

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Programme Evaluation
TRANSITION YEAR
REPORT

Ardcoil Rís
Griffith Avenue, Dublin 9
Roll number: 60420L

Date of inspection: 29 January 2016



AN ROINN | DEPARTMENT OF
OIDEACHAIS | EDUCATION
AGUS SCILEANNA | AND SKILLS

REPORT ON THE QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN TRANSITION YEAR

INFORMATION ON THE PROGRAMME EVALUATION

Dates of inspection	28 and 29 January 2016
Inspection activities undertaken <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Review of relevant documents• Discussion with principal, deputy principal and key staff• Interaction with students	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Observation of teaching and learning during six class periods• Examination of students' work• Feedback to principal and relevant staff

MAIN FINDINGS

- The quality of teaching and learning was very good overall, with some examples of excellent practice and few areas for improvement.
- Student engagement was highest in lessons where the methodology chosen allowed students to be active learners.
- While aspects of the school's Transition Year (TY) are good the programme would benefit from a review.
- Whole-school support, including guidance, in TY is very good.
- The TY co-ordinator works hard to provide a valuable TY experience for students.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

- Teachers should encourage students to think, by exploiting their interests and enabling them to engage with the lesson content on a deeper level.
 - An assessment policy specific to TY should be developed and should include a portfolio of students' best work for end-of-year assessment.
 - A full review of the TY programme should be carried out.
 - The planning documentation should be better organised to facilitate smoother co-ordination of the various aspects of the TY programme.
 - A strong link between the TY co-ordinator, tutors and teachers in establishing systems to manage the programme and the students should be developed.
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INTRODUCTION

Ardcoil Rís is a voluntary Catholic secondary school with an enrolment of 524 boys. There are two TY class groups, although the demand for places far outweighs supply. The school is planning to extend its TY provision to three class groups.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

- The quality of teaching and learning was very good overall, with some examples of excellent practice and few areas for improvement. Lessons were well planned and prepared. In the best lessons, the activities allowed students to develop independent learning skills.
- A variety of methodologies was observed including the use of electronic presentations and video clips, group and pair work, measuring activities, singing, and conducting experiments. These were most effective when they were used in a way that encouraged students to think and facilitated good student discussion. In order to extend such very good practice it is recommended that teachers plan lessons that exploit students' interests and encourage them to engage with the learning on a deeper level.
- Student participation and engagement were highest in lessons where the methodology chosen allowed students to be active learners. The students demonstrated a preference for computer work, group work, and out-of-class activities and were observed to enjoy lessons more when these types of approaches were used.
- The atmosphere in all of the classrooms visited was relaxed. Students showed confidence and maturity in their interactions with each other and with their teachers in most lessons. In one lesson, there were minor instances of student misbehaviour.
- The good assessment practices noted in the evaluation included student presentations, project assessment, and very good monitoring and provision of advice to students as they worked in class. However, there is a need for the development of an assessment policy specific to TY. The range of assessment modes used should be extended to include a portfolio of students' best work for end-of-year assessment.

PROGRAMME PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- Aspects of the TY programme are good. The curriculum is appropriately structured around an academic core, optional subjects and subject specialisms. Students go on work experience in December and March and, in keeping with good practice, source employers in line with their interests.
- The TY programme has a very strong emphasis on promoting mental health, and the programme includes course work that is not on the Leaving Certificate programmes. While these are positive aspects, there is a need for a broader balance in the range of activities offered.
- TY in Ardscoil Rís has been running for a long time without formal review. There is a need for systems to be put in place to better organise some elements of the programme, for example the monitoring of students while on work experience. It is recommended that a full review of the TY programme be carried out with the aim of providing better curriculum balance and establishing systems to meet the demands of the increase in provision.

- Students have access to a wide range of co-curricular and extra-curricular activities to enhance learning and to facilitate personal development. Particularly valuable features of the TY are Capoeira, yoga, horse riding and fencing. It is recommended that the school considers a social awareness placement to enhance personal development and to further promote the school's Christian ethos.
- Whole-school support for TY is very good. Creativity in terms of subject material and lesson delivery is encouraged and facilitated. The resources for co-ordinating the programme and for teaching and learning, which include information and communications technology (ICT), are very good.
- There is good communication with parents of TY students throughout the year. Information evenings are arranged, parent-teacher meetings are held and regular reports are sent home. The TY year concludes with a graduation ceremony in which students are provided with the opportunity to showcase their work and achievements.
- Students complete interest inventories and career investigations as part of the guidance provision for TY. They are timetabled for one class period with the guidance counsellor per week. They described the benefits of the guidance support when choosing subjects for the Leaving Certificate and making decisions about their future as a particular advantage of participating in the programme.

PROGRAMME PLANNING, CO-ORDINATION AND EVALUATION

- It is good practice that the TY programmes of work for each subject include material that is not on the certificate examination syllabuses. However, it is recommended that the subject plans be reviewed to ensure a stronger focus on essential skills development. They could include, for example, the development of reading, writing, oral and presentation skills in the languages and problem solving, investigation and discovery in Mathematics and the sciences. The existing programme of work for TY English provides a very good example of a course designed to develop skills using a diverse range of content and subject material.
- The TY planning folder was found to be disorganised and difficult to navigate. The planning documentation should include all of the relevant policies, subject plans, and activity and module descriptors. Details on managing work experience, outside speakers and external course providers should be included. The planning documentation should also facilitate a co-ordinated approach to managing changes in TY teachers where this occurs.
- The TY co-ordinator works hard to provide a valuable experience for students. However, there is a need to provide a structure to facilitate a sharing of the workload. Therefore, the role of the TY tutors should be strengthened, with perhaps the provision of a tutor period on the timetable. There should also be a strong link between the co-ordinator, the TY tutors and TY teachers in establishing systems to manage the programme and the students. Work experience should be monitored through the completion of student portfolios and through teachers contacting employers while the students are on work placement.
- The success of the TY programme is evaluated through student, parent and staff surveys. The programme has seen only minor changes for many years and there is little evidence to suggest that the programme is substantially informed from year-to-year by these surveys. Different methodologies are used in teaching and learning in TY. It is recommended that students be surveyed about these methodologies and about how they affect their learning.

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 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 of Ard Scoil Rís welcomes the broadly positive report from the Transition Year evaluation and is pleased with its findings. The Board is pleased that the work of the TY coordinator has been acknowledged and that the quality of teaching and learning in Transition Year has been commended by the Inspectorate. The Board is happy with the fairness of the report and looks forward to using it as a valuable source of reflection in its review of the 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

At the time of Inspection, the Transition Year programme was already under review through a series of meetings between the principal, the deputy principal and the Transition Year coordinator. The school will conduct an annual review of the programme as a means to updating content of the programme. The school will introduce a tutor system for Transition Years in 2016 to work alongside the coordinator and the deputy principal in sharing the various duties which are central to the success of the programme. The school will develop a specific assessment policy for Transition year in consultation with the teachers of Transition Year. All this will be conducted in 2016 and will be reviewed periodically as the programme evolves.