

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

Subject Inspection in Business Studies and Accounting

REPORT

School name	Coláiste Cholmáin
School address	Claremorris Co Mayo
Roll number	64610N

Date of Inspection: 24 October 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 Studies and Accounting 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	24 October 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 – 3 single periods and 1 double period• Examination of students' work• Feedback to principal and relevant staff

SCHOOL CONTEXT

Coláiste Cholmáin is a boys-only voluntary secondary school located in Claremorris. The school operates under the trusteeship of the Archdiocese of Tuam and has a current enrolment of 410 students. After junior cycle the school offers three senior cycle programmes: the Leaving Certificate, the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP) and the Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA). Transition Year is optional. At the time of the evaluation, business teachers had not availed of the continuing professional development (CPD) training to support the introduction of the new specification for junior cycle Business Studies. The reason for this was reported to be industrial action.

SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

FINDINGS

- The quality of teaching varied with very good practice evident in some lessons, and fair practice evident in others.
- The quality of students' learning was most effective when students had been taught to work effectively as individuals or as members of a group, depending on the task set.
- In a number of the lessons observed, teaching strategies were overly teacher-centred; there is a need to ensure that all lessons include opportunities for independent and active learning.
- Some very effective approaches to correcting students' homework were observed.
- The number of junior cycle students opting for business subjects is stable, and uptake of Accounting is increasing progressively at senior cycle.
- Subject department planning is well established, which provides a good opportunity to progress planning for the new business studies specification.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Individual lesson planning should ensure that the lesson intentions include both a learning and a practice dimension.
- Teachers should agree and implement a range of teaching approaches to support collaborative and active learning in lessons.
- School management and the subject department should undertake a review of the factors affecting students' choice of business subjects, and plan interventions accordingly.

DETAILED FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. TEACHING AND LEARNING

- Some very well prepared lessons were observed. In these instances the transitions within the lessons were well timed and a suitable range of activities selected. Homework was assigned early in these lessons which allowed students to scaffold their learning for the tasks. However, in some lessons there was a need to ensure that the pace of the lesson provided scope for the students to be challenged and to learn independently.
- One exceptionally good approach to lesson planning was observed. This approach focused on planning learning intentions that included both a learning and a practice dimension. This approach should be adopted for use across the class groups.
- The most effective questioning approaches observed were differentiated for the less and more able. In some lessons the teacher used too many global questions which were not always directed at assessing the relevant learning intentions.
- Efforts are made to make lessons interesting and stimulating and the use of appropriate business terminology by students is encouraged by teachers. Examples were used to explain business concepts and attempts are made to make these current and relevant. In some lessons quizzes and word clouds were used to assess and recall key terms and concepts.
- Although teachers are classroom based there is little evidence of either student work or business resource materials displayed in the rooms. Developing this area would enhance student learning experiences and support the whole-school literacy development priority. Introducing project work, particularly at junior cycle, would facilitate students in applying business knowledge to the wider business environment.
- The management of the correction of students' work varied in its effectiveness. It was most effective when the teacher visually checked that students had completed the work and then followed up by targeting key questions for individual responses or used check balance approaches with accounts questions. There is a need in some instances to re-evaluate the use of whole-class corrections as an approach to increasing students' knowledge and skills. As a support to this work, peer and self-assessment techniques should be developed.
- The classroom layouts facilitated pair and small group work, though such strategies were not commonly utilised. One good example of pair work was observed. The task included a well-managed feedback aspect which facilitated the teacher in reflecting on the students' learning and addressing any gaps. This approach should be used more widely.

2. SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- The quality of subject provision and whole-school support is good.
- Of particular merit is the year-long subject sampling programme provided to first-year students. It is recommended that, at the end of first year, students be surveyed about the business studies sampling programme, enquiring how the content and the learning activities influenced their subject choice. This information should then be used to develop the teaching and learning plan for the subject.
- Accounting is the only business subject offered at senior cycle. Data provided by the school indicates that the number of students opting for Accounting has increased in recent years. The principal reported that the board of management had decided to target resources at maintaining the business option most suited to the student cohort.

- In line with good practice, the performance of students in the certificate examinations is regularly reviewed by the subject teachers. In the context of school self-evaluation (SSE), it is recommended that this data, and other available student assessment data, be used to review practice and set targets for improvements in attainment.
- The transition year (TY) business module focuses on the Student Enterprise Awards. Teachers' experience of managing this type of activity provides a good basis for developing co-curricular learning experiences for junior cycle business studies students.

3. PLANNING AND PREPARATION

- The quality of subject planning is satisfactory, with good work done to date on the senior cycle and second-year schemes of work.
- A broad range of topics is discussed at team meetings, including operational issues, student attainment and review of whole-school teaching and learning priorities.
- The introduction of the new subject specification for Business Studies provides the opportunity for teachers to review the format of the first-year scheme. In the current school year, initial priorities were identified by the teachers using a range of textbook resources. Going forward, the schemes for junior cycle should use the *strands* and *elements* to develop units of work for the three years of the cycle. The primary focus should be on integrating key learning experiences and aligning these to specific teaching strategies.
- The teachers have been open in facilitating the placement of trainee teachers of the subjects. Closer collaboration between subject teachers and trainee teachers is required to avoid duplication in the topics covered.
- The department should revise its TY plan for term three with the objective of encouraging the take-up of business subjects at senior cycle through developing a subject sampling module.

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 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;