

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

**Programme Evaluation
Junior Certificate Schools Programme
REPORT**

**Greenhills College, Limekiln Avenue,
Dublin 12
Roll number: 70130I**

Date of inspection: 30 September 2015



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

REPORT ON THE QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN THE JUNIOR CERTIFICATE SCHOOLS PROGRAMME (JCSP)

INFORMATION ON THE PROGRAMME EVALUATION

Dates of inspection	29 and 30 September 2015
Inspection activities undertaken <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Review of relevant documents• Discussion with principal and key staff• Interaction with students	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Observation of teaching and learning during five class periods and observation of a tutor class• Examination of students' work• Feedback to principal and relevant staff

MAIN FINDINGS

- In the minority of lessons the quality of teaching and learning was very good with scope for development noted in the majority of lessons.
- In a few lessons there was an emphasis on students taking ownership of their learning where problem-solving and decision-making skills were promoted.
- Management is very supportive of the JCSP through the appropriate deployment of teaching staff and the creation of a core JCSP team.
- Some very good Assessment for Learning (AfL) strategies were noted but there is scope for further implementation of these strategies.
- A broad and balanced curriculum and a range of co-curricular and extra-curricular activities to enhance learning are available for JCSP students.
- There was some excellent use of cross-curricular approaches particularly in the 'Make a Book' initiative.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

- Teachers should avail of in-service training for JCSP, to enhance their understanding of the principles of the programme while accessing the most appropriate teaching strategies for the students.
 - Individual and subject department planning should be improved, with JCSP statements at the core of such plans.
 - Teachers should gain a greater understanding of the rationale for AfL strategies in order to integrate them more fully into their teaching.
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INTRODUCTION

Greenhills College is an all-boys post-primary school that operates under the auspices of Dublin and Dun Laoghaire, Education and Training Board. The school has 179 mainstream post-primary students and a large further education section. The school offers the Junior Certificate, Junior Certificate Schools Programme (JCSP), the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme and the established Leaving Certificate. Transition Year is not offered in the school. The school participates in DEIS, the Department's initiative to deliver equality of opportunity in schools. The focus of this report is on the JCSP.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

- The quality of teaching and learning was very good in a minority of lessons with scope for development noted in the majority of lessons.
- Features of very good practice included: prior preparation for the lesson; the establishment of clear learning intentions; use of methodologies that successfully catered for the students' abilities, and an appropriate selection of resources. Where these practices were observed there were high levels of student engagement in learning and progress was very good. For example, during one lesson students worked to complete a volume question using real life resources, such as soft drinks cans. They then used this information to draw conclusions and were guided through the activity by very effective teacher questioning.
- In less effective lessons, learning intentions were unclear; teacher-led instruction dominated and resulted in insufficient progress being made by students. It is recommended that the learning intentions are explicit, that an appropriate range of methodologies is used to support learning while ensuring that student learning is progressed in all lessons. There was scope for the inclusion of a wider range of resources other than, for example, the textbook. This should facilitate more active involvement by students.
- In the lessons where effective use was made of higher-order questioning strategies, frequent use was made of questions such as "why" or "what do you think?". In this way students were engaged in their learning and were required to provide justification for their answers.
- In many lessons, less effective use was made of recall type questions. In some lessons, teachers did not use an appropriate range of questions to check students' readiness to progress with new material. It is therefore recommended that teachers ensure that greater use of more challenging questioning strategies be used, thereby encouraging students to share in the responsibility for their learning.
- Global questions were over used in many lessons resulting in some students becoming passive or disengaged in their learning. It is therefore recommended that teachers plan to include a balance between global and individual questions so that all students have an opportunity to contribute more in lessons.
- There was evidence of some very good examples of formative feedback in student copybooks. An excellent example of such feedback was noted in the use of the "test copy" where combinations of assessment strategies are used including self-reflection. Peer review was very effectively used during a poetry lesson where students critiqued each other's work. Such AfL strategies should be used in all classes.

- The learning environment was enhanced by a range of displays including JCSP keywords posters and the “word of the week”. The weekly maths puzzle was displayed prominently in the school promoting a whole-school approach to literacy and numeracy initiatives.
- The alternative classroom configuration already in use in some classrooms in the school should be more readily used by all teachers to support the use of collaborative learning opportunities while promoting the development of oral literacy among students.
- Classroom behaviour overall was very good. In some lessons, students were less attentive and became distracted primarily due to insufficient challenge within the lesson.

PROGRAMME PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- A relatively new senior management team is in place in the school. They along with the core JCSP team and some members of the school staff demonstrated very good understanding of the principles underpinning the JCSP.
- As there was evidence that not all teachers were as familiar with the overall operations or principles of the programme, whole-staff in-service in the JCSP should be prioritised. In this way, all staff should have a clearer understanding of their individual responsibility in the successful delivery and implementation of the JCSP in the school.
- The selection criteria for selecting students for the JCSP are clearly documented. Commendably, all junior cycle students have opportunities to experience aspects of the programme including out-of-school activities, with profiling reserved for students in the target groups.
- A broad and balanced curriculum and a range of co-curricular and extra-curricular activities to enhance learning are available for JCSP students. Samples of books made during JCSP initiatives were exhibited in classrooms, demonstrating excellent use of a cross-curricular approach.
- A significant number of teaching staff is deployed to support all students at junior cycle, which results in the creation of small classes. Team-teaching is also facilitated. In order to further support teaching and learning, teachers should avail of in-service in this area.
- Events to celebrate students’ success on completion of the programme are to be commended and could usefully be extended to include all JCSP students at intervals throughout the school year from first year. This could also serve to promote the profile of the programme in the school.

PROGRAMME PLANNING, CO-ORDINATION AND EVALUATION

- The overall coordination of the programme is very good. This year a core team has been established and a weekly team meeting has been scheduled. Commendably, the core team has identified two targets for progression this year: planning and policy updating and review of the selection criteria for JCSP.
- Minutes of meetings are retained and opportunities to update staff are facilitated at staff meetings and through the dedicated staff noticeboard.
- Heretofore, one profiling meeting was arranged for third-year JCSP students. As profiling is a key requirement of the JCSP, more regular monitoring and tracking of students’ progress should be prioritised by management. A review of students’ statements retained

by individual teachers indicates some poor practices. The aforementioned whole-staff in-service in relation to JCSP should also address this area.

- Subject department planning documentation reviewed during the evaluation was mostly unsatisfactory. All subjects departments should review and update plans with JCSP statements embedded into yearly schemes of work. Subject departments should also use the available diagnostic data to inform planning.

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