

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

**Programme Evaluation
Transition Year**

REPORT

**Scoil Chuimsitheach Chiaráin,
An Cheathrú Rua
County Galway
Roll Number: 81012N**

Date of inspection: 19 May 2010



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

EVALUATION OF THE TRANSITION YEAR PROGRAMME

INTRODUCTION

This report has been written following an evaluation of the Transition Year (TY) in Scoil Chuimsitheach Chiaráin, An Cheathrú Rua, County Galway. It presents the findings of the evaluation and makes recommendations for the further development of the programme in the school. During the evaluation, the inspector held meetings with the school principal, a core group of teachers and with a small group of students. The evaluation was conducted over two days during which the inspector liaised extensively with the programme coordinator and visited classrooms to observe teaching and learning. The inspector provided oral feedback to teachers on lessons observed. The inspector also examined students' work and reviewed relevant documentation pertaining to the programme, as well as teachers' written preparation. The outcomes of the evaluation were discussed with the school principal and the programme coordinator at the end of the evaluation period.

Scoil Chuimsitheach Chiaráin is a co-educational Gaeltacht comprehensive school which has an enrolment of 312 students. The school offers Junior Certificate, Junior Certificate School Programme (JCSP), the TY, the Leaving Cert Vocational Programme (LCVP), the Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA), and the established Leaving Cert (LC). The school benefits from the supports provided through its participation in the Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) initiative. The TY programme was introduced for the first time in the school year 2009-2010. The programme is offered on a compulsory basis which is clearly set out in the school's admissions policy. A period of formal consultation with all stakeholders began in 2006 and commendably preceded the introduction of the programme. The board of management of the school 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.

1 QUALITY OF PROGRAMME ORGANISATION

1.1 Whole school support

The principal has a very good knowledge of the TY programme and issues surrounding its implementation and is a strong advocate for the TY programme and its development within the school. The introduction of the TY programme included much liaison between senior management and the second level support service (SLSS) in addition to two whole-staff planning days and a parent or guardian information evening given by a representative from the TY support service.

Currently there are 13 teachers involved in the delivery of TY. Minutes of staff meetings provide evidence of the extent of whole staff consultation regarding TY. TY teachers and other members of staff assist with and are supportive of many TY activities. It is intended that as TY develops in the school and new teachers join the programme, a teacher induction programme will be developed. This whole-school approach to supporting and implementing the programme is good practice.

A core team is in place which includes the TY coordinator and two members of the TY teaching team who are tutors to the TY class groups. This core team meet formally on a monthly basis. The principal liaises regularly with the TY coordinator on TY related issues.

1.2 Resources

The TY coordinator has no office space and there is no dedicated storage area for resources. As school resources allow, it is recommended that provision be made for such facilities. It was reported that an inventory of resources to support learning and teaching in TY has been compiled based on information available on www.transitionyear.ie. This list of resources should be included in TY plans so that each subject department's review of its subject plans is conducted in the context of the most recent support materials available. The increased awareness of the available TY resources among teachers should also promote cross-curricular approaches.

The TY programme benefits from a very good level of resource provision in terms of the provision of specialist rooms, access to audio-visual equipment and to information and communication technologies (ICT). The Transition Year students complete the seven modular components of the ECDL which are timetabled for two hours and forty minutes each week in the two designated computer room. Students expressed satisfaction with the integration of ICT in a number of modules and subjects. However it was evident that there is scope for the increased use of ICT in the delivery of subjects across the programme.

Staff members are appropriately assigned to teach all areas of study in the programme, according to their interests and qualifications. The programme offered includes the four layers of the TY programme, core subjects, subject sampling, specific TY modules and calendar events. All areas of study are timetabled concurrently for each TY group, a timetabling constraint that is not necessary and should be reviewed.

The TY coordinator has attended programme in-service over the past number of years. Members of the core team and TY teaching staff should also be extended the opportunity to avail of such training. It is recommended that attendance at such in-service should be rotated and matched to individuals' skills, interests, strengths and their role in the programme. In order to build capacity in relation to TY, the teachers comprising the core team should be rotated among staff members on an agreed basis. School management is commended for arranging input on general educational themes which assist in enhancing the delivery of all curricula in the school.

There is no formal annual student contribution for TY. Instead students fundraise to defray expenses incurred for certain activities included in the broad TY calendar. Students also pay for some activities themselves and are made aware of these expenses in advance in a coordinated manner. This practice is commended. It is recommended that parents be provided with a sample costing of the programme at the TY information evening prior to the commencement of the programme. This sample costing should also be included in the written plan.

1.3 Student selection and support

The TY programme is compulsory for all students who wish to progress to senior cycle. An orientation evening is held for students and parents preceding students' entry into TY and again in September when the TY programme begins. The details and benefits of the programme are outlined and a TY information leaflet is provided. It is recommended that the conditions for deriving the maximum benefits from TY be documented, and in the interest of strengthening partnership; form part of the discussion between the parents, students and the school at these orientation sessions.

There is an effective induction programme in place for TY students at the start of the year. As part of this students participate in a two-day trip to an adventure centre. This experience enables students to get to know each other through group activities and team exercises. Other supports which facilitate participation in TY include the daily availability of the TY coordinator, in the capacity of year head, who works in conjunction with the TY tutors who play a key role in supporting the care of this cohort within the context of a whole-school student-support system. It was evident from attendance at lessons that appropriate gender balance has been maintained in the formation of each class group. Management and staff are also commended for their ongoing efforts with parents or guardians to ensure good attendance and participation rates throughout the TY programme.

Each TY group is provided with one class of timetabled guidance per week. The guidance plan reviewed as part of the evaluation is inadequate as the scheme does not include an appropriate balance between the areas of personal and social development, educational guidance and career guidance, as outlined in Circular PPT 12/05. There is no detail on what diagnostic testing is carried out or when such is conducted during the TY year. It is recommended that the Differential Aptitude Tests (DATS) test be conducted early in the year to allow the outcomes of the DATS to inform student choices during work experience. There is no timetabled class for the preparation of students for work placements or to facilitate the necessary debriefing after the work experience period. While a plan for an employees and workers module was included in the documentation provided, there was no reference to work experience contained in this plan. It is recommended that an additional period of guidance be provided for TY students to improve the current guidance provision and to ensure that students derive the maximum benefits from work experience.

Students with special educational needs (SEN) are withdrawn in small groups for additional support. All teachers have received inservice on inclusion of SEN students within the mainstream setting and all TY teachers are made aware of the identified needs of these students. It is recommended that other methodologies outlined in the guidelines of the Department of Education and Science, *Inclusion of students with Special Educational Needs* and on www.sess.ie should be explored as alternative models of delivery.

Feedback from TY students in the course of the evaluation indicated that they were happy to be following the programme, and they articulated great satisfaction with the many benefits TY had afforded them. Students commented positively on their new class groupings for TY, they felt they had matured and gained confidence, and ‘come out of their shells’ through their TY experiences. Many students stated that they were more informed about senior-cycle subject options due to sampling subjects not previously studied. Students interviewed spoke about the perspectives and empathy they had gained with people in their communities outside school. Other positive benefits included improved social, communication, presentation, and ICT skills. The development of a greater sense of independence and responsibility was also attributed by the students to TY. Students were unanimous in their praise of the benefits and insights they had gained from their work placement experience.

1.4 Home-school links

Home-school interactions are of a good quality throughout the programme. There is frequent contact maintained with parents through information evenings, school reports, information letters, newsletters, invitations to school-based events, the school’s website and the TY end-of-year awards evening. Parental support for the work experience programme and for school competitions also facilitates further contact. Student absenteeism is reported to parents by telephone and letter.

It is recommended that earlier and a greater range of interventions be deployed in addressing student non-attendance. To this end the school calendar of events should be furnished to parents on a termly basis so that they are fully informed of planned activities for students. The acknowledgement of students' attendance in end-of-year certification could also be a positive motivating factor for students. The planned annual parent-teacher meeting for TY students was deferred from March to the end-of-year awards evening. It is recommended that this be reviewed and that the same status be afforded the TY parent-teacher meeting as for other year groups.

The introduction of the TY programme has positively impacted on links between the school and the community. The programme of TY activities has raised the image and profile of the school in the community and these TY initiatives have further developed loyalty to the school among both parents and students. Good links have been developed with local industries, businesses and services as part of the work experience programme. The TY students engage in a myriad of community based activities and events including voluntary community projects in conjunction with local care centres. Staff and students are commended for the many efforts made to establish and develop links with the local community.

2 QUALITY OF PROGRAMME PLANNING AND COORDINATION

2.1 Planning

The core planning team for TY meets formally on a monthly basis, and as necessary at other times during the year. Much informal communication also occurs and this has contributed significantly to the success of the programme. Minutes of formal meetings are maintained and provide evidence of the important part they play in enabling discussion of calendar events, the co-ordination of activity dates, the development of new initiatives as well as identifying challenges. It is recommended that areas for improvement identified at core-team meetings be prioritised and form the basis of an action plan over an agreed timeframe.

An up-to-date TY plan was made available for inspection. The mission, aims and rationale for the TY programme have been customised to the school and encapsulate the three overall aims of TY as set out in *Transition Year Programme, Guidelines for Schools*. This is good practice.

Long-term programme plans have been developed in each area of study and a common format similar to that outlined in the document *Writing the Transition Year Programme* is used in presenting the discrete subjects and modules. It is commendable that some subject programmes have tailored the subject objectives to dovetail with the overall aims of TY and have articulated these objectives in terms of learning outcomes for students. This good practice should be used in planning for all subjects and modules. In many of the subject plans made available, there is a need for more detailed information in relation to key areas such as subject matter to be covered, timeframes, resources, type and timing of assessments, links with other subjects, communication with the learning support team and the evaluation tools used to review subjects and modules. It is advised that this work be carried out in the context of the two TY-specific documents referred to above and the supplementary material available on the Second Level Support Service's website for TY at www.transitionyear.ie.

The organisational details section of the TY plan includes much useful information. It is recommended that this section be reviewed annually to include: contracts of learning, class lists of students, information on student attendance, duties and responsibilities of the coordinator and core-team members, correspondence with employers, and the results of programme evaluation.

2.2 Coordination

The TY programme is very well co-ordinated and benefits from the thorough knowledge and diligence of the TY coordinator who is committed to the ongoing enhancement of the programme. The coordinator's engagement with TY-specific inservice is also commended as are her inputs at staff meetings in relation to TY information. Formal programme co-ordinating structures are in place. The post of coordinator is linked to a post of responsibility and has a weekly four-hour time allocation for TY coordination purposes and year-head duties specific to TY. This time allocation is adequate. It is suggested, to further enhance the delivery of co-ordination duties, that consideration be given to the allocation of one class period per week for dissemination of information to the TY cohort.

Communication with senior management, staff, students, parents and the local community is a regular feature of the work of the TY coordinator and is carried out in an effective and timely manner. A TY notice board is maintained containing up-to-date programme information.

2.3 Curriculum

The school is commended for the provision of a broad curriculum complemented by a wide variety of calendar events in this the first year of the TY programme in the school. The four layers of the curriculum commendably foster personal, cultural, civic, social and vocational awareness as well as developing students' skills beyond the classroom. This is in keeping with the national TY ethos and with the aims set out in the school's TY plan.

The core subjects taken by all TY students include Irish, English, Mathematics, French, Religion, Physical Education (PE), and Guidance. All senior-cycle subjects offered by the school comprise the sampling layer. This is commended as it provides students with a broad educational experience which informs subject choice and can also help address any gender stereotyping that could influence uptake of particular subjects. A third layer in the curriculum gives students access to a complementary programme including a module to achieve the ECDL and a module timetabled as Life Skills. It was not clear from documentation reviewed what the exact purpose of the Life Skills module.

Short modules are also organised and include Media Studies, Soccer, Gaelic Football, Media Snackers, Safety at Sea and Film Studies. These courses offer enriching learning experience and foster links that are beneficial to all involved. However, because these activities are not timetabled, tuition time in timetabled areas of study is compromised. It is recommended that the core and sampling layer of the programme be reduced and that the time gained be included in the modular layer. In this way, the short courses referred to above will be included as modules in the timetable which will ensure all areas of study can complete planned activities with a maximum number of students present. It is also recommended that consideration be given to the appropriate re-naming of subjects and modules to reflect the different subject matter offered instead of using the names of the established Leaving Certificate subjects.

The curriculum is also complemented by a wide variety of calendar events which play a vital part in fulfilling the central aims of TY. Included in the calendar events are guest speakers on a stimulating range of topics, drama and drumming workshops, in-school exhibitions by external agencies, a variety of trips to activities and events and the many activities organised by the TY students for the school and the community. Another central element of calendar events are the opportunities afforded to students to become responsible and participative citizens through their voluntary work throughout TY with Tigh Nan Dooley and Bruach na Mara.

One week of work experience makes a key contribution to the vocational element of the programme. It was evident from students interviewed that they are encouraged to find a career sample work placement. This is in line with best practice. As the TY programme develops in the school, it is recommended that the school explores ways of adding to the work experience provision.

3 QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING

3.1 Planning and preparation

In some lessons very good short-term planning was observed which impacted positively on the structure, purpose and quality of student learning outcomes. However, in other lessons whilst preparation was noted in the teacher-generated materials, lessons lacked purposeful pace and targeted learning intentions. It is recommended that planning should focus on a number of learning outcomes in tandem with the duration of the lesson. This will ensure that the maximum learning benefit for the student is achieved within the timeframe of the lesson. Where focused planning characterised lesson delivery, continuity and clear links were established with previous learning and the link with future lessons was also shared with students. It was also clear that these lessons reflected the long-term planned teaching programme and provided for a meaningful and sequenced teaching and learning context. This is in line with good practice and should be a feature of all short-term lesson planning.

In some lessons the learning intentions were shared with students at the commencement of the lesson. It is recommended that this should be the practice in all lessons. The expected learning outcomes should outline what the student will be able to do or what the student will learn by the end of the lesson. It is further recommended that a debriefing session be conducted at the end of lessons identifying what has been learned and how the learning occurred. This will assist in building students understanding of themselves as learners and foster independent learning among the TY cohort of students.

3.2 Learning and teaching

A cross section of lessons was observed during the evaluation including core, sampling and modular study areas.

A varied range of methodologies was employed to deliver lesson content. The best lessons were characterised by a good balance between teacher input and the opportunities created for students to be active in their own learning. These lessons also expounded a mindfulness of the variety of learning styles present in all class groups. Good examples of group work and individual tasks were observed in a number of lessons. Very good practice was observed in an Art lesson where whole-class input was consolidated through the use of group work. Groups were of an appropriate size for the tasks set, each member of the group was assigned a particular task, a suitable timeframe was set for task completion and a structured debriefing session followed which afforded each group the opportunity to share their learning with the whole class. This good practice should be employed during group work in all areas of study. Group work was employed in a Business lesson. However the tasks assigned for group work did not have adequate content to ensure that appropriate and substantial learning was occurring. Some very good examples were observed of the use of resources to support learning. All lessons should seek to employ a range of resources

based on the different learning styles. It is recommended that the use of long lists of vocabulary, as observed in some lessons, be avoided.

In the majority of lessons classroom management was effective and discipline was sensitively maintained. Students' contributions were affirmed in a positive manner and their participation in lessons was encouraged. The students were co-operative in their work. In almost all cases they were engaged in the lesson and demonstrated the ability to apply their learning. Teachers did not have high expectations for student learning in the majority of lessons observed. It is imperative that students engage with new learning during all lessons and that the content challenges the range of abilities. In this regard, there is scope to develop a differentiated approach to teaching and learning and employ differentiation in questioning strategies, pair work and group work.

Irish was the medium of instruction in all lessons observed and good practices were observed in this regard. It is recommended that all teachers provide students with sufficient time to practice and become familiar with new terminology, in particular in relation to opportunities to practice vocabulary associated with the use of modern technology, aids and resources.

The provision of teacher-based classrooms is commended and some rooms had image-rich and print-rich learning environments. In all cases there is scope for the further development of the physical learning environments of all classrooms.

3.3 Assessment

Student progress in core, sample subjects and modular components was assessed using a combination of summative and formative assessment techniques. In a number of subject areas the assessment modes utilised allow for peer and self assessment. This approach is commended and its greater use is encouraged in all areas of study. In some subject areas students maintain a portfolio of work which provides a log of student learning. This practice is highly commended as it focuses on the learning process and should be considered as a worthwhile mode of assessment in all subject areas.

It was reported that a portfolio of excellence was also being maintained by the students. This practice is commended and in order to strengthen this assessment process, it is recommended that all areas of study detail procedures in relation to the portfolio of excellence and that a portfolio interview forms part of students' end-of-year assessment. Agreed criteria should be developed pertaining to the compilation of the folder of excellence across all areas of study. Once developed these criteria should be communicated to students over the year and that all students meet the coordinator in the course the year to discuss their progress in relation to the portfolio of excellence. The successful adherence to the criteria will also depend on the co-operation of teachers in the provision of three exemplars of best work from each subject area for the portfolio of excellence.

A range of other assessment techniques is used to assess students' skills and progress including practical work, projects and presentations. Further information in relation to AfL is available on the website of the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) at www.ncca.ie. The school has developed a comprehensive homework policy. It is recommended that this policy be reviewed to include practices in relation to homework during TY.

It is intended to collaboratively develop an accreditation system to acknowledge students' learning and engagement across the range of areas studied. Once developed this should be included in all

subject and module plans and communicated to the students. In the case of languages taught as part of the programme, the *European Language Portfolio*, a log of language learning, is recommended as a common approach to the learning and teaching of the languages. Information in this regard is provided at www.coe.int/portfolio.

Summative examinations are conducted twice during the school year for TY students and reports issue to homes based on these examinations. Student attainment in the areas of effort, progress, participation in activities and attendance form part of this communication with parents or guardians.

It is intended that an annual parent-teacher meeting be organised for the TY group of students. This meeting is strongly encouraged and it is suggested that students should also attend this meeting in the interest of promoting negotiated learning, a central tenet of the TY philosophy. Parents support TY events and attend the awards ceremony where student achievement is celebrated by the entire school community. TY certificates are graded with distinction, merit or pass. Students also receive separate certification in some of the modules and activities completed during the year.

4 SUMMARY OF STRENGTHS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT

The following are the main strengths identified in the evaluation:

- A whole-school approach to TY is fostered by senior management and the entire school community is kept fully informed regarding the TY programme.
- Good supports are in place for students during TY and students articulated great satisfaction with the many benefits TY had afforded them.
- There are good links between the school and students' parents and the introduction of the programme has impacted positively on links between the school and the community.
- The TY programme is very well co-ordinated and benefits from the thorough knowledge and diligence of the TY coordinator who is supported by a core team committed to the ongoing enhancement of the programme.
- Some subject programmes have tailored the subject objectives to dovetail with the overall aims of TY and have articulated these objectives in terms of learning outcomes for students.
- The school is commended for the provision of a broad curriculum complemented by a wide variety of calendar events which offer students a diverse range of learning opportunities.
- Very good teaching and learning methodologies were employed in some lessons.
- A variety of effective AfL assessment methods are employed in some areas of study.

As a means of building on these strengths the following key recommendations are made:

- It is recommended that the provision for guidance, the guidance plan and the diagnostic testing carried out during TY be reviewed.
- Long-term plans for the delivery of all areas of study require more detailed information in relation to key areas such as subject matter to be covered, timeframes, resources, type and timing of assessments, links with other subjects, communication with the learning support team and the evaluation tools used to review subjects and modules.

- To ensure all areas of study can complete planned activities with a maximum number of students present, it is recommended that some TY activities currently not timetabled be included on a modular basis in the timetable.
- It is recommended that adequate new learning occurs during all lessons in a purposeful manner and that the expected learning outcomes are differentiated so as to provide a challenge to all learners.
- It is recommended that the principles of AfL be adopted across all areas of study.

Appendix

SCHOOL RESPONSE TO THE REPORT

Submitted by the Board of Management

Area 1 Observations on the content of the inspection report

Fáiltíonn an Bord Bainistíochta roimh thuairisc na Roinne Oideachais agus Scileanna ar an meastóireacht a rinne an Chigireacht ar chlár na hIdirbhliana i Scoil Chuimsitheach Chiaráin.

Is tuairisc dhearfach í a dhearbhaíonn clár Idirbhliana na scoile mar chlár oideachais d'ardchaighdeán atá á eagrú agus á chomhordú go héifeachtach.

Molann an Bord dúthracht na foirne agus na bainistíochta i gcur chun cinn an chláir Idirbhliana.

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

Cuirfear moltaí na tuairisce san áireamh i bpleanáil agus i bhforbairt an chláir.

The following is a translation of the original school response submitted in Irish

Area 1 Observations on the content of the inspection report

The board of management welcomes this report from the Department of Education and Skills on the inspection of the transition year programme in Scoil Chuimsitheach Chiaráin.

This is a positive report that affirms the transition year programme provided in the school as a programme of high educational standards that is effectively organised and co-ordinated.

The board commends the diligence of the staff and management in progressing the development of the transition year programme.

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

The recommendations of this report will be included in the planning for and development of the programme.