

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

**Subject Inspection in Business Subjects**

**REPORT**

<b>School name</b>	Mercy Secondary School
<b>School address</b>	Goldenbridge Inchicore Dublin 8
<b>Roll number</b>	60872A

**Date of Inspection: 07-03-2017**



**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. 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

<b>Dates of inspection</b>	6 & 7 March 2017
<b>Inspection activities undertaken</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Review of relevant documents</li><li>• Discussion with principal and key staff</li><li>• Interaction with students</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Observation of teaching and learning during seven class periods</li><li>• Examination of students' work</li><li>• Feedback to principal and relevant staff</li></ul>

### SCHOOL CONTEXT

Mercy Secondary School, Inchicore, provides the full range of curricular programmes. The school participates in the Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) action plan. Business Studies is a core subject in junior cycle. Business education is offered in the compulsory Transition Year (TY) programme and as an optional subject for Leaving Certificate students. The school has a current enrolment of 173 female students.

### SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

#### FINDINGS

- Teaching was of a very good quality overall, while in a very small number of lessons possibilities for improvement were present in the choice of teaching approaches used.
- Student learning was very good in almost all lessons.
- The quality of assessment practices was satisfactory.
- Management's support for business education is very good and actively promotes a culture of collaboration, innovation and creativity in learning and teaching in the school.
- The very well-organised business subject department engages in high quality planning practices.
- Business teachers are successfully planning for and implementing the new Business Studies specification.

#### RECOMMENDATIONS

- In the small number of lessons where possibilities for improvement were present, business teachers should ensure that students' learning is aided by the use of effective teaching methodologies.
- Business teachers should agree on what is best practice in the assignment and assessment of students' work and should implement consistent practice throughout all year groups.

## DETAILED FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### 1. TEACHING AND LEARNING

- Teaching was of a very good quality overall. In a very small number of lessons, some of the teaching approaches used did not fully engage students in meaningful learning. In this small number of lessons, teachers should ensure that students' learning is aided by the use of learning activities that support incremental learning. Overall teachers were passionate in their delivery of business education.
- Student learning was very good in almost all lessons and satisfactory in a small minority of lessons. In all most all lessons, students were highly engaged in their learning when teachers effectively used a 'teaching-for-understanding' approach and worked in partnership with students while maintaining high expectations of their efforts.
- It was praiseworthy that in some lessons, where students' work included research and preparation for debates and projects, there was evidence of inquiry-based learning. It is advisable to extend this good practice, where appropriate.
- The pace and structure of lessons was generally very good. In all lessons, learning intentions were shared with students. Best practice was observed in lessons where learning intentions were presented as what students should be able to know, do and understand by the end of the lesson. It was praiseworthy that in some lessons students were involved in setting the success criteria by which their attainment of learning intentions could be assessed. This good practice should be adopted by all teachers.
- In all lessons, students engaged in either group or pair work. Co-operative learning was particularly effective when the task challenged students, created good dialogue and the concluding plenary session helped ensure effective learning for all.
- Information and communications technology was effectively used in all lessons as a presentation tool that aided teaching. In some lessons, the use of video clips enhanced and reinforced student learning, this good practice should be extended, where appropriate.
- In a very small number of lessons there was scope to reconfigure the practice of note taking in order to ensure student learning is more active.
- In most lessons, teachers contextualised theory to students' own experience and knowledge of the business environment. It is praiseworthy that some class groups are actively encouraged to access media content and share 'news of the day' in order to become informed on topical business matters. In addition, some students partake in business-related outings that are beneficial to their learning.
- Commendably, TY students, through their participation in 'The College for Every Student' (CFES) programme, were actively applying entrepreneurial, marketing, creative and organisational skills as they managed all aspects of a project to fund and organise their upcoming visit to Oxford College in England. In addition, through participation in the programme, students were provided with opportunities to further enhance their communication, confidence and leadership skills.
- In most lessons, very good differentiation techniques were used to challenge and support students in their learning through the use of questioning techniques, varied tasks and very good one-to-one student support.
- The use of good student questioning strategies effectively assessed student progress in lessons. Higher-order questioning strategies challenged students and facilitated the

development of critical thinking skills. In many lessons, students were comfortable and confident enough to ask questions and share knowledge on topics.

- Most students are assigned regular homework as evidenced from a selection of students' journals and copybooks. However, there were inconsistencies in the amount and type of homework assigned to students in the same year group. It is advisable that business teachers discuss and agree best practice for each subject and each year group and implement a common practice.
- While there was some evidence of formal checking of students' homework by teachers, there were few comments noted regarding how students might improve on their performance. Collectively, business teachers should develop a common approach to providing developmental written feedback to students.
- Students of business subjects are challenged and encouraged to aim for high academic standards and, where possible, to take subjects at the highest possible level in the certificate examinations. Student uptake at higher level and subsequent outcomes are generally very good.

## **2. SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT**

- Management's support and provision for business education is very good. The promotion of a culture of collaboration, innovation and creativity in learning and teaching was very evident in the school. Through the CFES programme, the school is building good relationships with other schools, third-level colleges and the wider community.
- While TY students have opportunities to be enterprising through the CFES programme, the development of a specific enterprise module in TY would give a real-life focus to business education and its introduction should be considered. The uptake of business subjects at senior cycle is high.
- In the main business classroom, students' awareness of the wider business environment is effectively enhanced through the use of noticeboards displaying topical news stories, access to newspaper articles and displays of student-generated posters.
- All business teachers are diligent in ensuring that their subject knowledge is current. Business teachers are regular attendees of conferences and workshops and have availed of relevant and varied continuing professional development courses in order to further enrich the learning experiences of their students.

## **3. PLANNING AND PREPARATION**

- The very well-organised business subject department engages in high quality planning practices. Business teachers work in a collaborative and supportive manner and are very committed to the continued development of business education.
- A very good overall comprehensive plan for the delivery of business education is in place. It contains relevant student-related policies, comprehensive details on teaching and learning methodologies, strategies for students with special educational needs and literacy and numeracy strategies which form part of DEIS planning. The inclusion of an agreed business department strategy to progress the school's self-evaluation improvement targets would further enhance the plan.

- The curriculum plans for business subjects are developed to a high standard. The sequencing of topics for delivery of Business in the classroom is very good as it builds on students' knowledge from junior cycle and is incremental and progressive in its approach to learning.

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
<b>Very Good</b>	<b>Very good</b> 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 <b>outstanding</b> 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
<b>Good</b>	<b>Good</b> 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
<b>Satisfactory</b>	<b>Satisfactory</b> 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
<b>Fair</b>	<b>Fair</b> 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
<b>Weak</b>	<b>Weak</b> 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;