

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Subject Inspection in Business Subjects

REPORT

Ainm na scoile / School name	Our Lady's College
Seoladh na scoile / School address	Presentation Road Galway
Uimhir rolla / Roll number	68285C

Date of Inspection: 13 October 2017



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. 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.

SUBJECT INSPECTION

INSPECTION ACTIVITIES

Dates of inspection	12-13 October 2017
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 ten class periods: two double and six single periods• Examination of students' work• Feedback to principal, deputy principal and relevant staff

School context

Our Lady's College is a girls-only voluntary secondary school located in the centre of Galway city. The school was established after the amalgamation of Meán Scoil Mhuire and Presentation Secondary School in 2016. It operates under the trusteeship of Catholic Education – an Irish Schools' Trust (CEIST). With a current enrolment of 324 students, the school operates off two sites, divided in the main between senior and junior students. The school offers an optional Transition Year (TY) programme and almost all other curricular programmes. It participates in the Department's action plan for educational inclusion, Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS).

SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

Findings

- The quality of teaching and learning in the lessons observed was good or very good.
- To meet the wide range of learning needs that is evident in class groups, teaching and learning approaches and resources are adapted to encourage student participation and engagement with the subjects.
- Teachers are expanding the range of learning experiences in junior cycle through which key skills, including research, presentation and reflection are being promoted.
- Assessment practices are good, and key strategies are in place to support students' attainment in the subjects.
- Subject provision is good and teachers work hard at maintaining student participation rates in the subjects in the senior cycle, though student numbers in some senior cycle class groups were small.
- Subject planning is very good and teachers have adapted the Junior Cycle for Teachers (JCT) resource materials in developing the schemes of work for junior cycle.

Recommendations

- The range of teaching strategies used to manage students' oral contributions in lessons needs to be expanded, and greater adaptation of the teaching styles used with smaller class groups is recommended.

- Formative assessment approaches, including the use of success criteria linked to learning intentions for units of learning at junior cycle, should be further developed to help teachers and students to make judgements about learning.

DETAILED FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. TEACHING, LEARNING, AND ASSESSMENT

- The quality of teaching in the lessons observed was good or very good.
- Lessons were very well prepared with materials customised to accommodate the range of learning styles. In a number of lessons, digital technology was used to support the attainment of the learning intentions. For example, in one lesson on industrial relations a very good multimedia presentation was used that reflected the gender and ethnic diversity of the Irish workforce, while also providing positive role models for the class group.
- A facilitative teaching style was well used in senior cycle lessons, including those for Accounting, and students worked collaboratively under the direction of the teachers to complete questions. Peer teaching and support was another feature of lessons.
- Two aspects of teaching approaches need to be reviewed by the department. Firstly, the management of the oral contributions of students in class needs to be more effective. Incorporating a 'no-hands up' approach with junior class groups could help in this regard. Secondly, greater variety in teaching styles is required between class groups of differing sizes. While a teacher-led approach can be suitable with large class groups, in other lessons where class size is smaller, a facilitative approach is normally more appropriate.
- Students' language needs were supported through the use of learning aids and teaching tools including, cloze-tests, matching exercises and graphic organisers. In addition, teachers were developing mnemonics to assist students in recalling business theory. To support this work a thematic approach could be used in junior cycle where topics including for example, budgeting, insurance, and banking could be linked to a common narrative or storyboard.
- Stimulus material was frequently used to prompt student discussion. In one lesson on fair trade, students working in pairs sequenced the stages in the distribution of goods from producer to consumer and completed an estimation task on allocating costs of fair trade goods through the supply chain. In another lesson, students used an example of an Irish worker's wage slip to learn about deductions and calculate income tax.
- Support for students was a key feature of the lessons observed, as teachers sought to maximise learner outcomes. Assessment was integral to the questioning styles used by teachers. In many instances, questions were differentiated to assess the learning of students of differing abilities.
- A review of summative assessment tests administered in senior cycle indicated that the structure of the tests, early in the cycle, was weighted in favour of short answer questions. This is an effective approach deliberately used by teachers to build student confidence and encourage higher level uptake
- To support the further integration of assessment for learning approaches within the subjects, a subject department wide approach to the use of self-assessment and peer assessment strategies, in conjunction with teacher-led comment-only marking, should be agreed and adopted.

- Teachers are currently expanding the range of learning experiences in junior cycle through which relevant key skills, including research, presentation and reflection are being promoted. The use of success criteria should be developed to support this approach.

2. SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- Certain challenges are posed by the dual-site location of the school. Student movement between the sites has been minimised and the school's management is endeavouring to minimise the movement of staff between both sites to break times, though this is not always possible.
- The overall quality of subject provision and whole-school support is good. Time allocated to the subjects in both junior and senior cycle is good. Of particular merit is the spread of lessons over four days, ensuring regular contact between teachers and the senior cycle class groups, who are based in the Newtownsmith Campus.
- Business Studies is a core subject for students in junior cycle. Business and Accounting are offered in senior cycle and the take-up of both these subjects is good. The school has a large core of teachers qualified in the subjects who are committed to maintaining the viability of business options across the curriculum.
- To enhance learning, links have been established with outside agencies, including Junior Achievement Ireland (JAI). Core modules of the TY business programme are built upon JAI, the enterprise and careers skills programme.
- Documentation reviewed during the inspection indicates that the senior management team proactively and formally responds to requests from the subject department. Where additional requests can be met, this is indicated, as is the rationale for decisions made.

3. PLANNING AND PREPARATION

- The quality of planning was very good, despite the lack of engagement with continuing professional development (CPD) for the new specification for Business Studies. The subject department has formulated a detailed scheme of work for first and second year students that incorporates and adapts the resources developed by JCT to support the introduction of the new course.
- In the current year, the teachers are planning that students will complete the Enterprise in Action option for the first Classroom-based Assessment (CBA) for Business Studies. As Enterprise is the core element of the business programme in TY, future planning for business modules in TY may need to be adapted to build upon junior cycle learning experiences in the subject.
- Senior cycle plans are detailed. There is evidence that the teachers of Accounting are reflecting on the skills, abilities and progress of the class groups and are modifying the sequence of the subject plan to achieve the best possible outcomes for each class group.
- In the context of curricular change at junior cycle, it is preferable that the subject co-ordinator be in place for more than one year. This would provide consistency within the evolving planning and assessment environment where the subjects are developing.

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 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.

Appendix

SCHOOL RESPONSE TO THE REPORT

Submitted by the Board of Management

Part A: Observations on the content of the inspection report

The Board was very pleased with the outcome of the inspection and with the level of engagement of the Business Department with the process.

The Board is satisfied that the recommendations made in the report are already being planned for and implemented by the Business Department.

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 Business Department has acted on the recommendations of the Department of Education and Skills inspection in relation to the level of interaction with students in the classroom.
- The Business Department has implement differentiated questioning techniques and teaching strategies to manage student's oral contributions.
- The Business Department is currently working on departmental formative assessment strategies in order to embed the key learning intentions and skills.

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
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;