Programme Evaluation in TY

REPORT

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School name</th>
<th>St Gerard's School</th>
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<tr>
<td>School address</td>
<td>Thornhill Road</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Bray</td>
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<td>Roll number</td>
<td>61811I</td>
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Date of Evaluation: 28-11-2017
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; a response was not received from the board.
Programme evaluation in TY

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dates of inspection</th>
<th>24th and 28th November 2017</th>
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<tr>
<td>Inspection activities undertaken</td>
<td>Observation of teaching and learning</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Examination of students’ work</td>
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<td>Feedback to principal, deputy principal and teachers</td>
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<td>Meetings with principal</td>
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<td>Meetings with key staff</td>
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<td>Review of relevant documents</td>
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<td>Student focus-group interview</td>
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School context

St Gerard’s is a co-educational fee-charging post-primary school in Bray with 545 students. In addition to TY, the school provides the Junior Cycle, Junior Certificate and the Leaving Certificate. TY is compulsory for all students.

Summary of main findings and recommendations:

Findings

- Learner outcomes and learner experiences were generally good and some were very good; students were observed to be developing skills in accordance with the overall aims of TY.
- The quality of teaching and learning observed during the evaluation ranged from fair to very good and one outstanding lesson was observed.
- Those leading the TY programme have brought about very good developments in the nature and range of assessment in TY but there is scope for improvement in reporting on the quality of learning.
- The TY programme is effectively led by an active core team, with ongoing support of management.
- The quality of the TY programme and learner outcomes is greatly enhanced by the calendar events, social awareness component and the range of extra-curricular activities, but the subject layer is too closely coupled with the Leaving Certificate.
- The quality of teachers’ individual curriculum planning for subjects and modules was satisfactory; there is scope to develop planning for inter-disciplinary and self-directed learning.

Recommendations

- The TY co-ordinators should work with teachers to support them in making judgements and reporting on the quality of students’ learning, relative to the aims of the programme.
- Management should immediately review the pre-selection and study of Leaving Certificate subjects within the TY programme and teachers should ensure that there is a clear distinction between the TY programme curriculum and the Leaving Certificate curriculum.
- Teachers of the programme should extend the emphasis on inter-disciplinary and self-directed learning, within the subject plans and in lesson delivery.
DETAILED FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1 TEACHING AND LEARNING

- Learner outcomes and learner experiences were positive. Students were observed to be developing skills in accordance with the overall aims of TY including increased maturity, personal development, responsibility, social awareness and communication skills. Students reported favourably on how the programme provides them with good opportunities to develop these skills.

- Students’ literacy; including speaking, writing, listening and reading, and their digital learning skills are effectively developed through the submission and showcasing of required coursework, presentations, projects and blogs, as well as preparing for their digital portfolio and the end-of-year interview.

- During the one-hour lessons, teachers created appropriate opportunities for active learning and they integrated instruction with a variety of skills-based learning activities. Classroom layout was rearranged in some lessons to facilitate co-operative learning. The outcome of the activities and the quality of students’ work and their projects were generally good and some were very good.

- Teachers were knowledgeable and enthusiastic about their subjects. The subject matter of lessons was interesting and relevant to students. Teachers made good use of information and communication technology.

- Overall, students enjoyed their learning, were motivated to learn and they engaged well. Their willingness to contribute was greatly enhanced by the quality of teachers’ expectations, questioning and the tasks given. In a few instances, during longer periods of teacher exposition, engagement was somewhat low and methods of actively involving students in these activities should have been used, such as challenging students to ask questions, clarify points or support opinions.

- In the lessons observed, some focus was placed on the development of self-directed learning. This was also promoted through a requirement to complete and submit a project or presentation in the subject. Learner outcomes could be further strengthened by more considered inclusion of opportunities for self-directed learning in all lessons. For example, it is suggested that students be required, during the instructive phases of lessons, to make relevant notes under given headings.

- One outstanding lesson was observed when, taking guidance from their teachers, students took full responsibility for progressing their Young Social Innovators (YSI) project. Collectively, they set goals as a result of their reflection on progress with the project and used them to direct their own work. Ways of extending these learning experiences to all students in TY and integrating them into the curricular components of the TY programme ought to be planned for and implemented.

- A range of worthwhile modes of assessment is used in monitoring and evaluating students’ achievement. Homework often includes research, material gathering and editing. It is suggested that guidance in how to conduct research, and how to recognise differences between fact and opinion in articles and in the media, be provided during TY induction.

- Students engage in regular self-assessment. They complete a twice-yearly reflection and keep regular blogs on their participation in the various aspects of TY. The co-ordinators monitor these and use the information to challenge students to make further progress and expand
their experiences. To assist students in making judgements about the quality of their learning, it is suggested that they be guided to use the school’s TY aims as benchmarks.

- One way that subject teachers report on students’ attainment is through school reports. Observations indicate that the commentary could, at times, be more diagnostic, so as to provide information with regard to student strengths and weaknesses, and formative so as to facilitate improved performance. It is recommended that TY co-ordinators work with teachers to develop reporting.

2 PROGRAMME PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- There is a high level of commitment to the TY programme in the school. Senior management and the board of management provide ongoing support to the co-ordinating team and the programme is well resourced.

- The quality of the programme is greatly enhanced by the calendar events, extra-curricular activities and electives that provide opportunities to develop a broad range of skills that achieve the aims of TY. The community action components give students the opportunity to support and become involved with their local community. The co-ordinators strongly encourage students to participate in the events and options and develop their TY experience as broadly as possible.

- Through a rotation system, students study all twelve modules provided. The modules were designed to broaden the educational spectrum for students. They are varied and largely interdisciplinary. Modules include leadership, computers, public speaking and courses in the sciences and the arts. The principal reported that the range of modules offered is kept under review to ensure student interest and commitment.

- Students study their pre-selected Leaving Certificate subjects during TY. These occupy a significant proportion of the weekly timetable. This should be reviewed. Subject selection for Leaving Certificate should follow not precede the development of a broad range of skills and experiences during TY.

3 PROGRAMME PLANNING, CO-ORDINATION AND REVIEW

- Teamwork and distributed leadership are very good. The co-ordinating team of TY co-ordinator, assistant co-ordinator and TY head of year is committed to the philosophy, aims and successful implementation of the programme. They are assisted by a core group that includes the guidance counsellor and learning support co-ordinator. Those leading TY have brought about development in the nature and range of assessment.

- The quality of communication is very good. The co-ordinating team liaise regularly with the principal, students, parents and those teaching TY, keeping all informed of developments throughout the year. The co-ordinators use feedback from parents and students to inform programme planning.

- The quality of teachers’ individual curriculum planning for subjects and modules was satisfactory. Most curriculum plans would benefit from linking the assessment processes to the aims. This would support teachers in their appraisal of students’ progress in achieving each of the proposed aims.
• In many subject plans there is an over-reliance on Leaving Certificate content. This should be immediately reviewed and topics selected to develop a broad range of skills aligned with the national aims for the programme. There is scope to develop inter-disciplinary learning within subject plans.
## 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.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Example of descriptive terms</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Very Good</strong></td>
<td><em>Very good</em> 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 <em>outstanding</em> and provides an example for other schools of exceptionally high standards of provision.</td>
<td>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</td>
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<td><strong>Good</strong></td>
<td><em>Good</em> 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 very good standard.</td>
<td>Good; good quality; valuable; effective practice; competent; useful; commendable; good standard; some areas for improvement</td>
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<td><strong>Satisfactory</strong></td>
<td><em>Satisfactory</em> 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.</td>
<td>Satisfactory; adequate; appropriate provision although some possibilities for improvement exist; acceptable level of quality; improvement needed in some areas</td>
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<td><strong>Fair</strong></td>
<td><em>Fair</em> 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.</td>
<td>Fair; evident weaknesses that are impacting on pupils’ learning; less than satisfactory; experiencing difficulty; must improve in specified areas; action required to improve</td>
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<td><strong>Weak</strong></td>
<td><em>Weak</em> 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.</td>
<td>Weak; unsatisfactory; insufficient; ineffective; poor; requiring significant change, development or improvement; experiencing significant difficulties;</td>
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