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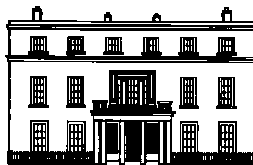
Department of Education and Skills

**Transition Year Programme Evaluation
REPORT**

**The Teresian School
12 Stillorgan Road, Donnybrook, Dublin 4**

Roll Number 60892G

Date of inspection: 15 February 2011



**A N R O I N N | D E P A R T M E N T O F
O I D E A C H A I S | E D U C A T I O N
A G U S S C I L E A N N A | A N D S K I L L S**

EVALUATION OF THE TRANSITION YEAR PROGRAMME

INTRODUCTION

This report has been written following an evaluation of the Transition Year (TY) programme in The Teresian School, Dublin. 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 and deputy principal, the TY core team, the TY co-ordinator and with a small group of students. The evaluation was conducted over two days during which the inspector liaised extensively with the programme co-ordinator 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, deputy principal and the programme co-ordinator at the end of the evaluation period.

The Teresian School introduced TY to its programme provision in 1987. The school offers TY as a compulsory programme. There is currently one class group of thirty students following the programme. The group is divided into two smaller groups for many subjects and modules. The stated mission of the TY programme in the school is 'to promote the personal, social, educational and career development of our students and to prepare them for their role as responsible members of society'. The mission is fulfilled through many aspects of the TY programme such as student participation in community work, work experience, Faith Education and An Gaisce. The board of management was given an opportunity to comment in writing on the findings and recommendations of the evaluation, and the response of the board will be found in the appendix to this report.

1 QUALITY OF PROGRAMME ORGANISATION

1.1 Whole school support

A whole-school approach to promoting and implementing the TY programme is fostered by senior management and this provides good direction in the development and implementation of TY in the school. The TY notice board displays information about significant TY events and competitions for students. The teaching staff is kept well informed regarding the TY programme in many ways such as the notice boards in the staffroom. It is praiseworthy that following a major review of the TY programme the school is planning to convene a TY day for the whole staff at the outset of the next school year. The school website could be developed to highlight significant aspects of the TY programme through photographs and articles.

Student achievement is celebrated by the whole school community at the TY night for parents. Students present an overview of their entire year's work, display projects and make a variety of presentations. This important event includes a formal presentation of TY certificates for participation in the programme and for achievement in TY curricular areas such as the European Computer Driving Licence (ECDL), First Aid, Law Day and Airfield House Day of Horticulture and Farm Studies. This is very good practice.

1.2 Resources

The different elements of the programme are appropriately timetabled. To provide greater diversity within the programme, consideration should be given to the further development of specific half-year or ten-week TY modules within the timetable. For the most part, staff is appropriately assigned to teach the programme. However, deployment of staff by senior management to some areas requires improvement. Staff development is critically important to any successful TY programme and senior management should ensure that staff development regarding TY is ongoing, including the provision of opportunities for all staff to develop and implement relevant TY programmes.

Information and communication technology (ICT) is utilised effectively in the planning and implementation of the programme. For example, there is internet access and a data projector in every classroom. It is praiseworthy that the school is planning to further upgrade ICT facilities within classrooms to include interactive boards. The TY co-ordinator maintains very good records and files pertaining to the programme.

School fees cover most costs incurred in participating in the programme. Some elements of the programme including trips, activity pursuits, aptitude testing and ECDL may incur an additional cost to parents.

1.3 Student selection and support

The school convenes a TY information evening for parents of third year students with input from the principal, deputy principal and TY co-ordinator. A very good booklet on the school's TY provision is distributed to parents. In addition, during the second term, an information evening is convened for parents of TY students regarding subject choice for Leaving Certificate. Students stated that they were better prepared in making an informed choice of subjects for senior cycle having experienced subject sampling in TY. This is praiseworthy.

Guidance is integrated into the TY programme. The programme outlined supports students in acquiring competence in career exploration, in developing realistic personal goals, knowledge of self, others and society as a whole and in assessing and interpreting information related to abilities, interests, skills and achievements. These are worthy objectives. Students are further supported through their completion of the Cambridge Occupational Analysis and Eirquest Aptitude Test. It is praiseworthy that each student is offered an individual appointment to discuss their personal results. Students are also supported by participation in a careers evening which is organised with the assistance of the school's parents council.

Students with additional needs are very well supported. For example, the school provides lessons in English as an additional language to international students at the outset of each year to facilitate integration.

Student attendance and punctuality are closely monitored by the class teacher, TY co-ordinator and by school management. Student progress in this regard is also monitored by subject teachers and is outlined in the student's personal development report. This is very good practice.

1.4 Home-school links

Senior management, the TY co-ordinator and the TY class teacher maintain close links with parents throughout the year. TY parents are kept well informed of upcoming events. For example,

parents receive a weekly email from the TY co-ordinator outlining the TY schedule for the following week. This is very good practice. Parents are invited to significant meetings and events throughout the year as outlined earlier in this report. A parent-teacher meeting is convened for parents of TY students. It is praiseworthy that the school is giving consideration to having the student present at this meeting. This may also be an opportunity to strengthen student self-assessment within TY. Parents, for their part, support TY in the school in many ways, helping with work experience placements and with extra-curricular activities.

2 QUALITY OF PROGRAMME PLANNING AND COORDINATION

2.1 Planning

The school has a good level of planning in place. The TY core team consists of the TY co-ordinator, the TY class teacher, the principal and deputy principal. Members of the core team meet formally twice during the year to plan, implement and evaluate the programme. Minutes of core team meetings reveal the good extent of planning and review measures in place. For example, at a recent core team meeting the aspects of TY that work well were identified together with those areas in need of revision. This is very good practice.

The TY written plan comprises of an introductory section outlining the school's TY mission and how it promotes the Teresian ethos. In addition, aspects of the school's code of behaviour are outlined and how the code is applied to TY. A brief summary of the wide range of activities in the TY programme is included. TY assessment strategies are outlined. Individual subject and module plans are briefly outlined under the headings personal development and learning outcomes. While the TY plan provides an overview of the programme, it is incomplete and not fully in line with Department guidelines. Individual subject plans examined are inconsistent in their adherence to the subject plan template for TY. Some TY subjects are not included in the current plan. Therefore the TY plan should be further developed and reviewed

In particular, each subject department should meet to review its TY planning and should develop an appropriate subject plan using the common template outlined in Department guidelines. Areas in need of attention include teaching and learning strategies, cross-curricular planning, review, evaluation and modes of assessment. The content of some TY subject programmes should be re-evaluated to ensure that there is a suitable balance between core academic material and innovative TY material. The TY plan should be developed as a single cohesive and current document with all of the areas in the guidelines addressed, including organisational details and self-evaluation measures. To further develop the TY planning process, it is suggested that the school considers developing some transition units. This would also help to enhance cross-curricular provision in the future. Details of transition units including a teachers' handbook and sample units can be accessed on the website of the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) www.ncca.ie/transitionunits.

The school outlined very good self-evaluation measures for TY which include comments gathered from students and parents by means of questionnaires. The self-evaluation measures in place have had a positive effect on the delivery and implementation of the TY programme. For example, the entire TY programme was reviewed and remodelled in 2009 following extensive feedback from the whole school community. Students indicated a very good level of satisfaction with the school's TY programme in the course of the evaluation.

2.2 Co-ordination

TY co-ordination duties are extensive and are carried out very effectively in a committed and focused way. Formal co-ordinating structures are in place and are operating effectively. Together with co-ordination duties, the TY co-ordinator takes responsibility for assessment, reporting, evaluation and planning for TY on an ongoing basis.

Currently, the post of programme co-ordinator is privately paid by the school with one and a half hours allocated in lieu of TY duties. The co-ordinator has regular class contact with TY students and as class tutor maintains good communication with them. In the current year, there is no designated class co-ordination time. It is therefore recommended that consideration be given to timetabling a class period for this purpose in future years. The TY co-ordinator's communication with parents, senior management, teaching staff and the whole school community is also good. For example, there is a weekly meeting scheduled with the principal, and a meeting with the senior management team during the pre-examinations to review long term planning. There are ongoing informal meetings with the TY class teacher to discuss discipline and pastoral issues that may arise. The co-ordinator's mid-year report to the board of management is very good practice. Resources including ICT are used effectively in the co-ordination of the programme.

2.3 Curriculum

The TY students are provided with a broad and varied curriculum. They are encouraged to build on their skills and achievements and to prepare for senior cycle and their future role in society. Needs, interests and abilities of students are prioritised and active learning, group work and teamwork have been successfully integrated into the TY programme. The support and encouragement given by teachers to students to participate in out-of-school activities and competitions has proven to be particularly effective. For example, environmental awareness is taught through many modules including the ECO-UNESCO project and Teresian School students have excelled in this field. Students also partake in many out-of-school activities, including the President's award scheme (Gaisce), visits to science-related events, environmental field trips and visits to museums.

Core subjects offer continuity from junior cycle and are allocated regular lesson periods throughout the week. Some optional Leaving Certificate subjects are sampled. Ability groups are formed for Mathematics and school management should re-examine the necessity for the formation of ability groups in Mathematics in TY as this arrangement may not best meet the needs of TY students. There may be further opportunities to allocate two teachers for subjects that are taught to the students as a single class group in order to facilitate team teaching in TY. Many subjects and modules offer students variety within the curriculum and the opportunity to learn new skills. In an effort to further broaden the curricular experiences of students, school management should consider the inclusion of modules such as Music and Technology.

It is praiseworthy that students partake in community work for one afternoon each week. In this way, students are provided with opportunities to learn to be responsible and participative citizens and to get involved in their local community. This module plays a vital part in fulfilling key aims of TY, such as developing a sense of social awareness.

Work experience provides a vocational element to the programme and tasks undertaken in an adult working environment play an important part in the development of students' experiential learning. Students are required to find their own work placement with help from their parents. It is praiseworthy that students are encouraged to find a work placement where a career is sampled.

Work experience is organised in two blocks, with one week in November and one week in February. Good communication mechanisms are in place and there is a good level of contact with the student by the school during the work experience. Feedback from employers also has a major part in developing the work-experience programme into the future. It is commendable that students are required to maintain a reflection of their experience.

3 QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING

3.1 Planning and preparation

Most lessons were well planned. There was effective planning for resources with handouts, materials and practical and ICT equipment ready in advance of the majority of lessons. Where there were varied methodologies and good levels of advance planning student learning was effective. A written plan for the current year was available for all subjects evaluated. The taught programme reflects, in the main, the school's plan for the programme.

3.2 Learning and teaching

The overall quality of teaching and learning was very good. Students were motivated to learn and in many cases took responsibility for their own learning. Relationships in the classroom were very good and student learning was enhanced as a result. Teachers displayed high expectations of students thus ensuring that students were sufficiently challenged to maximise their potential. Teachers, in the main, demonstrated an awareness of TY aims while delivering classroom lessons and there was a clear focus on skills development in many lessons. Student participation levels were very good overall and students appeared to enjoy the learning experience. In some cases, further input from students should have been encouraged by teachers.

Classroom management was effective in most instances. In some cases, better lesson pre-planning, pace and delivery would have ensured enhanced classroom management and learning outcomes for students. Lesson objectives were shared with students in many lessons and this good practice should be extended. The pace of most lessons was appropriate to students' abilities. Each lesson should have a clear aim and students should be afforded sufficient time to complete assigned tasks and facilitated with the necessary equipment to carry out an activity. In many lessons, teacher inputs were appropriately short, clear and concise. Where lessons showed significant strengths in teaching and learning, the variation in methodologies ensured that students' interest and motivation were maintained and that opportunities for learning were maximised. The board was used to highlight key ideas in many lessons.

It is praiseworthy indeed that confidence-building measures, in line with TY guidelines, were incorporated into the development of the lessons. During one lesson observed, students made presentations to their peers on the outcomes of their project work. In some cases, opportunities should be undertaken to coach students in their presentation skills and to encourage further participation of the whole cohort of students by encouraging them to ask questions of those students presenting their work.

Many students engaged with assigned tasks with energy and motivation. In some cases teachers expertly demonstrated skills which students replicated. This is very good practice. Individual help and support was provided by teachers as needed. Students particularly enjoyed new challenges, for example, the pronunciation of Japanese words or phrases, meditating in advance of an assigned task during an Art lesson or learning and practising self-defence skills during a Physical Education

lesson. During some lessons observed, the size of the group was not conducive to activity-based learning. Therefore, the size of the class group should be reviewed by senior management, with a view to dividing it into two smaller groups for more subjects and modules. Group work played an important role in some lessons. In some lessons students occupied seats randomly while an organised seating arrangement may have proven to be more productive in enhancing student learning.

ICT was used appropriately in some lessons and it is recommended that its use be extended and its benefits maximised across the curriculum. For example, photographs could be used as a backdrop depicting the themes of some lessons. It is also important to ensure that ICT is used effectively and that the size of photographs and text chosen be sufficient for students to see clearly from a distance.

Good use was made of various questioning strategies in lessons visited. Individual questions elicited specific responses while higher-order questions encouraged students to explain their reasoning. It was evident that students' understanding of material was of a high quality.

3.3 Assessment

An innovative credit system has been developed for assessment reflecting key areas such as student participation, academic effort and self-development. The format of the reporting template for TY has been modified following review and evaluation. Parents receive meaningful feedback on student progress by means of school reports, which are sent home on five occasions throughout the year. It is very praiseworthy that two of these reports are focused entirely on personal development.

There is ongoing assessment through class work and project work. Employers assess students' work experience and return an evaluative report to the school. Peer-assessment is encouraged and promoted in some lessons and this is very good practice. Students receive homework assignments on a regular basis in the form of worksheets, research tasks and project work. During some lessons, lesson outcomes would have been enhanced by students completing their questionnaires as an assignment rather than during class time.

Students maintain a folder of their work for all subjects. Plans are in place to introduce portfolio assessment into TY where students present various pieces of work for interview. Consideration should be given to students maintaining an electronic portfolio with, for example, photographs of activities undertaken during TY.

TY students have achieved highly in many projects and competitions throughout the year including the BT Young Scientist competition. This is praiseworthy and the commitment of teachers to the encouragement of students to take part in these activities is highly commended.

5 SUMMARY OF STRENGTHS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT

The following are the main strengths identified in the evaluation:

- A whole-school approach to promoting and implementing the TY programme is fostered by senior management.
- The self-evaluation measures in place have had a positive effect on the delivery and implementation of the TY programme.

- The school has a good level of planning in place.
- TY co-ordination duties are extensive and are carried out very effectively.
- The overall quality of teaching and learning was very good.
- Relationships in the classroom were very good and student learning was enhanced as a result.
- An innovative credit system has been developed for assessment.

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

- Consideration should be given to the development of specific half-year or ten-week TY modules within the timetable.
- The TY plan should be developed as a single cohesive and current document with all of the areas in the guidelines addressed.
- Each subject area and department should develop an appropriate subject plan using the common template outlined in Department guidelines.

Published December 2011

Appendix

School response to the report

Submitted by the Board of Management

Area 1: Observations on the content of the inspection report

The report seems to be a fair reflection of our TY programme.

We review this programme twice a year, at the end of the first cycle and in the month of June. Adjustments are made as a matter of course.

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

1. The half-year and/or 10 week modules have already been programmed: Chinese, Archaeology, Aromatherapy and Horticulture have been introduced. Some life-skills activities were introduced during the second TY cycle.
2. Interactive boards are in place in every classroom, Sept 2011-12. Staff have had two training sessions on the use of Interactive boards.
3. Students will be present at the Parent-Teacher meeting and 5th Yr choice of subjects will be presented to them during this meeting.
4. The TY subject plans are being reviewed and adjusted according to the NCCA template. The on-going subject planning review meetings have made provision for more cross-curricular activities including TY.
5. Coordinator time is back on the timetable for this year and mixed-ability Maths groups are back in place in the current school year.