An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Programme Evaluation
Transition Year
REPORT

Schull Community College
County Cork
Roll number: 71102I

Date of inspection: 3 March 2015
REPORT ON THE QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN TRANSITION YEAR

INFORMATION ON THE PROGRAMME EVALUATION

<table>
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<th>Dates of inspection</th>
<th>3 and 4 March 2015</th>
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<td>Inspection activities undertaken</td>
<td>• Observation of teaching and learning during seven class periods</td>
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<td>• Examination of students’ work</td>
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<td>• Feedback to principal, deputy principal and relevant staff</td>
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<td>• Review of relevant documents</td>
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<td>• Discussion with principal and key staff</td>
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<td>• Interaction with students</td>
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MAIN FINDINGS

- Teaching and learning, in the wide range of learning settings observed, was very good.
- The integration of a range of assessment modes to assess students’ learning within the programme is a key strength.
- A Transition Year (TY) programme of excellent quality is provided to students.
- A high quality TY curriculum includes core subjects, subject sampling, specific modules, social and vocational activities, and a range of additional experiences for students.
- The coordination and leadership of the programme is of very high quality.
- A culture of planning and evaluation that focuses on the needs of students, informs the ongoing development of the programme.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

- An agreed written assessment policy should be developed to formalise and standardise current very effective assessment practice across the programme.
- A core team, to support the work of the coordinator, should be developed to sustain and progress the programme into the future.
INTRODUCTION

Schull Community College is the sole second-level education provider on the Mizen Peninsula in West Cork. This co-educational school, under the joint trusteeship of Cork Education and Training Board (ETB) and the Diocese of Cork and Ross, has a current enrolment of 441 students. The Junior Certificate, a compulsory TY programme, the Leaving Certificate and the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP) are offered to students.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

- Very good quality teaching and learning experiences were observed, in a range of learning settings, during this TY evaluation. Activities observed included: very good quality engagements with French film; statistical analysis of data sets using laptop computers; a focus on the language of poetry; discussion towards action on human rights issues; engagement with research skills; discussion of health and safety in preparation for work experience and a practical first aid course. In all cases, individual lessons were very well planned, prepared and presented to students.

- Lessons were predominantly student centred and the teacher acted as facilitator in the co-construction of understanding for students. Discussion, co-operative-learning strategies and individual responses to stimuli, underpinned lessons. Stimulus materials in a variety of forms, whether visual, textual or numerical, challenged students to respond. These responses were both individual and collaborative, in oral and in written form, and, in many cases, focused on the preparation of projects. A further emphasis on questioning strategies, in a small number of lessons, should be considered.

- TY lessons had clear and established routines in relation to lesson structure and coherence. In all cases, it was clear to students how their planned learning was structured and paced and how the outcomes of their learning would be assessed. Students were clearly enthusiastic for all the experiences observed, and they worked together in learning settings that were underpinned by positivity, challenge and variety.

- Teachers’ practice in all learning settings clearly reflected an enthusiasm for the programme and for the opportunities it provided in the context of curriculum, pedagogy and assessment. Within the lessons observed, it was clear that the teaching and learning experiences provided to students were situated within a clear, agreed and articulated whole-school philosophy for TY.

- Assessment and learning are highlighted throughout the programme. Student-focused ongoing assessment is the norm, and it is very positive that there is very limited engagement with terminal examinations. The range of assessment events is provided with different mark weightings that allow the range of skills utilised by students to be both assessed and accredited. The central focus is on the ongoing assessment of students’ work in the form of reports, projects and presentations. Students receive regular feedback on this work. The integration of assessment modes within lessons, and across the wider programme, is a key strength. An agreed written assessment policy should now be developed to formalise and standardise these very effective assessment practices.

- Portfolio assessment, based on a small number of artefacts selected by students, is combined with an interview to provide an overall assessment and accreditation of students’ engagement, participation and achievement within the programme. Students also have the opportunity to be certified in particular activities including Young Social
Innovators (YSI), the Young Scientist exhibition, the European Computer Driving Licence (ECDL), in sailing instruction and in a range of other activities.

**PROGRAMME PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT**

- A TY programme of excellent quality is provided for students. The programme is grounded in TY philosophy and arises from an emphasis on providing a rounded and meaningful experience for students to support their personal, academic and social development, and on providing exposure to life, community and citizenship perspectives.

- Timetable provision for the programme facilitates a significant element of choice for students. Students study English, Gaeilge, Mathematics and either French or German as their core curriculum. Physical Education and Religious Education are also provided. A seven-week subject-sampling period allows students to experience the range of optional Leaving Certificate subjects available to them. Modular, activity, work experience, and specific-event layers, complete the extensive programme. Students are also offered participation in a range of complementary activities that include a musical production, sailing, skiing, film-making, Gaisce: the President’s Award, and a friends of the elderly programme.

- A strong Guidance element within the programme combines meaningful and scaffolded work experience with educational guidance to inform subject choice as students’ transition to Leaving Certificate. Students are also well supported within the programme in the context of whole-school pastoral structures and supports for the inclusion of students with additional educational needs.

**PROGRAMME PLANNING, CO-ORDINATION AND EVALUATION**

- The coordinator has provided engaged, active, and reflective high quality leadership of the programme over a prolonged period. This leadership has ensured the quality and dynamic nature of the programme, the enthusiasm of the wider teaching team and the ongoing support of senior school management. A core team to support the work of the coordinator should now be established to sustain and progress the programme into the future.

- Comprehensive planning at whole-programme and at individual teacher level is clearly evident and is expressed in an active TY plan that articulates a reflective rationale for the overall programme and for the individual elements that make up the whole.

- A culture of evaluation also informs the ongoing development and sustainability of the programme. The outcomes of an overall programme review in 2011 resulted in a number of changes. Annual staff and student reviews since that time have also resulted in curricular and associated staffing changes including the introduction of research skills, interview techniques, ECDL, Gaisce: the President’s Award, the friends of the elderly programme, and a food safety module.

The draft findings and recommendations arising out of this evaluation were discussed with the principal, deputy principal and the programme co-ordinator 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.