An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

Programme Evaluation
TRANSITION YEAR
REPORT

St Mary’s Secondary School
Charleville, County Cork
Roll number: 62450H

Date of inspection: 25 April 2016
REPORT ON THE QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN TRANSITION YEAR

INFORMATION ON THE PROGRAMME EVALUATION

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dates of inspection</th>
<th>25 &amp; 26 April 2016</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Inspection activities undertaken</strong></td>
<td><strong>Observation of teaching and learning during eight class periods</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Review of relevant documents</td>
<td>• Examination of students’ work</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Discussion with principal, deputy principal and key staff</td>
<td>• Feedback to principal, deputy principal and relevant staff</td>
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<td>• Interaction with students</td>
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MAIN FINDINGS

- Teaching and learning of very high quality, which prioritised the development of the individual student, through experience, active participation and reflection, was observed in lessons.

- Assessment practices are a key strength of the programme.

- An excellent Transition Year (TY) programme is provided.

- Feedback presentations from students that facilitated them to reflect on, and to distill, key learning from work experience, is a key strength of the programme.

- Individual teacher planning, collaborative subject planning, whole-school programme planning and programme evaluation combine very effectively to inform and sustain the quality of the students’ experience of the programme.

- The quality of the programme reflects the very effective and sustained leadership of the coordinator that is supported by the senior-management team.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

- To sustain the very good assessment practices, the teaching team should now develop an assessment policy for all subjects, and all experiences provided to students.
INTRODUCTION
St Mary’s is a voluntary secondary school for girls, informed by the ethos of the Congregation of the Sisters of Mercy schools, and managed under the trusteeship of Catholic Education: An Irish Schools Trust (CEIST). The school has a current enrolment of 401 students. Of these, 61 students are engaged in the optional TY programme. On completion of the programme, TY students can progress to the established Leaving Certificate, or to the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP).

TEACHING AND LEARNING
• Teaching and learning of very high quality that prioritised the development of the individual student through experience, active participation and reflection, was observed in lessons. Students responded very positively to the opportunities offered in the lessons observed and were assertive, courteous and confident in their interactions with their peers and teachers.

• Classroom practices were student-focused, practical and skills-based. These ensured that all students were active and engaged with very few passive students in evidence. The balance between teacher inputs and the responsibility placed on students to collaborate and to complete tasks was very appropriately balanced in favour of student engagement and participation. This reflects a very good philosophical basis for TY classroom practice.

• The classroom practices observed reflected very good quality lesson planning by teachers and a belief in the value of TY specific experiences for students, both as individuals and as learners. The lessons observed had clear learning intentions that were shared with students and were centered on collaborative activities leading to the completion, and to the presentation, of projects, models, individual and group oral presentations, and to the completion of very well-scaffolded tasks.

• Modules observed included a very appropriate and novel TY experience involving students in house design and in building a model of their design choice. Other lessons engaged students in a self-directed computer-skills programme while, other students completed a detailed and very well-organised laboratory experiment in Biology. An English lesson had students engaged in an excellent, enjoyable, and reflective task relating to memoir, while a team-teaching activity involved the whole TY cohort in very well-organised and focused mini-company enterprises.

• The outcomes of these activities, as reflected in: the quality of students’ work; their classroom engagement with tasks; the quality of the projects displayed; the presentations made and the quality of the student portfolios examined in the course of the evaluation, were very good.

• Assessment processes are fully reflective of the very positive TY culture in the school and emphasise individual and group tasks that are assessed based on participation and outcome. The portfolio assessment process that reflects participation in the whole programme, and includes an interview, facilitates assessment of students’ personal development and growth through their engagement with the experiences provided. This is very good practice and is demanding of teachers’ time. To sustain the very good
assessment practices, the teaching team should now develop an assessment policy for all subjects and student experiences at programme level.

PROGRAMME PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- The TY team in St Mary's provides an excellent TY programme for students. It is structured in line with best practice and is underpinned by a philosophy that focuses on the personal, social and academic development of students as they transition from junior cycle into senior cycle.

- The programme is optional in the school and access is open to all third-year students based on their interest and on that of their parents. The costs of the programme are regularly reviewed, are shared with parents, and payment is facilitated in stages and through an on-line payments system. It is clear that the current cost of the programme is not a barrier to participation by students. As enrolment in the programme has increased recently, the development of clear admissions criteria for the programme, to be included in the schools admissions policy, is recommended.

- Key aspects of the programme are in place including the core and subject sampling layers. A subject-choice process is provided late in the year to allow students to make informed choices of Leaving Certificate subjects. The provision of interesting and innovative modules and a range of TY-specific activities, ranging from mountain-biking to hat-making, and from Gaisce: The President’s Award to Chinese studies, further enhance this high-quality programme provision.

- Timetable provision is very good. The role of programme coordinator is linked to the role of year head and the associated work of class tutors. This very effectively connects the programme to whole-school pastoral care and student-support processes.

- Work experience is very well structured and organised. It maximises local opportunities and yet allows students the freedom to organise interesting and innovative placements. The structuring of feedback from students, in the form of individual and group presentations, that facilitates them to reflect and distill key learning from their work experiences, is a key strength of the programme.

PROGRAMME PLANNING, CO-ORDINATION AND EVALUATION

- A very good quality TY plan informs the students’ experience of the programme. Planning for individual lessons and subject planning for TY reflects the whole-school culture and rationale for the programme that is grounded in providing a broad educational experience that emphasises students’ social, personal, vocational and educational development towards creating autonomous, participative and responsible citizens.

- The process of scaffolding of students’ personal, social and academic development is achieved through formal reflection and evaluation of the programme based on gathering students expectations of the programme in advance, and through facilitating students to reflect on how these expectations are to be realised, as they progress through the programme. These reflective and evaluative practices that include parents, teachers, and
the students themselves, are a further key strength of the programme.

- The sustained quality and resilience of the programme reflect the very high-quality leadership of the co-ordinator, and the vision and support for the programme provided by the principal and deputy principal. The commitment of the large teaching team to the visibility and culture of TY in the school has clearly supported the work of the co-ordinator over a prolonged period.

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Appendix

SCHOOL RESPONSE TO THE REPORT

Submitted by the Board of Management
Area 1  Observations on the content of the inspection report

The inspection report concentrated on key skills that reflect TY ethos and its findings were in line with our own high opinions of the programme in our school. We are pleased that the quality and excellence of the programme shone through and that this was strongly noted. We found the entire experience both affirming and motivating as a staff.

Area 2  Follow-up actions planned or undertaken since the completion of the inspection activity to implement the findings and recommendations of the inspection.

- Only recommendations: “develop an assessment policy for all subjects”.
- For 2016-17 school year we have identified ‘Assessment’ as our school development strand. We have begun work by taking the following steps:
  1. Principal presentation to whole staff on AFL/AOL in our school.
  2. Subject areas given survey/self-evaluation sheets to complete and return.
  3. This evidence to be compiled, shared and utilised for next-step planning purposes.
  4. Draft Assessment Policy to be drawn from this and developed by end 2017.