate. Business education is compulsory in the school's optional Transition Year (TY) programme.

SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

Findings

- The quality of teaching and learning was good overall, although possibilities for improvement existed in lessons observed.
- Commendably, business teachers organise educational visits to local businesses and encourage students to participate in a range of co-curricular and enterprise activities.
- The overall quality of assessment was satisfactory; there was scope to expand formative assessment approaches in business education.
- The overall quality of subject provision and whole-school support for business education is good, including the school's commitment to providing business education in senior cycle, but the uptake of Business Studies as a subject in the school's Junior Cycle programme is relatively low.
- The quality of subject planning is good overall but some aspects of curriculum planning for Business Studies and TY require further development.

Recommendations

- To further enhance students learning experiences, business teachers should plan for increased use of appropriate digital learning resources and teaching methodologies that provide students with greater opportunities for active learning and skills development.
- Teachers should provide alternative modes of homework and summative assessments to support the development of broader skills and abilities in business education.
- All business teachers should extend their formative assessment approaches, including: setting and reviewing of learning intentions, using higher-order questioning targeted at individual students and applying written formative feedback.
- 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.

- Business teachers should collaboratively develop a 'Units of Learning' approach to planning for Business Studies and adopt a layered approach to incrementally building on the learning outcomes over the three years of the programme.

DETAILED FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. TEACHING, LEARNING, AND ASSESSMENT

- The quality of teaching and learning was good overall, although, some possibilities for improvement existed in lessons observed.
- In all lessons, students had an opportunity to work in pairs or small groups. The quality of the tasks varied. The potential to further develop co-operative learning strategies should be more fully exploited, where appropriate. In addition, student learning activities such as role-play, project work, research, debates and presentations should be further developed in all class groups so as to involve students in leading their own learning and in the development of their key skills.
- In all lessons, an outline of lesson content was shared with students. Very good practice was noted in one lesson where the learning intentions were stated explicitly in terms of what students ought to know and be able to do by the end of the lesson. As some lessons concluded, the intended learning of the lesson was reviewed through good questioning of students. All business teachers should adopt a consistent practice in setting and reviewing of learning intentions.
- In lessons, that had a book-keeping focus, a very good step-by-step method was underpinned by a teaching for understanding approach which helped students' attainment.
- In the majority of lessons, digital technology was used as a tool to present lesson material and to provide customised templates for book-keeping questions. 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 so as to give a dynamic focus to business education.
- Classroom management and atmosphere in lessons was characterised by very good teacher support and affirmation of students' efforts. Teachers circulated well in lessons and their engagement with students supported their learning.
- Students' key skills of 'working with others' and 'managing their own learning' were developed well in most lessons. It is advisable that when planning lessons, teachers be more explicit about how key skills are being developed in addition to the expansion of knowledge.
- Commendably, business teachers organise educational visits to local businesses and encourage students to participate in a range of co-curricular and enterprise activities. The participation in local Christmas fairs and in enterprise competitions is supportive of an enterprise culture in the school.
- The standard and type of questioning used by teachers in lessons varied. In some lessons, explorative questioning provided students with opportunities to develop higher-order thinking skills by critiquing their answers. In other lessons, the predominant questioning style mostly required students to recall information.
- In a review of a selection of students' journals, homework was regularly assigned to students. However, in most lessons, students were regularly asked to complete similar type of assessments and this merits review with a focus on developing students' broader skills and abilities in business education.

- In the junior cycle class groups, there was notable and significant emphasis on assessing students' progress through the use of end of chapter tests. It would be worthwhile balancing this with the ongoing assessment of students' progress in achieving the intended learning outcomes and key skills. Teachers should ensure that, in implementing the new Junior Cycle, assessment and reporting align with curricular learning outcomes.
- There was evidence of formal checking of students' homework by teachers. In general, students received good quality oral formative feedback from teachers about their work. In a few lessons, there was evidence of teachers providing written formative feedback on students' work. It is recommended that written formative feedback on significant homework tasks and assignments is provided by all teachers to ensure that students' strengths are acknowledged and areas for improvement are identified.

2. SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- There was good quality subject provision and whole-school support for business education.
- Currently, the uptake of Business Studies in the school's Junior Cycle programme, is relatively low. 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.
- Most students continue with business education from junior cycle, as do a number of students who have experienced business education in TY. Currently, there is a class group for Accounting in sixth year and a Business class group in fifth year. School management is commended for the continued commitment to providing business education at senior cycle.
- TY is a relatively new addition to the school's curriculum. Modules of Accounting, Business and Enterprise are taken by all TY students. This good provision enables students who are new to business education to experience aspects of business education in senior cycle and to further develop entrepreneurial skills.

3. PLANNING AND PREPARATION

- The quality of subject planning is good overall. The subject team are well organised and there are indicators of the development of reflective practice within the team.
- There are regular business department meetings; however, discussions generally focus on organisational and assessment aspects of the department. Discussions on the effective use of teaching and assessment strategies that will further enrich student learning should be included in meetings.
- As part of whole-school development planning, management encourages business teachers to review and evaluate the operation of the business subject department on an annual basis using discrete headings. This is very good practice. It is now advisable that an agreed action plan is put in place with timed, targeted strategies to progress the areas for development.
- Good progress has been made in curriculum planning for Business Studies. To further this work, teachers should collaboratively develop the a 'Unit of Learning' approach to planning by detailing rich learning experiences that take cognisance of the knowledge, understanding, skills and values that the teacher wishes to develop. In addition, there should be a layered approach to building on the learning outcomes over the three years of the programme.

- The curriculum plans for Accounting and Business are well developed. The current TY plan for business education requires further development it should detail how key skill development is accommodated, the cross-curricular approaches, the methodologies used and the assessment, and evaluation strategies of the module.
- The newly introduced practice of the use of the curriculum plans as working documents, wherein reviews and comments are added based on teacher's experiences of implementation, is of benefit to the overall planning in the department.
- The development of a business department electronic folder should be prioritised and a student learning platform for students to share resources and store material could also be progressed.
- A review of students' attainment in certificate examinations takes place bi-annually as part of whole-school development planning. Individual student attainment is reviewed using records of students' ability assessments and a narrative on students' achievement is noted in the review of certificate examinations. This is good practice.

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 was given an opportunity to comment in writing on the findings and recommendations of the report; a response was not received from 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 of 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;