

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Programme Evaluation in Transition Year

REPORT

Ainm na scoile / School name	St Angela's Ursuline Convent
Seoladh na scoile / School address	Ursuline Convent Waterford
Uimhir rolla / Roll number	64990D

Date of Evaluation: 23-11-2016



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 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.

Transition Year

INSPECTION ACTIVITIES DURING THIS INSPECTION

Dates of inspection	21-11-2016 and 22-11-2016
Inspection activities undertaken <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Discussion with principal, deputy principal and TY coordinator• Discussion with core team of teachers• Review of relevant documents• Examination of students' work	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Observation of teaching and learning during 6 class periods• Interaction with students• Feedback to principal, deputy principal and TY coordinator

SCHOOL CONTEXT

St Angela's Ursuline Convent Secondary School has a current enrolment of 904 girls. The school offers the Junior Certificate, the established Leaving Certificate, the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP), the Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) and a compulsory Transition Year (TY) programme.

SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

FINDINGS

- Students demonstrated high levels of interest, motivation and participation in learning.
- Teachers created a secure, orderly learning environment based on mutual respect, affirmation and trust.
- The teaching, learning and assessment strategies chosen were appropriate to the TY programme.
- The principal and other school leaders, in the context of the programme, build good relationships with the wider community.
- There is very effective support for the on-going development of the TY programme in the school though possibilities exist for enhanced core team support.
- An appropriate current written TY plan is in place, though some TY subject plans have evident weaknesses.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- The role of the TY core team, supporting the co-ordinator in planning, monitoring and implementing the programme, should be strengthened.
- TY subject plans should be developed using a common template; the Transition Unit template, available on the NCCA website, is suggested.

DETAILED FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. TEACHING AND LEARNING

- Students demonstrated high levels of interest, motivation and participation in learning, and were affirmed for their efforts and contributions.
- Teachers created a secure, orderly learning environment based on mutual respect, affirmation and trust.
- The teaching, learning and assessment strategies chosen in all lessons were appropriate to the TY programme. There was evidence of teachers providing constructive developmental written feedback to students in some cases, and this practice should be extended.
- The quality of teaching and learning ranged from good to very good overall.
- Students demonstrated good subject knowledge and developed appropriate skills during the lessons observed.
- Lessons were well structured overall and teachers prepared in advance resources suitable for the learning needs of students. Lesson intentions were shared and revisited in some lessons, and this practice should be extended.
- Teaching approaches were designed to maximise student engagement in most lessons. In some instances, teachers should vary the chosen methodology, reduce student note-taking and introduce pair or group work, so that student activity is maximised.
- There was differentiation to cater for the range of abilities of students and due attention was paid to the development of literacy and numeracy skills in almost all lessons. In a few lessons, placing key words on the board would have helped consolidate learning.
- Teachers enabled students to make meaningful links with other subjects and with applications of lesson themes in real life.
- The whole school and classroom environments support, encourage and celebrate students' learning and achievements in the TY programme. Alternative classroom layouts should be explored to better support group work where feasible.

2. PROGRAMME PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- A good TY induction process is in place.
- Teachers are facilitated to engage in appropriate continuing professional development and are deployed with a view to maximising their specific skills.
- The principal and other school leaders, in the context of the programme, build good relationships with parents and the wider community. There is an information night for parents, which is led by the TY coordinator, where information is made available on the entire TY programme and on subject choices. TY students present to parents at subject options night and parents attend the TY graduation ceremony at which students make presentations regarding the TY programme and their involvement in it. A fifth-year student who has completed TY makes a presentation to the incoming first-year students at open night. There is a web text communication system in place. There is however, scope for enhanced communication, feedback and evaluation procedures for parents so that their views further inform TY programme development. The proposed new school website is a welcome development and can be used to effectively communicate TY successes and achievements to the wider community.
- Learning support and resource teaching processes in TY are appropriate to supporting students' needs. Special tuition and assessment strategies are well organised. A good cross-

age peer mentoring programme is in place whereby TY students serve as tutors of junior cycle students.

- The guidance department advises students on appropriate subject choices for Leaving Certificate following aptitude testing. Students receive a timetabled careers lesson each week where students develop in many areas including study skills, research skills, careers information and preparation for work experience. Students who have completed the programme reported positive career sampling experiences. Students complete a work experience diary as a reflective exercise and there are reports from employers.
- The TY programme curriculum is broad and balanced overall and this is supported by good timetabling practice. The school is considering expanding student choices of the optional modules and this should be progressed so that subject sampling is maximised in advance of students choosing their subjects for senior cycle. Some subjects and modules are specifically tailored to meet specific student needs and to support students in taking up that subject for the first time in Leaving Certificate. Other student involvement in activities such as the Bayonne exchange programme, the Gaisce award and the Build a Bank Challenge support the overall aims of TY.
- Assessment procedures are in line with programme objectives. There is continuous assessment, examinations in core subjects and regular reporting to parents. Students are assessed through written, oral, aural, project and portfolio work. The student research project, chosen on a topic of personal interest, supports student autonomy, confidence, and inter-disciplinary work and caters for students' personal and social awareness in line with the aims of the programme. Students are formally assessed on this task and there is appropriate focus on oral presentation. TY students receive a portfolio of TY achievements at the graduation ceremony at the end of the year.
- Consideration should be given to developing a specific TY assessment policy to further support modes of assessment which support learning within TY.
- Students set personal targets at the outset and reflect on achievement of these targets. This is a very worthwhile practice. Students stated that they developed personally during TY and welcomed the diverse skills and experiences encountered during TY.
- The TY programme was reported by the coordinator and senior management to help all students build maturity, confidence and develop as lifelong learners.

3. PROGRAMME PLANNING, CO-ORDINATION AND EVALUATION

- There is very effective support for the on-going development of the TY programme in the school, though possibilities exist for enhanced core team support. The role of the TY core team, supporting the co-ordinator in planning, monitoring and implementing the programme, should be strengthened. Areas for possible discussion at core team meetings include students' modes of learning and assessment, overall programme evaluation and teacher professional development.
- An appropriate current written TY plan is in place, though some subject plans have evident weaknesses. TY subject plans should be developed using a common template. The Transition Unit template, available on the NCCA website, is suggested.
- Evidence is available that a programme evaluation process is in place and that the outcomes of the evaluation have led to necessary changes in the programme and have impacted positively on students' learning experiences within the programme. Evaluation has been generally informal and this aspect of TY requires some further development, perhaps as part of the school's self-evaluation process.
- The programme is co-ordinated very effectively and is very well supported and resourced by school management.

The draft findings and recommendations arising out of this evaluation were discussed with the principal, deputy principal and TY coordinator at the conclusion of the evaluation. The board of management of the school was given an opportunity to comment on the findings and recommendations of the report; the board chose to accept the report without response.

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' 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' 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;