Programme Evaluation in Transition Year

REPORT

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<tr>
<th>Aínm na scoile / School name</th>
<th>St Mary’s College</th>
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<tr>
<td>Seoladh na scoile / School address</td>
<td>Ballysadare Co Sligo</td>
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<tr>
<td>Uimhir rolla / Roll number</td>
<td>65130E</td>
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Date of Evaluation: 15 December 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 (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.
Transition Year Programme

INSPECTION ACTIVITIES DURING THIS INSPECTION

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Dates of inspection</th>
<th>15 December 2016</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Inspection activities undertaken</td>
<td>Observation of teaching and learning during five class periods</td>
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</table>
- Discussion with principal and teachers |
- Review of relevant documents |
- Examination of students’ work |
- Observation of teaching and learning during five class periods |
- Interaction with students |
- Feedback to principal and teachers |

SCHOOL CONTEXT

Saint Mary’s Secondary school is a co-educational voluntary secondary school with a current enrolment of 204 students. Transition Year (TY) is offered as an optional programme and in the current academic year there are forty-one students following the programme, six of whom are international students. Students are arranged in two mixed-ability groups for most areas of study and are co-timetabled with Leaving Certificate year one students for Irish and Mathematics.

SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

FINDINGS

- The quality of teaching was good or very good in the majority of lessons observed, and satisfactory methodologies were used in the remainder.
- Student learning ranged from very good to satisfactory.
- The provision and whole-school support for TY is of a good quality.
- Students’ assessment experience throughout the programme is an area requiring systematic review and implementation.
- Good quality co-ordination and planning characterise the TY programme provided.
- In more than half the TY curricular plans reviewed a fair or satisfactory quality was in evidence, as well as excellent practice in a few.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Pedagogical approaches employed in TY should provide learning experiences that focus further on skill development, collaborative learning and on inculcating learner autonomy.
- A TY specific assessment policy should be developed to include guidelines for homework and for the reintroduction of a programme-wide accreditation system.
- A formal annual action plan for the improvement of the TY programme should be agreed.
- Curricular plans for almost all areas of the TY programme should be developed and include up-to-date resources to support teaching and learning.
DETAILED FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. TEACHING AND LEARNING

- In the majority of lessons observed, good or very good teaching techniques were employed and satisfactory techniques were used in less than half of the classes.

- Key characteristics of the good practice were the incremental manner in which lessons developed, the range of methodologies employed to consolidate lesson material, and the very good use of peer-teaching facilitated by teachers.

- The level of teacher preparedness for lessons was generally good. Teacher-generated additional resources to support learning and teaching were used effectively. The extended integration of information and communications technology (ICT) to support learning in all lessons through the use of video, animation, photographs and presentations is an area for development.

- Student learning was good or very good in the majority of lessons due to the clarity of the learning intentions, the purposeful learning experiences created with the students and the manner in which the students were motivated to participate in the class activities.

- In less than half of the lessons evaluated, student learning was satisfactory as the lesson content was not differentiated sufficiently to engage all students. In addition there was an over-reliance on global questions and adequate in-class supports were not provided to assist students to complete tasks.

- There was little evidence in any of the classes observed of literacy and numeracy strategies agreed at whole school level as part of SSE. The use of these strategies in the classroom should be more effectively monitored.

- An atmosphere of positive regard and mutual respect was evident in all classes. In general, students’ efforts and contributions were affirmed and encouraged. It is recommended that all teachers be mindful of the need to simplify their language to cater for the international students who are following the TY programme.

- Overall, the physical learning environments of classrooms were good. In some classrooms however, the classroom layout and seating arrangements could be organised better to support collaborative learning.

- Homework was assigned in all lessons during the evaluation. A review of a random sample of students’ homework journals indicated that homework was not always set as part of the students learning experience in the majority of subjects.

- Current assessment practices used during the TY programme should be formalised so that optimal benefits can be derived from the assessment process; a programme-specific assessment policy should be developed. This policy should emphasise both assessment for learning and assessment of learning and agree guidelines for homework to foster consistency in this regard. It should also provide for the redevelopment of a programme-wide accreditation system.

- The general criteria for project-based assessment, end-of-year portfolio assessment and multimedia presentations should be agreed across all areas of study and be explicitly taught to encourage students to further engage in self and peer-evaluation.
2. PROGRAMME PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- There is an active core planning team comprising the coordinator, the deputy principal and another member of the TY teaching team. Monthly meetings are convened and minutes maintained.

- Whole-school support for the delivery of TY is of a good quality.

- A good quality curriculum that includes the four layers of the TY programme is provided throughout the TY year. This provision is augmented by a good variety of modules, projects, activity-specific groups and tours. It is recommended, as resources allow, that consideration be given to the modularisation of some of the core subjects offered on the programme.

- The majority of third-year students opt to follow the TY programme. Students, including representatives of the students’ council, express a good degree of satisfaction with the standard and variety of the programme.

- It is recommended that selection criteria for student participation in the TY programme be specified in the school admissions policy.

- There is an effective induction programme at the beginning of the school year to support the TY programme and good supports are provided for Guidance during TY, including a work placement booklet. It is commendable that debriefing sessions for students after work placements is carried out. Career investigations and aptitude testing should be carried out early in TY to inform some work experience choices.

- All junior cycle students are given comprehensive and timely support on the nature, benefits and cost of the TY programme. The school has effective communication systems in place in order to cultivate a good relationship between parents and other stakeholders in relation to the work and activities of the programme.

- Regular attendance is fundamental to ensuring students achieve optimal learning outcomes during the TY year. The rate of absenteeism noted in the lessons observed is an area that should be given immediate attention.

3. PROGRAMME PLANNING, CO-ORDINATION AND EVALUATION

- The overall quality of planning, co-ordination and evaluation is good.

- Good quality work has been carried out to date in terms of planning for TY. The written plan for the programme contained good quality organisation details, including a clearly documented role for the co-ordinator.

- The quality of curriculum plans varied; the quality of the majority of plans was fair or satisfactory and good or very good practice was in evidence in the remaining plans reviewed.

- Best practice was observed where plans reflected the national aims of TY; and where learning outcomes linked to methodologies, resources and assessment modes were detailed. Commendably, a few curricular plans had developed a very good local dimension. This good practice should be replicated across all TY plans.

- Notwithstanding the meetings organised for teachers involved in the delivery of the TY programme, further supports should be provided to build collaborative practice among TY teachers.

- The TY core team evaluate and review the TY programme on an ongoing basis, however there is scope to develop more systematic evaluative procedures involving all stakeholders. The
outcomes of such evaluations should guide future formal action planning for the improvement of TY on an annual basis.

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. 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.
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 welcomes the Programme Evaluation TY Report and is very happy that the commitment of the TY Core Team, teachers and senior management is recognised and affirmed. The Board is especially pleased that the Inspectorate identified the good quality multi-layered curriculum as a strength of the programme. The Board is delighted that the evaluation compliments the coordination, planning and whole school support for Transition Year.

Part B Follow-up actions planned or undertaken since the completion of the inspection activity to implement the findings and recommendations of the inspection

An annual action plan is underway and will form the basis for the implementation of the recommendations of the report.
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.

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<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>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.</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>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>
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<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>
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<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>
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<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>
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