

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Subject Inspection in Business Studies

REPORT

Ainm na scoile / School name	Mountrath Community School
Seoladh na scoile / School address	Dysartbeigh Mountrath Co. Laois
Uimhir rolla / Roll number	91550B

Date of Inspection: 31-01-2019



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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 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.

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	30 & 31-01-2019
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 two double and three single class periods• Examination of students' work• Feedback to principal and relevant staff

School context

Mountrath Community School is a co-educational school with a current enrolment of 750 students. The school offers Business Studies in junior cycle, and Accounting and Business as optional subjects in the Leaving Certificate programme. Business education is compulsory in the school's optional Transition Year (TY) programme. Business Studies is the focus of this report.

SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

Findings

- The quality of teaching and learning was good overall; in the majority of lessons, the quality ranged from very good to good, while in the remainder of lessons there was scope to develop teaching practice.
- In lessons, where very effective teaching was observed students were highly engaged in their learning, attained good business knowledge and developed key skills.
- The quality of assessment practices was good overall; while the use of effective questioning strategies was a key element of most lessons, only in some lessons was students' work returned with affirming and formative feedback.
- The overall quality of subject provision and whole-school support was very good; current whole-school continuing professional development (CPD) for teachers is focused on developing the use of active teaching methodologies.
- Subject department planning for Business Studies is satisfactory overall; the devolved model of subject planning is not supportive of good collaborative planning practices and the quality of planning for the new Business Studies specification is fair.

Recommendations

- In lessons where scope for development was identified, teachers should plan the lesson's learning activities to ensure that student learning is meaningful and incremental.
- To further support and enhance assessment for learning practices, teachers should expand the use of higher-order questioning and the provision of formative written feedback on students' work.
- Business teachers should work collaboratively to prepare a teaching, learning and assessment plan for the new specification and from it collectively prepare units of learning based on the learning outcomes.

DETAILED FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. TEACHING, LEARNING, AND ASSESSMENT

- The quality of teaching and learning was good overall. In the majority of lessons, the quality ranged from very good to good, while in the remainder of lessons there was scope for development in the choice of teaching approaches used and their effectiveness in engaging students in meaningful and deep learning.
- In general, a good blend of teaching methodologies was used. Students had opportunities to work in pairs or small groups. In most lessons, well planned tasks ensured students had in-depth discussions relating to their task. In a small number of lessons, the quality of some tasks were not suitably challenging or engaging for students.
- Where very good practice was observed, students had a clear sense of making progress in their learning and were highly engaged in enjoyable learning activities. These included a walking debate, pair work, group task, discussion and explorative questioning.
- Most lessons were well structured. Some, however, would have benefitted from a teaching for understanding approach to ensure there was an incremental approach to student learning.
- Learning intentions were shared with students in all lessons. To enhance this approach, learning intentions could be linked to success criteria that would focus on how students will demonstrate the learning achieved.
- In many lessons, students were given the opportunity to populate beneficial graphic organisers that served as revision and summary aids. The use of information and communications technology was effective in the majority of lessons and included the use of stimulating visuals, colourful presentations and very good video resources.
- It is praiseworthy that in some lessons there was evidence of inquiry-based learning tasks as students' homework included research, project work and pre-learning of topics. This is supportive of the development of key skills and merits extension to all lessons.
- In some lessons, students were transcribing information that was available in their textbooks and this was not an effective use of lesson time. Students should be encouraged to generate their own notes.
- In the majority of lessons, the student voice was a strong feature as students had opportunities to engage in teacher-student discussions and present the outcomes of co-operative learning activities. This good practice should to be strengthen in a small number of lessons as the opportunities for student to voice opinions and views were not fully exploited by teachers.
- The overall quality of assessment practices was good. Good questioning strategies were used in most lessons. In a small number of lessons, the use of very effective questioning strategies challenged students to think critically while in other lessons the increased use of higher-order questioning would have provided opportunities for students to develop higher-order thinking skills.
- Good practice was observed in some lessons where students' work was returned with affirming and formative feedback on their work. Teachers should expand the provision of written formative feedback to students on their corrected work, where appropriate.

2. SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- The overall quality of subject provision and whole-school support was very good.
- First-year students select optional subjects for Junior Cycle from student-generated preference bands and they participate in a day-long ‘taster’ of the optional subjects. There has been a marginal decline in the uptake of Business Studies in recent years. The business department could explore options for in-coming students to engage more with the subject before choices are made with a view to maintain uptake of the subject.
- Whole-school CPD and the school’s self-evaluation (SSE) improvement targets are focused on developing teachers’ use of active teaching methodologies. It is praiseworthy that the school is currently undertaking a teaching project on active methodologies as part of Forbairt’s Action Learning Network. Business teachers have attended training for the implementation of the new Junior Cycle Business Studies specification and most are members of their subject association.
- In most teacher-based classrooms, a good visual learning environment has been developed. The potential to further develop a visual learning environment in all business classrooms should be further exploited.
- To increase parents’ understanding of the assessment framework that supports Junior Cycle, reporting mechanisms should be further developed that reflect the range of student learning experiences and the descriptors used with classroom-based assessments and certificate examinations. It is advisable to develop a school assessment policy to support changes in Junior Cycle.

3. PLANNING AND PREPARATION

- Subject department planning for Business Studies is satisfactory overall. The devolved model of subject planning, where teachers take specific responsibility for yearly units of learning is not supportive of good collaborative planning practices and requires change.
- At the regular business department meetings, discussions generally focus on organisational matters. As a means of formally sharing good teaching and learning practice, the agenda for subject department meetings should include discussions on the use of effective teaching methodologies that will further enrich students’ learning.
- The business subjects plan should be extended to include an agreed business department strategy for the SSE improvement targets in the use of active teaching methodologies. It is also desirable that there is an agreement among teachers regarding the type and quality of homework that students receive so as to further develop the Junior Cycle key skills and for all students to experience a variety of homework modes.
- The quality of planning for the new Business Studies specification is fair. To ensure students benefit from the full range of intended experiences of Junior Cycle Business Studies, all business teachers should collaboratively prepare a teaching, learning and assessment three-year plan encompassing each of the strands of Enterprise, Personal Finance, and Our Economy. From the plan it is recommended that teachers collectively develop units of learning based on learning outcomes of the specification so as to provide a range of rich learning experiences for students and teaching and assessment approaches that promote key skills.

- To support the implementation and review procedures of the new Business Studies specification, it is recommended that business teachers use the units of learning as working documents, wherein reviews and comments are made on the success or otherwise of students learning experiences.
- The business department has a dedicated folder on the school's intranet to store electronic resources for use in lessons. It is advisable to re-organise the shared folder based on the units of learning and to include a section with resource materials that will support teachers in planning for the new specification.
- As part of whole-school development planning, management encourages teachers to review and evaluate of the operation of their subject department on an annual basis. Following the review, appraisal targets are set by the subject department. This is good practice.

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 board of management of the school was given an opportunity to comment on the findings and recommendations of the report; the board chose to accept the report without response.

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;