

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

**Programme Evaluation in Transition Year**

**REPORT**

<b>Ainm na scoile / School name</b>	Royal School Cavan
<b>Seoladh na scoile / School address</b>	College Street Cavan County Cavan
<b>Uimhir rolla / Roll number</b>	61080S

**Date of Evaluation: 31-01-2017**



## **WHAT IS A 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 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.

## Programme Evaluation in Transition Year

### INSPECTION ACTIVITIES DURING THIS INSPECTION

<b>Dates of inspection</b>	30-01-2017 and 31-01-2017
<b>Inspection activities undertaken</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Discussion with principal, deputy principal and teachers</li><li>• Review of relevant documents</li><li>• Examination of students' work</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Observation of teaching and learning during seven class periods</li><li>• Interaction with students</li><li>• Feedback to principal and teachers</li></ul>

### SCHOOL CONTEXT

The Royal School Cavan is a fee-charging co-educational boarding and day school with a current enrolment of 225 students. Transition Year (TY) is compulsory.

### SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### FINDINGS

- The overall quality of teaching and learning was satisfactory; student-centred methodologies were used in a minority of observed lessons and students were passive learners in more than half of the lessons.
- A very good range of worthwhile modes of assessment is used for monitoring and evaluating students' achievement.
- Teachers have received very good training in active and collaborative teaching approaches but there is scope for systematic sharing and more widespread implementation of this expertise.
- Whole-school support for TY is satisfactory, however, the vision statement for TY as articulated by the school is not fully embedded in practice.
- Programme planning, co-ordination and evaluation are good and there is good communication between the TY core team and the wider school community.
- There is scope to strengthen students' voice in the ongoing development of TY.

#### RECOMMENDATIONS

- Further reflection by teachers on the teaching and learning methodologies employed is needed; methodologies that motivate TY students to take greater ownership of their learning and enable them to participate purposefully and meaningfully should be included in all lessons.
- In its leadership of learning, the senior management team should prioritise teaching and learning in TY and explore ways to share and implement good practice and expertise.
- School management, including the board of management, should consult with students, parents and teachers to ensure that its vision statement for TY is embedded appropriately in practice and planning.
- Ways to strengthen student voice should be augmented; for example the establishment of a student advisory committee should be considered.

## DETAILED FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### 1. TEACHING AND LEARNING

- The overall quality of teaching and learning observed was satisfactory; there was scope to improve on a number of aspects. Teachers provided a range of relevant resources such as handouts, electronic presentations and video clips. The quality of the students' engagement observed across the various learning activities ranged from fair to very good.
- Student-centred approaches, such as group or pair work, were used very effectively in three of the seven lessons observed where students were provided with good opportunities to discuss, think and be active. In the other lessons, less effective methodologies were used; learning was often overly passive with students spending long periods listening, taking notes and reading from the textbook. There was a considerable imbalance in teacher-student talk with teacher voice dominating to a significant degree. It is therefore recommended that methodologies that motivate students to take greater ownership of their learning and enable them to participate purposefully and meaningfully should be included in all lessons.
- During more effective lessons, students remained attentive and engaged throughout. In less effective lessons, students were observed to pay attention for only short periods of time and were often inattentive. To improve students' engagement, it is recommended that more active and student-centred learning approaches be used.
- In a few lessons, the tasks were appropriately demanding and encouraged students to develop problem-solving, critical thinking and independent learning skills. In other lessons, there was insufficient differentiation, particularly for more-able students. Appropriately differentiated lesson tasks should be provided in lessons to ensure that students of all abilities are suitably challenged.
- A very good range of worthwhile modes of assessment is used for monitoring and evaluating students' achievement. These include project assessment, end-of-term formal examinations, student interviews and evaluation of the students' portfolios.
- The quality of in-class assessment varied across the observed lessons. In a majority of cases, teachers assessed students' progress effectively; there was close monitoring during lessons with good feedback provided as students worked.
- In a significant minority of lessons, teachers employed good questioning strategies including the use of higher-order questions to help students develop their learning. In other instances, assessment was less effective; one-to-one questioning was used but not all students were involved in the process. Differentiated questioning strategies that engage a wider range of students should be used in lessons.

### 2. PROGRAMME PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- Whole-school support for TY is satisfactory overall; there is scope to improve on a number of aspects. High levels of expertise in collaborative learning methodologies exists within the school with, for example, seven teachers having received training in *Teaching and Learning for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century (TL21)*. In its leadership of learning, the senior management team should prioritise teaching and learning in TY and explore ways to share and implement good practice and expertise. The resources for co-ordinating the programme are adequate.

- The school has articulated its vision for TY which includes maintaining a student-centred focus and maximising whole-school and community involvement. It also commits to ensuring that students develop all of the skills necessary to complete senior cycle. There was evidence that this vision has yet to be realised in many aspects of TY, including students' classroom experience. School management, including the board of management, should consult with students, parents and teachers to ensure that their vision is embedded in the TY programme.
- TY curriculum provision is good and provides a broad range of core, optional and non-curricular subjects and modules. Guidance provision in TY is good; students are timetabled for one class period of career guidance per week. They complete interest inventories, aptitude tests and career investigations. Advice is provided on curriculum vitae preparation, interview skills, and students complete mock interviews.
- Work experience is co-ordinated effectively and takes place on two separate weeks during the year. There is scope to make better use of work experience placements to support students to make decisions about their future, for example by exploring relevant careers before the placements. The school should also consider the inclusion of a community action placement.
- Students engage in valuable co-curricular and extra-curricular learning experiences. These include trips out of school, involvement in Gaisce, mini-company projects, first aid, and *Tooth-Led Teens* which is an initiative aimed at TY students teaching first-year students about oral hygiene.

### **3. PROGRAMME PLANNING, CO-ORDINATION AND EVALUATION**

- Programme planning, co-ordination and evaluation are good. Adequate time is allocated to the TY co-ordinator for planning on a weekly basis. While individual subject departments collaborate on their TY plans, the entire TY team has not had opportunity to meet formally. It is recommended that an opportunity be provided for TY teachers to meet formally as a group to discuss the actions needed to fully realise the vision for TY.
- Surveys are administered to students at the end of each module studied and parents are surveyed at the end of the year. A review of the student surveys indicated that there is scope in such surveys to provide students with opportunities to provide more in-depth feedback on the programme. There is scope also for students to have a stronger voice in evaluating and enhancing the overall TY programme. Consideration should be given to establishing a student advisory committee to strengthen the student voice in TY.
- There is good communication between the TY core team and the wider school community. Appropriate opportunities for communication with parents and the celebration of students' achievements, including information evenings and the TY graduation, are provided.
- Subject planning for the optional subjects and current TY modules is good. However, there is an over-emphasis on leaving certificate material in English, Irish and Mathematics. The topics for study in these subjects should be selected to develop a broad range of relevant key skills rather than focus unduly on certificate examination material.

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The draft findings and recommendations arising out of this evaluation were discussed with the principal, deputy principal and relevant key staff at the conclusion of the evaluation.

## **Appendix**

School response to the report

**Submitted by the Board of Management**

## **Part A: Observations on the content of the inspection report**

The Board of Management of the Royal School Cavan accepts the content of the report and has already started the processes to improve the teaching and learning in the school in general and Transition Year in particular.

Student-centred methodologies are being targeted through the resources available within the school as well as using outside agencies. It is also accepted that the aims as espoused in the Transition Year vision statement need to be taken to heart and encouraged among all involved in the programme in the school.

While the school may have thought that it was listening to the voices of its students, the ideas suggested in the report are being considered and being implemented in the current school year as well as in the planning for Transition Year students in the future.

## **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 Board of Management wish to acknowledge the participation of six of its teachers on the two year TL21 course. This group of teachers have developed effective AfL strategies around success criteria and feedback. The Board of Management recognise the importance of celebrating and providing time for teacher professional development in order to facilitate a learning organisation and it is the Board of Management's intention to provide time for these TL21 teachers to share, in a more formal setting with their colleagues, their experiences of using the strategies developed and their effectiveness.

Time set aside will allow Transition Year teachers to consider the Transition Year vision statement and allow it to inspire how the programme is implemented. This will also allow the teachers of the core subjects of English, Irish and Mathematics to consider how the necessary skills to be taught and developed in Transition Year can be done without relying heavily on topics that may or will form part of the Leaving Certificate syllabuses.

The student voice is regarded very highly in the school, but it is clear that improvements need to be made. Some have already taken place, such as meetings between members of the Student Council and the Board of Management, but it is intended to have a fully operational Transition Year Student Advisory Body in place next year, while consultation has already taken place with the current Transition Year.

The Board of Management acknowledge the very good teaching and learning strategies noted in the report and indeed the very good range of modes of assessment present throughout the programme. The Board of Management would like to state that our Teaching & Learning Policy will be amended in the next school year in consultation with all our stakeholders. This policy will incorporate the key principles as documented in 'Looking at our School 2016' and set-out a 5 year action plan that will endeavour to move our collective teaching and learning practice to one that is highly effective.

The Board of Management are delighted to facilitate time for teachers to collaborate and share good practice. However, the time devoted towards effective whole-school development planning practices, established in the school for the previous four years, are unfortunately very much reduced because of the stoppage of Croke Park hours due to industrial action.

## 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;