

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

**Programme Evaluation in TY**

**REPORT**

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| <b>Ainm na scoile /<br/>School name</b>       | Mount Sackville Secondary School       |
| <b>Seoladh na scoile /<br/>School address</b> | Tower Road<br>Chapelizod,<br>Dublin 20 |
| <b>Uimhir rolla /<br/>Roll number</b>         | 60120W                                 |

**Date of Evaluation: 12-11-2019**



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An Roinn Oideachais  
agus Scileanna  
Department of  
Education and Skills

## **PROGRAMME EVALUATION**

The programme evaluation model of inspection is used to evaluate the quality and effectiveness of the following programmes and to provide advice and support to teachers, principals and school management in post-primary schools and centres for education:

- Junior Certificate School Programme (JCSP)
- Transition Year (TY) programme
- Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) programme
- Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP)

## **HOW TO READ THIS REPORT**

During this inspection, the inspector evaluated learning and teaching in TY under the following headings:

1. Teaching and learning
2. Programme provision and whole-school support
3. Programme planning, co-ordination and evaluation

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 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.

## **CHILD PROTECTION**

During the inspection visit, the following checks in relation to the school's child protection procedures were conducted:

1. The name of the DLP and the Child Safeguarding Statement are prominently displayed near the main entrance to the school.
2. The Child Safeguarding Statement has been ratified by the board and includes an annual review and a risk assessment.
3. All teachers visited reported that they have read the Child Safeguarding Statement and that they are aware of their responsibilities as mandated persons.

The school met the requirements in relation to each of the checks above.

## Programme evaluation in TY

| Dates of inspection  | 08 & 11 November 2019   |
|--|---|
| Inspection activities undertaken <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Meetings with principal, deputy principal, and programme co-ordinator</li><li>• Meeting with key staff</li><li>• Review of relevant documents</li><li>• Student focus-group interview</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Observation of teaching and learning in six lessons</li><li>• Examination of students' work</li><li>• Interaction with students</li><li>• Feedback to senior management team and programme co-ordinator</li></ul> |

### School context

Mount Sackville Secondary School is a fee-paying post-primary school for girls with a current enrolment of 656 students. The school operates under the trusteeship of the Le Chéile Schools Trust and offers the junior cycle, Transition Year (TY), the established Leaving Certificate, and the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme to its students.

### Summary of main findings and recommendations:

#### Findings

- The overall quality of teaching and learning observed was good, with aspects of very good practice, as well as some areas for development, noted in lessons.
- Effective and highly effective pedagogical practice observed included instances where teachers facilitated the creation of dynamic student-centred learning environments.
- A broad and balanced variety of assessment approaches is in place to support learning within the TY programme; excellent examples of written formative feedback were noted in some, but not all, subject areas.
- The overall standard of programme provision and whole-school support is very good; there is scope to further review the school's admissions criteria in relation to student participation in the TY programme.
- The quality of programme planning, co-ordination and review is very good.

#### Recommendations

- Teachers should work towards extending the engaging student-centred learning environments observed to all lessons.
- To extend the excellent practice that exists all teachers should provide regular written formative feedback to students.
- In reviewing its admission policy into TY, the board of management should provide greater clarity to prospective parents and students as to the requirement for participation in the TY programme.

## DETAILED FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### 1. TEACHING AND LEARNING

- The overall quality of teaching and learning observed was good, with aspects of very good practice, as well as some areas for development, noted in lessons.
- Teachers presented specific learning intentions at the start of most lessons. This served to provide students with a clear sense of the lesson direction from the outset.
- Individual teacher planning for lessons was of a good standard overall, with all necessary materials prepared in advance.
- Effective and highly effective pedagogical practice observed included instances where teachers progressed the lesson at a very good pace and ensured that activities were tailored to meet the needs of the student cohort. These practices facilitated the creation of dynamic student-centred learning environments. By extending such approaches to all lessons, this would ensure an appropriate balance between teacher and student input and maintain student motivation for learning.
- A very good balance in assessment modes was noted to support learning within the TY programme; these included oral formative feedback, in-house examinations, project and portfolio work, and cognitive assessment testing.
- Excellent examples of written formative feedback on student work were observed in a mathematics lesson, and in the overall coursework review, appraising students of areas that were in need of development as well as areas that were working well. However, from the sample of copybooks and folders reviewed in lessons, such examples did not feature as regularly. It is advised that such feedback be extended to all subject areas in order to further support student learning.
- Teachers provided differentiated support to students in every lesson through individual attention and a good mix of lower and higher-order questioning. Students were noted to be confident and articulate, and willing to both ask and answer questions regularly in the lessons observed.
- A sample analysis of the TY journals during the evaluation indicated variations in the extent to which students use them to record homework and to reflect on their progress. Feedback from staff in meetings also indicated that there was scope to ensure that students and teachers make greater use of the journal as a teaching and learning tool.
- Teachers paid due attention to literacy in the lessons observed, with student attention drawn towards subject-specific vocabulary noted on the whiteboard.
- Classroom management was characterised, in all lessons, by supportive and affirming teacher-student relationships.
- Seating arrangements favourable to the creation of optimal conditions for active learning were in use in every lesson observed and the classrooms were print-rich, with vibrant displays of student work in evidence.

## 2. PROGRAMME PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- The overall standard of programme provision and whole-school support for TY is very good.
- The senior management team and TY co-ordinator provide high quality leadership to the TY programme. They are supported in their work by tutors and TY mentors who assist students over the course of the academic year in sourcing employment and in monitoring their progress during work placement periods.
- Traditionally, students in Mount Sackville Secondary School have participated in TY. However, the school's admissions policy is silent as to whether or not the programme is provided on a compulsory or optional basis. In order to ensure that parents and students are fully informed in advance of applying for admission in first-year, the board should revisit its admissions policy and elaborate on the requirements in relation to student participation in TY.
- Highly effective communication structures are in place within the programme; these include a detailed TY news bulletin for students and parents and regular communication between parents and the TY co-ordinator via e-mail. Parents can also attend information evenings prior to and during TY.
- A broad, balanced and appropriately timetabled TY curriculum is in place in Mount Sackville Secondary School, with core subjects, subject sampling, TY specific subjects, work experience, and additional once-off activities as the cornerstones of the overall TY programme provided to students.
- A vibrant co-curricular and extra-curricular programme of activities serves to support and enhance student learning in TY. For example, students have participated in overseas trips and a school musical. Exemplary cross-curricular approaches include links between Italian and Home Economics. Students interviewed in the course of the evaluation were enthusiastic and highly positive in their description of the many possibilities for learning that they received both inside and outside of the classroom.
- Student leadership skills and self-confidence are developed within the TY programme; opportunities include a buddy system between TY and first year students, to support student integration into the school, and TY students lead the schools environmental awareness programme.
- Very good links have been established with the local community; for example, TY students engage in paired reading projects with local primary schools and organise events for the elderly in the community. Furthermore, TY students support a local charity through a series of fundraising events.

### 3. PROGRAMME PLANNING, CO-ORDINATION AND REVIEW

- The quality of programme planning, co-ordination and review is very good.
- The TY programme provides a comprehensive picture of planning and co-ordination. It is of very good quality, and is reviewed on an annual basis.
- The quality of teachers' individual curriculum planning for subjects and modules was also very good and a common template exists for subject planning within TY, thus ensuring a unified approach to planning.
- Many of the individual subject plans have made specific reference to the Department of Education and Skills publication *Looking at Our School (2016)*, in order to benchmark their teaching and learning practices. One area for development within some subject plans included the need to further define the methodologies sections in order to ensure that the descriptions are more specific to each topic under discussion.
- In terms of overall assessment in TY, a credit system is in place with students awarded points for areas including their portfolio, work experience and overall participation in the programme. At present a portion of available credits are also awarded for good attendance in TY. As attendance at school is mandatory, this practice should be discontinued.
- Parents and students have been surveyed in order to ensure ongoing review of the programme provided. Two parents also act as TY representatives within the school's Parents Council. This is very good practice.

The draft findings and recommendations arising out of this evaluation were discussed with the principal, deputy principal, and co-ordinator at the conclusion of the evaluation.

## 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 of the school's provision of each area.

| Level               | Description   | Example of descriptive terms  |
|---------------------|---|---|
| <b>Very Good</b>    | <i>Very good</i> 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 <i>outstanding</i> 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>         | <i>Good</i> 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> | <i>Satisfactory</i> 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>         | <i>Fair</i> 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>         | <i>Weak</i> 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;   |

# **Appendix**

**SCHOOL RESPONSE TO THE REPORT**

**Submitted by the Board of Management**



### **Area 1 Observations on the content of the inspection report**

The Board of Management welcomes this report and its very positive findings. In particular, the Board is pleased to see an acknowledgement of the high quality leadership and support of the TY programme provided by the school's Senior Management Team. The findings do justice to the vibrancy, depth and scope of the school's TY curriculum and to the work of the TY coordinator and the dedication of the mentors, tutors and teachers who deliver the programme.

### **Area 2 Follow-up actions planned or undertaken since the completion of the inspection activity to implement the findings and recommendations of the inspection.**

Mount Sackville's Admission's policy is being reviewed by the Board in 2020 -this will allow for the inclusion of more specific information regarding the invitational nature of TY admissions.

The school's Teaching and Learning Team are employing an initiative known as the Pineapple Timetable. This serves to open the doors of the classrooms and facilitate peer observation. This will also assist in ensuring that the excellent practise regarding written feedback and student learning environments observed by the Inspector can be embedded across subject areas.