

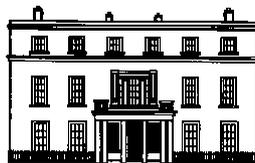
An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

**Programme Evaluation
Junior Certificate School Programme
REPORT**

**Ballinode Community College
Ballinode, Sligo
Roll Number: 72360M**

Date of inspection: 13 October 2010



**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 JUNIOR CERTIFICATE SCHOOL PROGRAMME (JCSP)

INTRODUCTION

This report has been written following an evaluation of the JCSP in Ballinode College, Sligo. It presents the findings of the evaluation and makes recommendations for the further development of the programme in the school. During the evaluation, the inspectors 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 inspectors liaised extensively with the programme co-ordinator and visited classrooms to observe teaching and learning. The inspectors provided oral feedback to teachers on lessons observed. The inspectors 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, the deputy principal, and the programme co-ordinators following the evaluation. The board of management was given an opportunity to comment in writing on the findings and recommendations of the report; a response was not received from the board.

Ballinode College, under the patronage of Co. Sligo Vocational Education Committee, has a large enrolment principally due to its post-Leaving Certificate (PLC) courses. While its second-level enrolment is quite small, the current year's enrolment is a substantial increase on that of previous years, following an extensive programme of refurbishment and rebuilding.

The school has undertaken JCSP in a wholehearted and comprehensive manner and to date the programme has had a record of success in the school. Being a participant in Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS), Ballinode College has available to it a large range of additional resources both staff and material. It is also part of the local school completion programme (SCP). Currently all of its junior cycle students participate in JCSP. The question of this level of participation is under review by the school.

The school has had JCSP since September 2007 and in 2010 the first cohort of JCSP students completed the Junior Certificate examination. The school tracks students' attendance and achievement and it places a big emphasis on impressing on its students the need for regular attendance and punctuality, commitment by students to their work and to achievement and the pursuit of excellence. The school is well integrated into its community and it links with many local and community organisations in the interest of its students.

1 QUALITY OF PROGRAMME ORGANISATION

1.1 Whole school support

There is a whole-school approach to the organisation and implementation of the JCSP and this is part of the school's focus on encouraging students to complete senior cycle. JCSP enjoys a high profile in the school as almost all of the junior cycle teachers are involved and almost all junior cycle subjects are included. The programme also has a very high level of whole-school support in terms of staffing and of other resources. JCSP is a highlight of the school's curriculum and is referred to in most school literature. The JCSP notice board that is in the student area is used by staff and students to keep informed of JCSP activities.

The school principal leads school management in its commitment to the programme. Staff for the programme are carefully selected, are fully committed, and almost all have undergone or will shortly undergo training for JCSP. Adequate time is allocated by school management for planning for JCSP. There are two mixed-ability class groups in each year. A third smaller group is formed for some subjects and this is seen by the school as a means of giving additional support to students.

Because all junior cycle students are in the JCSP, meetings at the whole-school level also deal with JCSP-related issues. For this reason JCSP enjoys a prominent role in aspects of the school such as care and education support. School management sees the main advantages of having the programme in the school as access to more resources, improved participation by students in the school, improvement in the self-esteem of students, and the improved Junior Certificate results achieved in the current year. An indicator of the success of JCSP in the school is the fact that since it commenced, no junior cycle student has left education. There has also been an improvement in student attendance since JCSP was introduced to the school even though there is still some way to go.

1.2 Resources

The school has good resources for JCSP, including being very well equipped for information and communication technology (ICT). ICT resources are being well used. The coordination of JCSP is well resourced by the school.

While the school has a classroom in which resources for the programme are stored, the resources are not readily accessible to staff. The school should take account in its planning of the need to have JCSP teaching resources stored in an area that is accessible to teachers.

While the school does not have a library, there is a bookshelf in one of the classrooms from which students can borrow books. The storage of books and giving students access to these books is a challenge for the school. Given the central importance in JCSP of the promotion of the habit of reading among students, there is a need to develop book storage and to acquire a wider range of reading materials for students. This should be given priority as resources allow.

The members of school staff that are involved with JCSP students are well skilled as several of them have learning-support and resource-teaching qualifications. Teachers new to JCSP receive an induction into the programme that is provided by the programme co-ordinators and also through inservice with the JCSP Support Service (JCSPSS). Teachers also receive in-school training and support on an ongoing basis. Most of the teachers of JCSP classes have had continuing professional development (CPD) both in their subjects and also related to the JCSP. The school is aware of the areas within the delivery of JCSP for which teacher CPD is required and has shown good practice in planning for that CPD and in keeping a record of it. To support teachers in teaching classes that have a high spread of student abilities school management should plan for whole-school CPD in differentiation and mixed-ability teaching.

The school benefits from its participation in DEIS, in particular through the school completion programme (SCP) and the services of the home-school-community liaison co-ordinator.

Guidance provision for JCSP students is organised by the school's guidance counsellor. It is seen as a whole-school function that is carried out through the teachers, in particular the Social Personal and Health Education (SPHE) teachers, and the counsellors provided through the SCP. It is under the overall direction of the school's guidance counsellor. This is in line with good practice. In their interviews most JCSP students stated that they had not yet given consideration to what they were going to do after Junior Certificate. Because of the range of personnel involved in the provision of

student guidance and because of the key role that guidance plays in JCSP, the school's JCSP-specific guidance plan should be included in the JCSP plan.

Overall students are well supported by the school. Trips and outdoor activities supported by the SCP are regular features of the school's programme and other supports include breakfast and lunch clubs in the school canteen, and an after-school homework club.

1.3 Student selection and support

The increase in the number of students in JCSP has made the organisation of the programme more challenging. The school is adhering to good practice by reviewing whether or not JCSP should be offered to all students from September 2011. In doing this the school should take into account that students should be selected for JCSP for particular reasons and the programme should be structured so as to address these priorities.

Through its involvement with students at primary and second level the SCP is supporting continuity between students' primary and secondary education. This is a core principle of the JCSP. The school has shown good practice in documenting its well-structured transfer programme that begins when students are in primary school. As part of its own evaluation of JCSP the school should evaluate the transfer program through obtaining the views of students, their parents, and school staff.

Because the special-needs co-ordinator is involved in visits to feeder primary schools prior to students' entry, the school has full information on the educational needs of incoming students. The special-needs co-ordinator also addresses first-year teachers each year to give them information on students requiring additional support.

The development of students' study skills and homework skills is addressed through SPHE, the use of the student journal, and the homework club that is available to students. This is a very good practice.

The care of JCSP students has a high priority for the management and staff. As well as the school's weekly management meeting that gives much attention to the care of students, it has a care team that meets each week and that team includes the JCSP co-ordinators.

A weekly meeting of the special needs department, attended by the JCSP co-ordinators and several other teachers, facilitates sharing of information in this area and coordinating the delivery of support and is an example of the high priority placed by the school on effective communication. The special needs department promotes close cooperation between the teachers giving additional support to subject teachers. This fact is also reflected in the subject inspection report for Mathematics (2009), which states that planning for the individual needs of students is a central focus of the work of the mathematics department and the report for Geography (2006) where there is reference to an effective dialogue between the geography Department and the learning-support Department.

The school is aware of the needs of its Traveller students and members of staff have received training in this area. The visiting teacher for Travellers (VTT) enjoys a close relationship with the school through her regular school visits and her involvement in the transfer of Traveller students to second level. Her work facilitates good communication between the school and the parents of Traveller students. As part of her role the VTT is available to provide information to school staff in relation to the needs of Traveller students so as to secure parental engagement in their children's education. The VTT meets with the principal and with individual teachers. In order to develop

further the manner in which the school addresses the educational needs of its Traveller students, the VTT should be invited to address the school staff.

1.4 Home-school links

The school places a very high priority on informing parents about the JCSP and having good communication between the school and students' homes. The school's parents' handbook provides parents with detailed information on many aspects of the organisation of the school. It includes also an overview of the JCSP. It is an indicator of the desire of the school for the fullest partnership with the parents of students. The school could consider preparing a summary document that would describe the key elements of the school for ease of reference by parents.

There is good transfer of information from home to school through school reports, parent-teacher meetings and parents being invited to JCSP events. The school goes to considerable lengths to include parents in the programme though participation in a range of activities organised by the school. This inclusion is also helped by the effective use that is made of JCSP postcards to promote positive communication between school and home.

The home-school-community liaison co-ordinator (HSCL) is a member of the school's pastoral care team and also occasionally attends meetings of the JCSP support group. As the HSCL co-ordinator is a key element of the contact between the school and students' homes, the role of the co-ordinator in respect of JCSP should be outlined in the school's JCSP plan. Targets for achievement by the co-ordinator should be developed in consultation with school management and included in the JCSP plan. The plan should also include indicators to assist in evaluating the success of the role.

The school has worked with parents and through the SCP in its key target of increasing student attendance. Students' attendance is monitored through a range of methods that includes regular liaison with the VTT and the HSCL co-ordinator. Certificates of attendance are presented at Christmas and Easter.

2 QUALITY OF PROGRAMME PLANNING AND COORDINATION

2.1 Planning

The school's JCSP is well-planned from year to year as documented in the school's JCSP plan. Profiling statements in individual subjects are selected by the teachers of those subjects. As the completion of profiling statements by students is key part of JCSP, the school should aim to have a planning meeting early in the school year at a time when statements are being selected. This meeting should also provide an opportunity for teachers to co-operate in completing some of the cross-curricular statements. As part of the planning process there should be provision for keeping a central record of the statements being followed by each student.

The school is adhering to very good practice through its plans for school management to lead an evaluation and review of the JCSP later in the autumn term. Along with that proposed review the school is continually informally evaluating the programme. The view of school management is that to date JCSP in the school has been a success as it has brought about changes in students including greater confidence with regard to reading, a greater attention to their work, improved social skills, and improved Junior Certificate results.

As far as the school is concerned the most effective aspects of the implementation of JCSP have been the improvement in literacy and numeracy levels, attendance, punctuality and behaviour, and students and their parents being more positive towards learning.

A profiling meeting is organised each year for profiling of students. While it is accepted that the whole-school care group and staff meetings are used to discuss the academic and other progress of JCSP students and other students, there is a need for a greater emphasis at a programme level on teaching and learning as a topic for discussion.

2.2 Coordination

Up to September 2010 the school had a single co-ordinator for JCSP and this role was carried out by two teachers over different time periods. Since then the two teachers have begun sharing the co-ordinator role. They work well together and are committed and effective in the role. Both co-ordinators have a very good knowledge of the students and their work is well-resourced by school management with regard to time. The principal duties undertaken by the co-ordinators are liaising with the support service with regard to initiatives and resources; keeping parents and teachers informed; formulating the JCSP plan; organising student profiling; weekly meetings of the steering group; and planning the first-year general studies programme. They are also responsible for giving JCSP materials to students and for the organisation of students' JCSP folders. As the joint coordination role becomes more established, provision should be made for it to evolve so that, for example, responsibility for the coordination of the JCSP students in different years could be assigned to different co-ordinators.

The school's JCSP is managed through three meetings of the co-ordinators each week. The meetings review current coordination tasks and prepare for the weekly meeting of the support team. The support team meetings include the two co-ordinators and three other teachers. The guidance counsellor and the HSCL co-ordinator also attend from time to time. Meetings of the JCSP support group deal with organisational issues in JCSP, in particular JCSP events and initiatives and records are kept of these meetings. In order to allow for continual self-evaluation by them of their work, records should also be kept of the meetings of the co-ordinators.

A teacher who is representative of the teaching team for each JCSP year group is included in the JCSP support group. As part of the emphasis that the school places on the development of students' literacy and numeracy, students' literacy and numeracy skills are assessed on a continual basis and these outcomes are discussed by the support group and JCSP teachers are made aware of them. To develop this existing good practice further good practice with regard to teaching and learning in JCSP should be discussed and shared at meetings of the co-ordinators and of the support group. While responsibility for completing profiling statements should remain with individual teachers, each teaching team should meet to carry out student profiling.

2.3 Curriculum

JCSP students in Ballinode College have available to them a very broad curriculum that includes ICT classes, drama, and project work in addition to a wide range of examination subjects. The recent introduction of Music and Spanish has further broadened the curriculum. These subjects, together with the wide range of JCSP activities in which students participate, foster students' personal and social development. First-year students have a three-period block entitled General Studies the purpose of which is to allow for cross-curricular activities such as 'author in residence' or 'artist in the classroom'. It is also used to address the development of students' numeracy and literacy skills and to complete cross-curricular statements.

The school regards a subject as being a JCSP subject when students of that subject complete profiling statements. In broadening its view of JCSP subjects the school should regard having a consistent and coordinated approach to teaching and learning by all of the teachers of a subject as the key determinant of whether a subject is a JCSP subject. It should therefore move towards regarding all subjects taken by JCSP students as JCSP subjects, even though statements may not be completed in every subject.

From interviews held in the course of the evaluation it is clear that students are aware of their participation in JCSP. Their perceptions of the highlights of JCSP centre on the additional activities involved, such as involvement in 'Make-a-Book'.

The school's practices in relation to literacy and numeracy are underpinned by well-developed policies that place literacy and numeracy at the centre of students' experience in the school. As well as including a rationale and aims, these policies include concrete and measurable ways of developing students' literacy and numeracy. This whole-school focus on the development of students' literacy and numeracy needs to be extended further so that there is an emphasis on literacy and numeracy evident in each lesson in each subject.

3 QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING

3.1 Planning and preparation

There was high-quality planning for resources in JCSP lessons and almost every lesson observed was very well-planned. In many cases this involved teachers either adapting existing teaching materials or creating sets of material. Where lesson planning was of a high standard it provided a structure for the lesson and approached the lesson through building on students' previous learning and helping them to organise their new learning.

The school shows good practice in that statements and learning targets are in use in the majority of the subjects and lessons observed. Subject planning should address raising the level of students' involvement in the profiling process.

Subject department planning is well developed in the school. From an examination of the curricular plans of subject departments during the inspection it was evident that some department's plans were at a more advanced stage of development. Each of the subject department plans included schemes of work for each year and level. As the school's subject-planning process is advanced further student learning outcomes should be used as a basis for curricular planning. Over time the curricular plans should be extended so that they address the teaching methods to be used to achieve the learning outcomes and how students' learning is assessed.

The school involves itself in whole-school CPD on a regular basis. To ensure that this has an impact on teaching and learning in the classroom relevant aspects of whole-school CPD, such as strategies for mixed-ability teaching and differentiation, should be used in subject department planning for teaching and learning.

3.2 Learning and teaching

Twelve JCSP lessons were observed during the evaluation and students' homework and class workbooks were also reviewed. Very good quality teaching and learning was evident in most lessons observed.

Each lesson had a clear focus and in the majority of lessons the learning intention was clearly outlined to students at the start of the lesson. Where very good practice was seen the content of the lesson was stated in terms of the learning objectives that would be achieved by students at the end of the lesson. In a small number of cases the learning objectives were used at the end of the lesson to recapitulate the lesson and to assess students' learning.

Most lessons were delivered using a variety of methodologies. These included pair work, group work, teacher demonstrations, board work, active learning and questioning. The variety in the methodologies used kept students on task and engaged in the lesson topic. In a small number of cases the range of methodologies used was quite small, for example giving notes from the PowerPoint presentation. The school's excellent ICT facilities were used in many lessons. In one mathematics lesson in particular it was used in an innovative and very effective way to stimulate students' enthusiasm for working with numbers.

Differentiated teaching methodologies were in use in a few lessons that made the lesson content accessible to all students. In one lesson the learning objectives were differentiated so that each student, irrespective of his or her ability, was enabled to achieve. In this lesson also the tasks were differentiated and students who had finished early were given additional more demanding tasks. In another case differentiation was evident in the setting of students' homework. While keyword lists are being used in most subjects, and were on display in several classrooms, they were not often referred to in the course of lessons.

It is clear that there is a very good relationship between students and teachers in the school and that teachers are very encouraging of their students. In almost all instances there was a very good cooperative atmosphere with students attending to the lesson and in many lessons they were enthusiastic in their participation. Students' participation in lessons was also helped by the feedback that was given to them on their work and the guidance given by teachers. While students' participation was encouraged in almost all cases, there was a tendency in some classes for teachers' contributions to dominate. In these cases it would have helped if students' questions and contributions could have been emphasised to a greater extent.

There were one or more special needs assistants present during each of the lessons observed and it was clearly evident that the teachers and the special needs assistants work together very effectively as a team to the benefit of students.

In almost all classes students' behaviour was good and students were attending to and engaged with the lesson. This was supported through these teachers making sure that students complied with the school's code of classroom behaviour.

It was evident in almost all lessons that most students were learning well. This was especially evident in lessons where teaching and learning were of a high quality, where there was a clear structure to the lesson, and where the lesson was focused on students' learning. That students were learning was judged from their contributions to the lessons, the questions they asked, and their answers to questions. In some cases it was evident also from an examination of their work. Interaction with students in some lessons indicated that most had a good understanding of the

topics of lessons. In some lessons student learning could have been helped further through having a range of different activities that catered to the needs of different learning styles of students, such as combining teacher talk with written material, graphical material, and student activity. In particular greater use could have been made of the board in a number of lessons.

3.3 Assessment

There is a range of assessment practices in the school's JCSP and in all lessons homework was assigned and corrected. The school shows good practice in regard to student assessment and completion of homework and written feedback was provided to students on their work in a small number of instances.

While students' learning was assessed in most lessons this aspect of learning and teaching, because of its central importance, needs to be emphasised still further. The assessment of students, in particular questioning of students to assess their understanding of the lesson content, should be included in all lessons. Such questioning should make use of assessment for learning strategies including waiting longer to allow students time to think about their answer.

In keeping with the JCSP aim of recognising students' individual achievements, each student has a folder. The folders are updated as much as possible and some of them contain examples of students' work and achievements, such as their "Make-a-Book" projects. From students' earliest days in the school a strong emphasis is placed on the value of the individual student JCSP folder as a record of their achievement. This has a key role in building students' self-esteem and through that their capacity for work and achievement.

Student profiling statements are in use in virtually all subjects. Although students stated that their teachers talked to them about how they are getting on, decisions on when students achieve their targets are made by the teachers. The school should work towards having a greater involvement by students in the profiling process.

One profiling meeting is held each year and while the progress of each student is not discussed at this meeting, the co-ordinators discuss the progress of each student on an individual basis with each teacher. Because of the large number of students in the school's JCSP maintaining communication between subject teachers is challenging. There is a need for a greater level of organisation in regard to tracking the statements being followed by each JCSP student.

4 SUMMARY OF STRENGTHS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT

The following are the main strengths identified in the evaluation:

- JCSP enjoys a high profile in the school and has a very high level of whole-school support in terms of staffing and of other resources.
- An indicator of the success of JCSP in the school is that since it commenced no junior cycle student has left education.
- The weekly meeting of the special needs department is an example of the high priority placed by the school on effective communication.
- The school places a very high priority on good communication between the school and students' homes.

- The school is adhering to very good practice through its plans for school management to lead an evaluation and review of the JCSP later in the autumn term.
- The two co-ordinators work together well, are committed and effective in that role, and have a very good knowledge of the students,
- JCSP students in Ballinode College have a very broad curriculum available to them.
- The school has well-developed policies that place literacy and numeracy at the centre of students' experience in the school.
- Very good quality teaching and learning was evident in most lessons observed.
- There is a very good relationship between students and teachers in the school and teachers are very encouraging of their students.

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

- The whole-school literacy policy should be supported further through the acquisition of a wider range of reading materials for students together with the further development of students' literacy through an emphasis on the promotion of reading, and having an emphasis on literacy and numeracy evident in each lesson in each subject.
- Because of the range of personnel involved in the provision of student guidance and because of the key role that guidance plays in JCSP, the school's JCSP-specific guidance plan should be included in the JCSP plan.
- As the completion of profiling statements by students is a key part of JCSP, the school should work towards having a greater involvement by students in the profiling process.
- As the role of joint coordination of JCSP in the school develops further, the school should encourage a review of the duties undertaken by the co-ordinators so that they are complementary. An outcome of this should be a common approach to learning and teaching within the JCSP, led by the co-ordinators and the JCSP support group
- The emphasis on differentiated teaching and learning methodologies that was evident in some lessons should be developed further.