Programme Evaluation
Junior Certificate Schools Programme
REPORT

Riversdale Community College,
Blanchardstown Road North, Dublin 15

Roll number: 70081V

Date of inspection: 5 February 2016
REPORT ON THE QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN JUNIOR CERTIFICATE SCHOOLS PROGRAMME

INFORMATION ON THE PROGRAMME EVALUATION

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MAIN FINDINGS

• In the majority of lessons, the quality of teaching and learning was very good.

• A range of very effective teaching and questioning was used in most lessons.

• Students participating in Junior Certificate School Programme (JCSP) are provided with a broad and balanced curriculum.

• The move from dedicated JCSP class groups to mixed-ability class groupings has resulted in an increase in the number of teachers teaching the JCSP.

• Very good opportunities are afforded to students to access and participate in activities and initiatives that support JCSP.

• Senior management provides very good support for JCSP.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

• Differentiated teaching methodologies and questioning strategies should be used more often to ensure that all students are challenged.

• Formal JCSP core team meetings should take place regularly and minutes of meetings should be kept.

• As more teachers are delivering the JCSP, management should facilitate regular inputs for the dissemination of information on staff meeting agendas and identify further whole-staff training about teaching approaches for the successful delivery of the programme.

• Regular review and updating of the plan and programme should be undertaken.
INTRODUCTION

Riversdale Community College is a co-educational school that operates under Dublin and Dun Laoghaire, Education and Training Board. The school participates in DEIS, the action plan of the Department of Education and Skills for educational inclusion and has an enrolment of 364 post-primary students. The school offers the Junior Certificate, the JCSP, Transition Year, the established Leaving Certificate, the Leaving Certificate Applied and the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme. A home-school-community-liason (HSCL) co-ordinator works in the school.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

- In the majority of lessons teaching and learning were very good, with some excellent practice observed. In one lesson there was scope for development in aspects of classroom practice.

- Optimal student engagement was observed in lessons where learning intentions were clearly communicated, a clear plan for the lesson was established and the most effective methodologies were selected.

- Resources used in lessons included teacher-prepared materials, flash cards and matching exercises. Of particular note was the excellent use of information and communications technology in lessons providing a visual aid to support and scaffold student learning.

- Very effective teaching methods observed included problem-solving strategies and consolidation activities. Group work was most successful when the purpose for the activity was clearly identified and students had specific roles and responsibilities. Where further scope for improvement in group activity was noted, teachers should differentiate the task ensuring that sufficient progress can be achieved by individuals and collectively by the group.

- In some lessons, very effective use was made of the higher-order probing questions that allowed for a deep development of the lesson topic. Effective practice was observed where students’ answers were redirected by the teachers to the entire class and used as a learning opportunity for all. In a small minority of lessons greater use of differentiated questioning is recommended to challenge all students appropriately.

- Students were very well behaved in all lessons. The learning environment was enhanced with student-developed displays and some commercially-sourced materials. However, as many classrooms were configured in a traditional layout an alternative setting is recommended in order to further promote and support collaborative learning opportunities.

- Very good attention was paid to keywords in all lessons. Teachers regularly referenced and checked keywords and encouraged students to use the word in context. This is very good practice.

- A review of students’ copybooks indicates that some teachers provide detailed written feedback to their students with other teachers using JCSP stickers indicating good work. However, it is recommended that teachers implement the consistent practice of providing written formative feedback on student work to provide specific guidance for the learners in how to improve their work.
PROGRAMME PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- The JCSP is very well supported by management. However, this year a number of anomalies in relation to the timetabling of JCSP have been identified, management should work towards addressing these in future timetabling.

- In keeping with the ethos of the programme, mixed-ability class groupings have been introduced and JCSP students are integrated fully with students who are not following the programme.

- Clear criteria for selecting students for JCSP have been developed and approved by the board of management. A broad range of subject choices is available to JCSP students in the school.

- A significant range of extra-curricular and co-curricular activities and initiatives is arranged for JCSP students. Intrinsic in the success of these initiatives is the invaluable support that the school receives from the services of a full-time librarian available through the JCSP demonstration library initiative. In addition, initiatives such as Numeracy and Literacy Accelerated programmes and “Make a Book” are impacting positively on student attainment and progress.

- The promotion of the programme is undertaken in a number of ways through the school open night and by visits to the local primary school undertaken by the HCSL co-ordinator, the JCSP coordinator and the JCSP librarian.

- Very good strategies have been developed in the school to communicate with parents. These include a JCSP newsletter, the school’s biannual “Dale News”, formal school reports, parent-teacher meetings and positive communication via JCSP postcards sent to the students’ homes.

- Graduation events are organised to celebrate student success and coffee mornings are also arranged for parents. The HSCL co-ordinator makes home visits in order to support parents regarding the education of their children. It is recommended that the school develop a system of formalising the feedback from parents and students which should be used in the ongoing review and updating of the JCSP.

PROGRAMME PLANNING, CO-ORDINATION AND EVALUATION

- Time allocated to the JCSP is very good. There are two co-ordinators each of whom has responsibility for different aspects of the programme. It is recommended that their specific roles and responsibilities be identified and clearly documented.

- A large core team is in place. The core team meets irregularly and many of these meetings take place on a one-to-one basis or in small groups. While the level of liaison between members of the core team is very good, it is recommended that formal core team meetings be arranged on a regular basis.

- Student profiling is currently completed via an electronic spreadsheet. As there has been an increase in the numbers of teachers involved in the delivery of the programme more regular structured profiling meetings should be considered. More regular inputs on staff meetings’ agendas should also be facilitated and training for staff who are new to the teaching of JCSP should be accessed.
• A JCSP plan is in place and includes organisational details of the programme and initiatives undertaken in the programme. The JCSP plan should be reviewed and updated to ensure that there is greater distinction between the numeracy and literacy aspects of the DEIS plan and the JCSP plan. The programme should be reviewed regularly with views of all stakeholders considered.

• Department schemes of work reviewed during the evaluation, could usefully be updated to include the subject statements embedded with specific subject topics. Individual teacher planning for lessons was mostly very good and based on the overall subject department 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 accepts the report as the final inspection report available for publication and does not wish to respond formally to the report.

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