An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

Subject Inspection in Business Subjects

REPORT

Ainm na scoile / School name	Coláiste Muire
Seoladh na scoile / School address	Ballymote Co. Sligo
Uimhir rolla / Roll number	65140H

Date of Inspection: 10 May 2017

AN ROINN OIDEACHAIS AGUS SCILEANNA | DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND SKILLS

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	10 May 2017
Inspection activities undertaken • Review of relevant documents • Discussion with principal and key staff • Interaction with students	• Observation of teaching and learning during four class periods • Examination of students' work • Feedback to principal and relevant staff

SCHOOL CONTEXT

Coláiste Muire is a co-educational secondary school operating, under the trusteeship of Catholic Education – An Irish Schools Trust (CEIST). Current enrolment stands at 251. In addition to junior cycle, an optional Transition Year (TY) programme, the established Leaving Certificate and Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP) are offered at senior cycle.

SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

FINDINGS

- Teaching practices in the lessons observed were of a very high standard.
- Good quality learning was supported through well-structured lesson activities and tasks.
- New assessment approaches are being developed, and whole-school strategies in literacy and numeracy are well promoted in the teaching of the subjects.
- Following a curriculum review, Business Studies is moving from core to optional provision in junior cycle.
- Supports for the subjects are of a very high quality, and new developments in reporting systems will enhance parent and student understanding of the Junior Cycle Framework.
- Very effective practice and innovative approaches to the use of technology to support subject planning are evident.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Participation rates in Business Studies should be monitored in forthcoming years and, if necessary, appropriate interventions put in place to encourage participation in the subjects at senior cycle.
- Planning for differentiated teaching and assessment approaches should be further enhanced within the subjects, particularly in the context of the new common level junior cycle course.

DETAILED FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. TEACHING, LEARNING AND ASSESSMENT

- The quality of teaching and learning in the lessons observed was mostly very good. Lessons were very well prepared and planned. Learning was developed through the range of lesson tasks completed by students.
- Teachers were consistent in their use of learning intentions to structure lessons. Of particular merit was the use of keywords for activating prior knowledge and for assessing student learning.
- The whole-school target of improving students' mental arithmetic skills was evident in lessons. For example, students were being asked to estimate the relevant value added tax (VAT) and discount amounts from given rates in a *Business Documents* class and their mental arithmetic skills were also being developed in another lesson on the completion of *Ledger Accounts*.
- Questioning strategies were varied and questions were well spread among class groups to check on and to reinforce learning. Oral questions posed by teachers were also used to differentiate between students of varying abilities and to assess progress. In some lessons, students were encouraged to formulate questions for teachers, which provided another opportunity to demonstrate their learning.
- The print environments were well developed and included displays of relevant keywords, updated daily. Also evident were numeracy priorities, such as number lines and common fractions with decimal and percentage equivalents. Students' achievements and learning are celebrated through displays of their mini-enterprise projects.
- Homework was set early in lessons, which enabled students to see how lesson content and activities would support the completion of assigned homework activities and consolidate their learning. The levels of homework completion were very high and teachers had high expectations in relation to the quality of work to be produced.
- Currently, systems are in place to capture screen shots of exemplars of students work for LCVP portfolio items. This system could be expanded to support student self and peer-assessment of samples of work using success criteria.
- Students were engaged and interested in their lessons. Information and communications technology (ICT) was used very effectively to support teaching and learning. For example, the student hub aspect of the school's educational platform was used in Accounting to email homework and resources to students. This system could also be used by students to email completed long questions to the teacher, which could then be used, with student consent, as exemplars for peer and self-assessment within lessons.

2. SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- Whole-school provision and support for the business subjects is of a very high quality. The time allocated to the subjects within the school's timetable is good and Accounting and Business are provided as options in senior cycle.
- As part of a whole-school review of curriculum provision, Business Studies will move from core to optional provision in junior cycle from next September. It is advised that teachers monitor the participation rates in the subject in coming years. If necessary, teachers should review the business programme in TY, to include an element of subject sampling in addition to the

existing enterprise programme, to encourage students who may not have opted to study the subject at junior cycle to do so at senior cycle.

- Management is currently developing the school's reporting systems to parents and students. A portfolio-based system will link reporting on junior cycle students' performance to the Junior Cycle Framework and the relevant statements of learning for each subject. This initiative will be a positive development in increasing parent and student understanding of the integrated nature of the programme and will facilitate reporting on a range of student learning experiences.
- School self-evaluation (SSE) in embedded in the teaching and learning approaches used in business subjects and in the operation of the subject department. In the near future, it is planned to carry out surveys to gather student reflection data on the impact of the whole-school SSE strategies currently in place.
- 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 at the time of the inspection. The reason for this was reported to be industrial action.

3. PLANNING AND PREPARATION

- Teacher collaboration and collective practice is very good. Collective practice is clearly evident in the integration of whole-school policies and approaches with planning and teaching approaches in place for the subjects. Teachers have planned well for the introduction of the new specification for Business Studies.
- In further developing the scheme of work for Business Studies, the sequence of second-year units of learning should take account of the agreed focus for the *Business in Action* classroom-based assessment (CBA).
- Teachers have completed a significant amount of work in migrating all subject planning documentation to the school's electronic administration system. Plans and resources are well developed, as are the records of team meetings.
- In the context of the new common level junior cycle course, planning for differentiation should be further progressed. Existing learner experiences and teaching approaches can be built on to progress from instances where differentiation is supported mainly through the use of past examination papers, towards differentiation that centres on the in-class assessment for learning (AfL) strategies used.

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 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 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;