An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

Programme Evaluation
TRANSITION YEAR
REPORT

Patrician Academy
Mallow, County Cork
Roll number: 62330U

Date of inspection: 12 March 2015
REPORT ON THE QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN TRANSITION YEAR

INFORMATION ON THE PROGRAMME EVALUATION

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MAIN FINDINGS

- The students’ experience of both teaching and learning in the school’s Transition Year (TY) programme is very positive.
- Classroom activities encourage students to actively engage and to participate collaboratively in their own learning.
- The puppet show project linking Art, Music and Drama is an excellent example of an inclusive TY activity that develops students’ skills, teamwork and self-esteem.
- The quality of programme co-ordination is very good.
- The programme offers students a broad and balanced curriculum combined with a range of assessment opportunities.
- The reduction of the time allocation to subject sampling offers both a challenge and an opportunity to teachers within the programme.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

- An assessment policy for the programme that specifies assessment weightings for the various items for assessment across all subjects, should be agreed and formalised, following consultation with TY teachers.
- The use of the students’ journal as a record of ongoing tasks, and as a means of communication with home, should be strengthened.
- Following consultation with TY teachers, the school’s core teaching and learning philosophy for TY, relating to appropriate content, methodology and classroom experience of subjects by students, should now be re-stated to strengthen and sustain the programme.
INTRODUCTION

Patrician Academy is a secondary school for boys in the town of Mallow. It has a current enrolment of 379 students. The school is one of three second-level education providers in the town. Students are offered Junior Certificate, a compulsory TY programme, the established Leaving Certificate and the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP).

TEACHING AND LEARNING

- The lessons and non-classroom based learning experiences, observed during the evaluation, provided a very positive teaching and learning experience for TY students. Lessons and activities were well planned and prepared, were appropriate to the programme philosophy, and they reflected the individual subject plans for TY subjects and activities. Teachers were well aware of, and articulated, a very positive view of the importance of sustaining and strengthening a TY appropriate classroom experience for students in their school.

- Lessons were active and engaging and had a student-centred focus. This focus facilitated students, in Mathematics class, to engage with data-logging, based on practical group tasks, while students of English made presentations to the class on their detailed study of aspects of film as text. A Social Personal and Health Education (SPHE) class group was presented with a range of issues varying from table etiquette to aspects of personal health, while students of Construction Studies worked on individual design tasks based on roof models. Physical Education students were active in both physical fitness training, and in developing skills across a range of sports, in the school’s high quality indoor sports facility.

- Where recommendations were made in lessons, they concerned the need to rebalance the extent of teacher presentation with strategies to actively engage students in discussion or collaborative work. All the lessons observed, however, provided students with topics for study that were fully appropriate to a TY programme.

- Lessons in Music, Art and Drama had been merged, at the time of the evaluation, into a module that involved all students in a puppet show production. Students worked on the creation of the puppets, on the script, scenery, music and as puppeteers. Teachers, from each of the areas concerned, were observed to have formed a very effective production team that had empowered students to engage enthusiastically in this excellent production project.

- Projects and tasks, arising from classroom work, form the basis for ongoing assessment within individual subjects. To ensure a consistent approach to assessment within the programme, it is of particular importance that the variety of assessment instruments, including projects, tasks and assignments, currently in use, be maintained. To support and sustain current practice, it is recommended that an assessment policy for the programme that specifies assessment weightings for the various items for assessment across all subjects, should be agreed and formalised following consultation with TY teachers.

- Very good practice is evident in the context of the students’ own assessment of their engagement and achievement within the programme. Students keep a reflective diary as a record of their engagements and achievements, and are then required to produce a portfolio of artefacts to reflect their experience of the whole programme. Students are interviewed and then certified within the programme based on both their portfolio and their interview.
• The students’ homework journal that serves to record homework assignments and submission dates for projects and tasks, is also a key conduit of communication with parents. This journal is underused by the current student cohort. The use of the students’ journal should therefore be strengthened through greater attention to monitoring by teachers and the programme coordinator.

PROGRAMME PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

• The programme is long established in the school and is well supported and provided for by school management, in the context of timetabling and resources. An appropriate structure of core subjects, sampling of optional subjects, TY specific options and modules, work experience and a range of complementary experiences is offered to students.

• Guidance and pastoral support for students is provided, as is comprehensive support of students’ work experience. Engagement with the wide range of complementary activities, including tuition in Japanese and Chinese, and a programme of guest speakers, is provided for and supported by school management.

• Recent revisions to the programme include the limiting of the subject sampling period to the first term, and the placing of greater emphasis on business subjects and vocational preparation. Students now make their subject choices for their Leaving Certificate in January. This situation provides both a challenge and an opportunity for the coordinator and for teachers of examination subjects. The challenge is to avoid over engagement with Leaving Certificate content, methodologies and approaches to examination subjects, following subject choice. An opportunity to provide an enriching TY experience within these examination subjects, for the January to June period, is also presented to teachers. Teachers therefore have the opportunity, using the range of assessment modes already in place, to provide experiences for students that will complement and enrich their progression to Leaving Certificate courses in fifth year.

• To sustain and strengthen the quality of the TY programme within these revisions, the school’s core teaching and learning philosophy for TY, relating to appropriate content, methodology and classroom experiences of subjects by students, should now be re-stated based on consultation with the coordinator, subject departments, and the teaching team.

PROGRAMME PLANNING, CO-ORDINATION AND EVALUATION

• The programme coordinator has provided very good quality leadership over a prolonged period and has worked to develop the programme, in consultation with the principal. The quality of the programme is reflected in the very good planning structures that have been developed and maintained and in the very positive views of current TY students. An overall TY plan that contains individual subject plans, guides the delivery of the programme.

• Co-ordination time facilitates communication, discussion and review with students on a weekly basis and is conducted by the class tutors and the coordinator. The recommended focus on the use of the student journal could be achieved during these contacts.

• Evaluations of the programme, including parent surveys, have been completed by the coordinator in the past. The forthcoming planned internal evaluation should now include
the voices of teachers and students, as well as parents, to allow for an open and consultative review of the programme.

The draft findings and recommendations arising out of this evaluation were discussed with the principal and programme 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.