An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Programme Evaluation in Transition Year

REPORT

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ainm na scoile / School name</th>
<th>Our Lady's Secondary School</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Seoladh na scoile / School address</td>
<td>Castleblayney Co. Monaghan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uimhir rolla / Roll number</td>
<td>64770M</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Date of Evaluation: 14-01-2020
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 Transition Year 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.

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 Transition Year

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dates of inspection</th>
<th>13-14 January 2020</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Inspection activities undertaken</td>
<td>Observation of teaching and learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Meetings with principal</td>
<td>• Examination of students’ work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Meeting with key staff</td>
<td>• Interaction with students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Review of relevant documents</td>
<td>• Feedback to senior management team and programme co-ordinator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Student focus-group meeting</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

School context

Our Lady’s Secondary School is a co-educational voluntary Catholic secondary school under the trusteeship of Catholic Education, an Irish Schools Trust (CEIST). The school currently caters for 711 students. All curricular programmes are offered in the school. Transition Year (TY) is a compulsory programme for students.

Summary of main findings and recommendations:

Findings

• The overall quality of teaching and learning was very good in the lessons observed.

• In all lessons visited teachers have successfully created inclusive learning environments based on mutual respect, affirmation and trust.

• An effective range of assessment approaches was used in the majority of lessons observed; in some lessons there was a need for questions to challenge students further.

• Students are aware of, and appreciate, the many opportunities for personal development they can avail of through their participation in TY.

• The overall standard of programme provision and whole-school support for TY is very good.

• The quality of programme planning, co-ordination and review is highly effective.

Recommendations

• Teachers should develop strategies to facilitate greater student participation in answering questions and the use of higher-order questions should be broadened.
DETAILED FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. TEACHING AND LEARNING

- The quality of teaching and learning was very good overall in the lessons observed.
- All lessons were well planned and prepared. In the best lessons, the activities allowed students to develop independent learning skills.
- Students demonstrated positive dispositions towards their learning; they co-operated well during collaborative learning activities and listened to the contributions of others. In all lessons visited teachers have successfully created inclusive learning environments based on mutual respect, affirmation and trust.
- The majority of lessons were clearly structured around learning intentions which provided a variety of learning experiences. These enabled students to work together, solve problems, explore ideas, make decisions, engage in dialogue and reflect critically. In highly effective lessons, learning intentions were differentiated and sufficient time was provided for a plenary session in order to consolidate learning and to facilitate students to evaluate their own progress.
- Students safely and responsibly used digital technology to manage their learning, to communicate, to be creative and to engage with a variety of assignments both in school and at home. Students are also provided with opportunities to develop their digital skills with timetabled information technology lessons. Students reported the benefits of these lessons for enhancing their on-going learning and developing necessary skills required for college and work.
- An effective range of assessment approaches was used in the majority of lessons to monitor and evaluate students’ learning. These include in-class oral formative feedback, in-house examinations, project and portfolio work.
- In the lessons observed good use was made of whole-class questioning to initiate discussions and to facilitate students to make links with prior learning and consolidate their knowledge. On occasion, higher-order questioning was also used. However, in the majority of instances student responses were brief and the teacher then expanded on the answer. It is recommended that teachers develop strategies that engage students more when answering questions and broaden the use of higher-order questions to deepen students’ learning.
- In lessons, students were observed to be developing skills and attributes in line with the overall aims of TY and these included personal development, social awareness and communication skills. Students reported favourably on how the programme provides them with opportunities to sample Leaving Certificate subjects and to develop a variety of skills.
- Students are aware of, and appreciate, the many opportunities for personal development they can avail of through their participation in TY. There is an extensive range of co-curricular and extra-curricular activities offered. In particular, there are excellent leadership opportunities for students to avail of in a range of areas such as coaching, community based projects and participation on the Student Council or Amber committee.
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, newly appointed TY co-ordinator and core team of teachers provide high quality leadership to the programme.
- Teachers are deployed appropriately according to specialist qualifications, expertise and interest. They engage in relevant ongoing professional development and use this purposefully to expand the modules and initiatives offered to enhance students’ learning experiences.
- Highly effective communication structures are in place within the programme; these include a detailed TY news bulletin for students and parents, and regular email communication between parents and the TY co-ordinator and principal. Parents can also attend information evenings prior to and during TY.
- TY has a strong whole-school profile. A broad, balanced and appropriately timetabled TY curriculum is in place, with core subjects, subject sampling, TY specific subjects, work experience, and additional once-off activities provided to students. Through this programme students’ abilities and interests are carefully nurtured.
- Career Guidance is timetabled as a six-week module to support students in their career investigations and subject selection for Leaving Certificate. In meeting with students they expressed the benefits of the guidance support as a particular advantage of participating in the TY programme.
- Learners are provided with opportunities to engage with work experience. Students arrange their own placements and the school has developed very good links with local business to facilitate these placements. This work experience is effectively monitored by a combination of workplace visits, phone calls to employers, employers’ evaluations and student diaries.
- Very strong links have been forged with the local community and primary school. For example, TY students engage with various initiatives to assist sixth-class pupils in preparation for confirmation, peer reading, science events and coaching of sporting teams. Through these initiatives students made meaningful and authentic connections between their own school-based learning and how they can contribute to the learning of others in different settings.
- Students are provided with a social development class where they are supported by tutors to reflect constructively on their learning experiences. Students complete an achievement diary and E-portfolio as part of this class. A very comprehensive Guide has been developed by the core TY team to assist students in reflecting on their experiences. This Guide is appropriately differentiated to support all students to engage in a range of academic, sporting and social and personal development goals. In addition, this document supports students’ social awareness placement and further promotes the school’s Christian ethos.
- Students’ experiences of TY and their achievements are appropriately celebrated at the end of the year awards event with their families and school community.

3. PROGRAMME PLANNING, CO-ORDINATION AND REVIEW

- The quality of programme planning, co-ordination and review is highly effective.
• The overall TY programme is comprehensive, and is subject to an annual review. Very good quality individual curriculum planning for subjects and modules was noted. In a small number of subject plans there was a greater emphasis on course content rather than linking learner outcomes with the development of key skills. This should be addressed.

• A very comprehensive assessment framework based on a credit system has been developed to recognise student achievement in TY.

• In line with very good practice, parents and students have been surveyed to support ongoing review of the programme. In addition, a focus group of parents and students is also facilitated to seek detailed feedback on the programme. This information has been used effectively to inform changes to the TY programme and its modes of assessment.
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 Our Lady’s Secondary School welcomes this extremely positive and affirming inspection report. The Board of Management would like to acknowledge the hard work and professionalism of the senior management team, programme coordinator and staff in providing the students with a comprehensive, challenging and rewarding transition year programme. The Board of Management would like to acknowledge the enthusiasm, cooperation, goodwill and energy of the students in embracing the many and varied opportunities that are available to them as part of the transition year programme.

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 will liaise with the senior management team to put structures and supports in place to address the recommendations made in this report. The Teaching & Learning Committee will use the SSE structure to develop strategies to ensure a greater use of higher order questioning at whole school level.
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>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Very Good</strong></td>
<td>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 <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>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Good</strong></td>
<td>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’ 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>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Satisfactory</strong></td>
<td>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.</td>
<td>Satisfactory; adequate; appropriate provision although some possibilities for improvement exist; acceptable level of quality; improvement needed in some areas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Fair</strong></td>
<td>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.</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>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Weak</strong></td>
<td>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.</td>
<td>Weak; unsatisfactory; insufficient; ineffective; poor; requiring significant change, development or improvement; experiencing significant difficulties;</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>