

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

DEIS EVALUATION

REPORT

School Name	Vocational College Bunclody
School Address	Bunclody Enniscorthy Co Wexford
Roll number	71620H

Date of Evaluation: 28-04-2017



WHAT IS A DEIS EVALUATION?

In 2005 the Department published *DEIS (Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools): An Action Plan for Educational Inclusion*. The aim of this action plan is to ensure that the educational needs of children and young people from disadvantaged communities are met.

Schools are expected to develop action plans for improvement in the following areas (referred to as the DEIS themes): attendance; retention; progression; literacy; numeracy; at post-primary level, educational attainment including examination attainment; partnership with parents; partnership with other schools and educational providers, and with external agencies. The DEIS Evaluation model evaluates and reports on the school's action planning for improvement.

HOW TO READ THIS REPORT

During this inspection, the inspectors evaluated the school's action planning for improvement under the following headings:

1. DEIS action planning for improvement
2. DEIS themes

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.

The board of management 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.

DEIS Evaluation

INSPECTION ACTIVITIES

Dates of inspection	24 – 26 April 2017
Inspection activities undertaken <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Discussion with principal and teachers• Examination of school's current action plans for improvement• Observation of DEIS-related activities and interventions• Student focus-group interview	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Parent focus-group interview• Analysis of parent and student questionnaires• Observation of teaching and learning• Examination of students' work• Interaction with students• Feedback to principal and teachers

SCHOOL CONTEXT

Bunclody Vocational College has participated in the DEIS initiative since its inception. The school offers the Junior Certificate School Programme (JCSP), the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP), and the established Leaving Certificate. There are currently 198 post-primary students enrolled in the school. The school has the services of a full-time home school community liaison (HSCL) co-ordinator and participates in the School Completion Programme (SCP). The recent changeover of personnel has meant that the HSCL service has only been operational since March of the current academic year.

SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

FINDINGS

The key findings in relation to the DEIS action planning for improvement process in this school are the following:

- Senior management and staff demonstrate very high commitment to promoting equality of opportunity for students; this is reflected in the whole-school approach to DEIS planning and implementation.
- The targets and initiatives established are sound, many of them being grounded in the improvements arising from the previous DEIS cycle.
- Very good work has been carried out in recent years to improve attendance and attainment: however, of all the DEIS themes these remain the greatest challenge for the school.
- An ethos of care permeates the school and there is a strong impetus to raise student attainment; however, students in some lessons would benefit from further challenge.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Aspects of the DEIS action planning for improvement process that require development in this school include:

- A fresh review of attendance patterns and strategies should be undertaken in conjunction with the proposed introduction of the National Behaviour for Learning Support Service (NBSS).
- Whole-school professional development should focus on differentiation and assessment for learning (AfL) as a means of further improving attainment for students of all abilities.

DETAILED FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. DEIS ACTION PLANNING IMPROVEMENT

DEIS action planning for improvement is very good and the DEIS plan is being actively implemented. The very good practice of evaluating the previous DEIS plan and identifying the progress made regarding each DEIS theme has served the school well in making their current targets more specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and time bound (SMART). The work of senior management and its use of the DEIS initiative to bring about overall school improvement in recent years is praiseworthy.

It is clear that the DEIS initiative is a whole school endeavour in both planning and practice. The board of management has commendably overseen the review of the previous DEIS plan and the progression to the current one and is kept informed of progress at board meetings. The core DEIS committee has representation from a range of disciplines, while the literacy committee, the numeracy committee, and a behaviour and homework committee, each led by an assistant principal, contribute to the work of the core DEIS committee.

Subject department plans document how teachers have integrated the DEIS themes into general teaching and learning. To enhance this good practice it is recommended that a DEIS theme form part of the agenda at staff meetings for the purpose of sharing successful practice and tracking progress in an incremental manner.

The school operates an effective tiered system for identifying targeted cohorts of students. While all junior-cycle students are included in the primary cohort, those presenting as more significantly at risk are identified as 'target students' within this cohort. A further group classed as "priority target students" are identified on a weekly basis at care team meetings as students requiring immediate interventions or support. A similar approach is used to target and support vulnerable senior-cycle students.

Confirmation was provided that the board of management has formally adopted the Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-primary Schools (2011) without modification and that the school is compliant with the requirements of the *Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools (2011)*.

2. DEIS THEMES

2.1 Literacy, Numeracy, Examination Attainment

Literacy

Very good work has been carried out in recent years to support literacy and there is a clear understanding in the school that every teacher is a teacher of literacy. The targets established to increase the number of students taking higher-level English at both junior and senior cycle are robust as they are based on the progress made over the three-year cycle of the previous DEIS plan.

Effective initiatives include the creation of the excellent print-rich environment permeating the school, the reading challenge with rewards for achievement, and the drop everything and read (DEAR) initiative. The school's participation in the 'Make a Book' initiative in recent years has resulted in the compilation of very creative student literature. In order to acknowledge this achievement, school management should explore ways whereby those involved in the initiative could be provided with a published version of their work on graduation.

The school has a small library with a range of books available for borrowing. However, it is underused as a centre of reading for leisure and pleasure. This should be addressed.

There was good attention to the understanding and use of key vocabulary in all of the lessons

observed. There were some lessons where the key word strategy was seamlessly integrated into the body of the lesson, while in others it remained a discrete preparatory component of the lesson. Teachers should adopt the more integrated approach thereby enabling students to incorporate these key words into their general vocabulary and to use them across contexts.

Greater promotion of students' oral and written literacy is recommended in some instances. Good oral literacy development was noted in lessons where AfL strategies were used, where students engaged actively in paired or group tasks and where they were challenged to demonstrate their understanding of key concepts. This practice should be extended and further opportunities provided for more active student participation in asking and answering questions and in contributing to discussion. Greater attention should be paid in some instances to the promotion of writing skills both in class and at home.

Numeracy

The targets established to promote numeracy include increasing the number of students taking higher-level Mathematics at Junior Certificate. This represents a continuation of progress achieved in recent years where improved results in mathematics were noted. Outcomes to date indicate continued improvement.

It was noted however, that attention to numeracy was less explicit than the promotion of literacy in lessons other than Mathematics. In order to address this, further targets and initiatives should be considered that would promote numeracy as an essential life-skill with particular emphasis on general problem solving.

Examination Attainment

The school has been successful in recent years in changing its focus from behaviour management to improving overall educational attainment. This, according to senior management, has underpinned the unified approach to DEIS planning and implementation. The target for examination attainment is to improve student outcomes in both the Junior and Leaving Certificate examinations. The initiatives instigated are twofold; teachers are required to create the positive learning environment that will engage students and raise their aspirations, while students are expected to work towards achieving their full potential. To maximise this endeavour, greater attention is recommended in some instances to the setting of regular and meaningful written homework and the provision of formative feedback.

A strong ethos of care permeates the life of the school and there is good support for targeted students and those with additional needs within the mixed-ability class groupings. There were some lessons however, where the higher-ability students would have benefited from further challenge while in other lessons the students experiencing greater difficulty were not expected to make optimum effort to participate or improve. In order to best support the needs of all students, it is recommended that future whole-school professional development prioritise interventions on differentiation and AfL.

Consideration should also be given to providing homework supports early in the morning as the school transport system militates against high uptake of the after-school homework club.

An initiative to mentor students and to track their progress using the information from cognitive ability data should be considered as a whole-school activity within the context of leadership for learning. As part of this initiative students could learn to record and assess their own progress in light of their achievements and their aspirations. The student journals could be used for recording purposes.

2.2 Attendance, Retention, Progression

Senior management has been very proactive in recent years in establishing a positive learning environment within an inclusive and welcoming school. However, attendance presents significant challenge for the school in setting and achieving targets. The decision to establish separate targets,

one for the general school population and one for Traveller students, is sound. However, the same initiatives are proposed for both cohorts. This should be reconsidered.

Initiatives to support good attendance include the provision of an attendance officer through SCP, morning roll call and informing parents of their child's absence on the day. Parents are further contacted after longer periods of student absence and there is ongoing communication with the education welfare officer regarding prolonged student absence. Positive student-centred initiatives include attendance awards at the school's biannual awards ceremony and a school tour for those achieving over 85 per cent attendance. The provision of breakfast and lunch clubs also supports good attendance. However, while the data accrued over the years reveals improvement, the improvement has not been consistent for either cohort.

Findings from questionnaires completed as part of the current DEIS evaluation found that 69 per cent of students were absent sometimes for reasons other than illness, while all parents declared that their child goes to school most days. Only two parents reported that their child had missed a lot of schooldays this year. These responses merit investigation as they may point to a lack of awareness of the degree to which students are absent and the importance of good attendance to attainment and progression. Parents should also be made acutely aware of their responsibility in ensuring that their children attend school every day.

While the HSCL service has endeavoured to improve attendance among both cohorts of students over the years, the recent changeover of HSCL personnel and the planned introduction of the NBSS offers new opportunity for the school to reduce absenteeism as this new service offers many strategies that can encourage positive attitudes to school and result in improved attendance.

A range of effective initiatives, including a summer camp organised by SCP, are in place to support students' successful transfer into secondary school. The induction evening organised for parents and the first year subject-sampling programme were cited by parents as very positive initiatives. Very good care systems are also in place to support students' well-being thereby encouraging them to stay in school. Timetabled guidance classes are provided for third-year students to inform them of their educational progression routes and subject choices for the future.

To further the good practices already in place to support retention, consideration could be given to establishing a transfer programme from junior cycle to senior cycle to support students at risk of early school leaving. The proposed introduction of a Transition Year programme may offer opportunities in this regard. A special initiative could also be considered for Traveller students and their parents to raise awareness as to how educational progression could serve to further enhance their officially recognised ethnicity.

Students' career ambitions ranged from advancement into Post Leaving Certificate courses to the pursuit of professional careers, many of which require progression to university or Institutes of Technology. Supportive initiatives relating to progression include the LCVP programme, the provision of timetabled guidance, individual careers counselling sessions for senior-cycle students, and subject information evenings for parents. Students are also made aware of the access routes that support equality of opportunity for those experiencing social or economic disadvantage.

2.3 Partnership with parents and others

Parents who attended meetings with the inspection team reported very good relationships with senior management and staff in the school. This was corroborated by the findings from the parents' questionnaire. Parents also praised the service provided by the HSCL.

The lack of a parents' room limits somewhat the opportunity to provide practical courses for parents during the school day. However, consideration should be given to offering alternative courses; personal development or courses to help parents deal with adolescent issues would be helpful in this

regard. Courses such as numeracy for parents to improve their own skills and in turn help their children and initiatives such as 'The One Book One Community' or a book club for parents to coincide with the students' reading challenge could also be considered.

The SCP makes a significant contribution to many of the initiatives supporting the general student body. The service is also effective in supporting individual students as required. Good links have been forged with agencies such as the Ferns Diocesan Youth Service and local businesses who provide much needed support and sponsorship for school-related events. Consideration should be given to organising an annual event to acknowledge these business and community supports while at the same time showcasing the school's work and successes and further raising the profile of Bunclody Vocational College as a school of and for the community.

Appendix

School response to the report

Submitted by the Board of Management

Part A: Observations on the content of the inspection report

The Board welcomes these findings which acknowledges our schools:

- “praiseworthy” use of the DEIS initiative which has brought about overall school improvement.
- *“very high commitment to promoting equality of opportunity for students”*
- *“ethos of care which permeates the school”.*
- *“positive learning environment within an inclusive and welcoming school”*
- *“very good” practice of evaluating the previous DEIS plan*
- *“effective tiered system” for identifying target students*
- *“robust” targets, and “range of effective initiatives”*
- *“very good work” carried out to improve attendance and attainment and to support literacy*
- *“very good” relationships that exist between management and parents*

The board is satisfied that students attain to their potential as evidenced by our student tracking system. Current attainment levels are among the highest on record and compare favourably to national statistics. We value all progression routes including Third level, Further Education, apprenticeship and employment. We believe this is why increasing numbers are choosing our school. The board accepts attendance is an ongoing challenge for a specific student cohort.

Part B: Follow-up actions planned or undertaken since the completion of the inspection activity to implement the findings and recommendations of the inspection

Recommendation 1 Re Attendance Strategies.

Since our inspection we have:

- Written to all parents outlining the necessity for full school attendance and the benefits this can bring to their children’s education and future.
- Introduced a weekly attendance meeting in addition to our traditional Care Meeting where student well-being tended to dominate.
- Developed a monitoring system whereby absenteeism is detected and immediately responded to by our attendance and HSCL officers. (It should be noted that we were without the crucial services of HSCL for almost a full year, this position was only filled in March of this year).
- Trained relevant staff to log all correspondence, phone calls, home visits, and interventions by our new Behaviour for Learning teacher on VShare.
- Initiated a review of our Code of Behaviour in an effort to further promote a positive school environment and to encourage full attendance by all students. Three teachers were also trained in restorative practices last year
- Initiated a rewards strategy aimed at promoting full attendance

Recommendation 2 re Differentiation and AFL strategies

Management and staff are committed to the process of school self-evaluation and continuous improvement and all are encouraged to engage in CPD programmes. Our teachers frequently engage in training in order to stay at the cutting edge of developments in their relevant subject areas. Events attended include T4, Project Maths, JCSP, and PDST initiatives. Eight teachers have also engaged in WWETB initiatives delivered by Barrie Bennett, a Canadian education expert,

and Mike Hughes a UK education expert. These initiatives encourage teachers to explore new teaching and differentiation methodologies aimed at stretching all students to reach their potential. A new cohort of teachers are due to embark on phase two of the Mike Hughes initiative this year and we have also completed a whole school workshop on differentiation in the classroom since this inspection. Staff members have, and continue to engage in, subject specific Junior Cycle reform and whole school training. Bunclody Vocational College also strives to provide state of the art facilities with the help of funding provided by the DES. These include ICT facilities aimed at enhancing the quality of the teaching and learning environment. Twelve teachers are to receive digital literacy training this year as part of the schools ICT strategy. Training will focus specifically on the use of the Microsoft Surface Pro as a teaching aid. WWETB have also provided all staff with ICT training last year. The programme delivered was aimed at integrating ICT into the classroom through the use of Office 365.

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'/students' 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'/students' 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;