Programme Evaluation
TY
REPORT

Presentation College,
Headford,
County Galway.

Roll Number: 63040Q

Date of inspection: 10 December 2010
EVALUATION OF THE TRANSITION YEAR PROGRAMMAE

INTRODUCTION

This report has been written following an evaluation of the TY in Presentation College, Headford, Co 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 small 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 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 following the evaluation. 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.

The TY programme is well established in the school and has been offered on an optional basis since its introduction in 1994. The provision of TY on an optional basis is outlined in the college’s admissions policy. Currently, there is one class group of students following the programme.

1 QUALITY OF PROGRAMME ORGANISATION

1.1 Whole school support

The principal is an advocate of the programme and is aware of the value of the programme and its contribution to living out the educational, personal, social and emotional development of students as set out in the college’s mission statement. Management is committed to supporting the organisation and delivery of the TY programme as well as its continued improvement and development. The senior management team in consultation with the TY co-ordinator plans the TY timetable and allocation of staff to the programme. On-going communication throughout the year occurs between management and the co-ordinator on an informal basis. The deputy principal co-ordinates the dissemination of information regarding TY on the general notice board in the staff room. Although TY is not formally included on the agenda of staff meetings the co-ordinator can address the whole staff on issues relating to TY where necessary. It is recommended that a dedicated programmes notice board be developed in the staff room and that TY be a regular item on the agendas of staff meetings. In this way, staff can contribute to the effective planning and review of the programme.

The arts are an integral part of the TY programme in the college. For a number of years now TY groups have been afforded the opportunity to create permanent murals or other artistic forms in areas throughout the main school building. The accumulation of these manifestations uniquely embodies a whole-school profile of TY and positively enhances the learning environment for all. This work is highly commended. Student achievement in TY is celebrated at an end-of-year graduation night by the school community. TY students are also affirmed in the annual school magazine, which is produced jointly by a group of TY and Leaving Certificate year one students. It is commendable that TY teachers and other members of staff assist with and are supportive of many TY activities and the supervision and substitution required to carry out such activities.
The majority of teachers delivering the TY programme are familiar with the main national aims of the programme. However, a whole-staff in-service regarding TY has not been organised since the programme’s introduction to the school. It is recommended that this be organised in preparation for the next academic year. In the interim, staff may consult the website of the TY support service at www.transitionyear.ie. This site provides useful resources for teaching and learning across a range of areas of study as well as many templates to assist in planning, implementing and evaluating the programme. There is also information about the new Transition Year Teacher Professional Network on this website which may be of interest to the teaching team.

1.2 Resources

There are 19 teachers involved in the delivery of TY and while there is a core team of teachers who teach TY every year, the school aims to afford as many staff members as possible the experience of teaching on the programme. This is commended. Currently, however, there is no formal induction process for teachers new to TY. When resources permit, it is recommended that consideration be given to having a formal induction process, including the provision of a prepared pack of resources relating to TY, for new teachers.

Staff members teaching on the current programme are appropriately deployed according to their qualifications, and commendably skills and interests of staff are taken into account. In general, good provision is made in the timetable for the delivery of the programme. Requests for changes to the timetable are facilitated by senior management and have included the concurrent timetabling of Music and Drama to allow for team-teaching for a number of years as well as the recent inclusion of a triple period for Art. This support is commended.

There current designated office space for the TY co-ordinator and for the storage of TY-specific resources is not adequate. As school resources allow, it is recommended that provision be made for such facilities and that a programmes office could be developed. A comprehensive inventory of resources to support learning and teaching in TY should be compiled based on information available on www.transitionyear.ie. The increased awareness of the available TY-specific resources among teachers should also promote cross-curricular approaches to support the implementation of the programme. The TY programme has an annual budget which is allocated by the co-ordinator to subject areas and particular activities. It is recommended that the allocation of monies to departments and activities for TY is documented in the TY plan. This will provide a record to ensure that all areas of study receive equitable funding in any given year.

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 information and communication technology (ICT). Students expressed a good level of satisfaction with the integration of ICT in a number of modules and subjects. However, it was evident that scope exists for the increased use of ICT in both the planning for and the delivery of subjects across the programme.

There is no specific TY contribution except for the voluntary subscription to the school that parents of all students may contribute. Students themselves pay for some activities included in the TY calendar and students 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 annual costing at the TY information evening prior to the commencement of the programme.
1.3 Student selection and support

All junior cycle students are encouraged to consider the option of TY. Students are given comprehensive and timely support on the nature and benefits of the TY programme. An information night regarding TY is arranged for parents or guardians and students in March of the junior-certificate year. It is recommended that students who have completed the programme are afforded the opportunity to input at this forum. A ceiling of 24 students participating in the TY programme was introduced two years ago but a system for selection to TY has not yet been developed. It is recommended that inclusive criteria for suitability for participation in TY be formally developed at whole-school level and that these criteria be documented and form the framework within which interviews for admission to TY are conducted. It is also recommended that students receive a clear debriefing on why they were included in or excluded from the programme. An abridged version of the suitability criteria should also be included in the school admission’s policy to increase awareness of the programme among the entire parent body. A significant number of students do not apply to for the option of the TY programme and although some students who do not select the programme have been surveyed, it is recommended that all students and their parents who do not elect to follow the programme are consulted year on year. In this way a trend in relation to obstacles perceived in following the programme can be identified and steps can be taken to increase the numbers participating in TY.

There is a good 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 in November. 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 co-ordinator, in the capacity of year head and tutor. There are two twenty-minute timetabled tutor slots per week and the tutor plays a key role in supporting the care of this group of students within the context of a whole-school student-support system. It was evident from attendance at lessons where students are divided that appropriate gender balance has been maintained in the formation of each class group. It is recommended that where students are sampling subjects, that groups comprise an appropriate balance of students who have experience of the subject and those who have not to maximize the opportunities for peer-tutoring. A review of documentation made available to the inspector recorded that in the event of two class groups following the programme, a number of core areas of study are offered at two levels. It is recommended that this practice be reviewed so that all subjects are taught in mixed ability groupings in line with a central tenet of the TY philosophy.

TY students are provided with two periods of guidance per week. The teacher who delivers guidance also has responsibility for the co-ordination of work experience and meets frequently with the two guidance counsellors involved in the delivery of guidance and counselling to the rest of the student body. A valuable directory of the work placement contact details used over the years has been compiled by the work experience co-ordinator. This is commended as best practice. The written TY guidance plan that was made available at the time of the inspection is focused on educational guidance in preparation for subject choice and related career paths, and on career guidance linking directly to work experience. The Rothwell Millar Interest guide is conducted prior to students’ second block of work experience. It is recommended that links to students’ practical experience of the world of work be documented in the guidance plan and that the use of ICT as a teaching and learning tool in educational and vocational guidance be increased.

Students felt that the TY programme had provided them with opportunities to become more mature, confident, responsible, independent and respectful individuals. Students commented on their increased opportunities to participate in their own learning and that they were learning in a
more meaningful way. Other positive benefits articulated by students included the programme of study being more relevant to life, the gap between junior and senior cycle had been bridged during the year and they felt in a better position to make subject choices from experiences gained during work placements and subjects sampled. Students also felt that they had developed better social and personal skills and were unanimous in their praise of TY, acknowledging that TY nurtured and developed the uniqueness of each student and resulted in better student-teacher relationships.

It was reported that the current cohort of TY students does not include students with special educational needs (SEN). In previous years where students with identified needs participated in the programme they were supported through a reduced curriculum and withdrawal from certain areas of study and the use differentiated strategies in other classes. The school is commended for deploying additional teaching resources as well encouraging differentiation in all classes and other models of provision, including team-teaching, is encouraged to support these students.

1.4 Home-school links

Home-school interactions are of good quality and are on-going throughout the year. Methods of communication include an information evening, letters containing good information regarding TY activities and trips. Progress reports and invitations issue to homes to attend significant events including the TY graduation night. In order to strengthen the partnership with parents or guardians, it is recommended that a parent-teacher meeting be organised for this cohort of students as is standard for all other year groups in the school. There is limited ongoing communication between home and school through the student journal. It is recommended that this be reviewed and this conduit of information flow be better utilised.

2 QUALITY OF PROGRAMME PLANNING AND COORDINATION

2.1 Planning

The structures to support planning for the TY programme include a meeting of all teachers involved in the delivery of TY at the beginning of the school year and formal inputs are held as required at break times. There is no official TY core team in place. However the key personnel who are very involved in the delivery of the TY programme meet together frequently, mainly on an informal basis. These teachers work very well together and ensure the smooth running of the programme. It is recommended that the formation of a formal core team for TY be considered. In this context formal meeting should be facilitated on a regular basis so that a collaborative forum for the co-ordination and planning of all aspects of the programme is in place. The composition of the core team should comprise the co-ordinator and two staff members teaching on the programme. The teacher members of the core team should be rotated on an agreed basis to build expertise across the staff in relation to planning, implementing and evaluating the programme.

The TY co-ordinator evaluates the opinions of students who opt for TY and those that do not as well as parental feedback. This work is commended. In order to build on this, the evaluation should be broadened to elicit the views of senior management and all members of staff. Very good materials for conducting such an annual review are available at www.transitionyear.ie.

The school has a written TY plan in place which includes a brief outline of the aims of TY, subject and modular plans for areas of study offered in the current year and in previous years. The plan also contains some of the organisational details envisaged in section three of the document Writing the Transition Year Programme. In general, however this plan does not reflect the guidelines for
TY planning and does not provide a clear and current insight operation of the programme in the school. The majority of individual subject plans examined are inconsistent in their adherence to the ten point subject plan template, outlined in section two of the above referenced document. Particular attention should be given to student learning outcomes, detail on timeframes, current resources, cross-curricular planning, modes of and criteria for assessment and evaluation tools. A copy of Writing the Transition Year Programme is available on the TY website.

2.2 Coordination

The current co-ordinator has co-ordinated the TY programme since its introduction and acts as year head and tutor to the TY cohort. These positions are attached to an assistant principal post. The TY co-ordinator carries out an extensive range of duties, responsibilities and supports in respect of TY in an enthusiastic and committed manner. The co-ordinator also teaches a Drama module and an Assertiveness module which further increases opportunities to stimulate, encourage and enthuse student with regard to participation in the programme. Relationships with students on the programme are based on mutual respect. The co-ordinator has a clear vision for the programme and operates an open-door policy in relation to students and values highly the benefits of providing students with a year to develop, learn and mature individually and as part of a team. It is recommended that the skills, insights and expertise earned and gained by the co-ordinator over his long service to the school community is not lost in a hand over to a new co-ordination team anticipated at the end of the current academic year.

2.3 Curriculum

The programme offered includes the four layers of the TY programme, core subjects, subject sampling, specific TY modules and calendar events. However, there are issues which need to be addressed in relation to timetabling in the sampling and modular layer of the programme. Firstly, the science programme of study focuses on Physics, Chemistry or Biology depending on the teacher timetabled for teaching in given school year. It is recommended that a sampling of the all science subjects offered at senior cycle in the school comprise the science programme of study. It is commendable that a number of students each year go on to study subjects not studied at junior certificate level based on their experience during TY. There is a need to develop the timetabled modular layer. Some modules offered as part of the programme do not have a dedicated timeslot on the timetable and rely for their delivery on the borrowing of classes. This interrupts the progression through planned activities in different areas of study and consequently compromised. It is recommended that this fragmentation of the timetable be addressed. The increased provision in the modular layer of the programme will also allow for the development of more meaningful cross-curricular links in line with the TY guidelines. Teachers’ interests and expertise could be surveyed to identify areas of study that could be included in the timetabled modular layer. This initiative may also serve to encourage teachers who have not taught on the programme to do so. The delivery of the seven modular components of the ECDL is planned for during the TY programme and is timetabled for two class periods each week. As some students do not complete all modules of ECDL during TY, and this necessitates carrying some of the modular components into Leaving Certificate, year one, it is recommended that the timetabled provision for ECDL be reviewed so that the license can be earned during TY.

The curriculum is complemented by a 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 range of health-related topics, a foreign tour, a variety of trips to activities and events and also activities and initiatives organised by the TY students for the school and the community. The school is twinned with Dundonald High School in Belfast and TY students participate in developing links with this
school during the TY year. Another element of the calendar events are the opportunities afforded to students carry out voluntary work, including a visit to a local nursing home at Christmas, involvement in the Christmas Shoe Box appeal and engagement with the Parish Project as part of the Religious Education (RE) programme for TY. There is a need to develop the volunteering aspect of the programme and the planned introduction of the ‘Log on Learn’ initiative is strongly encouraged.

There are two work experience blocks; one week in the first term and two weeks in the second term which play a key contribution to the vocational element of the programme. It was reported that difficulties are encountered in securing meaningful and interesting work experience. Senior management is satisfied that work experience is co-ordinated in a comprehensive and effective manner. It was evident from students interviewed that they are encouraged to find a career sample work placement. This is in line with best practice.

3 QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING

3.1 Planning and preparation

Very good short-term planning was observed in all lessons evaluated which impacted positively on the structure, purpose and quality of learning outcomes. In some lessons continuity and clear links were established with previous learning and links with future lessons were also shared with students. 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 their independent learning. In a small number of lessons, it is recommended that short-term planning should focus on a number of learning outcomes appropriate to the duration of the lesson. This is in line with good practice.

Short-term preparation for the majority of lessons was also very good and included worksheets, equipment and instruments ready for use and prepared PowerPoint slides. This level of readiness is commended and it is recommended that all teachers ensure that lesson content is supported by good preparation so that the maximum learning benefit for the student is achieved.

3.2 Learning and teaching

In general, students were in a subject-relevant and visually-stimulating learning environment during lessons observed. This is commended.

The quality of learning and teaching was good or very good in all of the lessons evaluated. In over half the lessons a good balance between whole-class presentation and student activity characterised lessons. Students engaged in assigned tasks either as individuals or in pairs. In general, teachers attended well to the students’ needs as they completed the learning activities. In one lesson an excellent feedback session was conducted with the students at the end of the group activity which afforded students the opportunity to share with the whole class what had been achieved in the group work. All contributions from the groups were recorded on a flip chart and this good practice should be used at the conclusion of all task based learning activities. It is also
recommended that students be assigned a specific time frame for task completion. It is important to be mindful that groups are not too large and that each student is assigned a clear role within the context of the group.

In the case of half the lessons evaluated teachers are commended for the attention given to building students’ awareness of subject-specific terminology. In one lesson, this terminology was also recorded on the board to reinforce the oral version. This is good practice, in particular for those students whose preferred learning style is visual. In one language lesson evaluated, the target language was employed very judiciously. During this lesson the teacher also showed a mindfulness of the need to support students by explicitly teaching learning strategies. A visual scaffold was displayed on the board which set up the structure of sentences and allowed for differentiated learning outcomes to cater for the range of abilities amongst the learners. This approach in supporting the acquisition of the target language by the student is commended as best practice and its application across other languages is encouraged.

In some lessons teacher exposition included clear explanation and very good modelling of skills. This was followed by students completing skills guided and facilitated by the teacher. Opportunities for peer-learning were encouraged, affirmed and were central to successful learning for students of all abilities. This practice is highly commended.

All teachers managed their classes effectively. There was a supportive and affirming learning atmosphere in all classes. Teachers showed a very good knowledge of the interests of the students in their care which enhanced the teaching and learning encounter. Students’ contributions were affirmed in a positive manner and their participation in lessons was encouraged. The students were enthusiastic, purposeful and co-operative in their work.

### 3.3 Assessment

The detail in relation to assessment in the TY plans is inadequate and in the case of six areas of study there is no information on assessment modes employed. The formative methods outlined include continuous assessment of practical work, performance and group work as well as journaling in the case of one RE plan. Eight areas of study employ projects and presentations at the end of modules of work to assess student learning and to facilitate peer learning. It is recommended that the criteria for assessment of projects and presentations be shared with the students to guide their efforts and to build such skills across the subjects in question. This detail is provided in Home Economics and could be employed as a template. The TY website also contains guidance in this regard. Subject plans do not contain any reference to summative assessments. In this context it is imperative to develop robust methods for assessment to ensure that learning is monitored and feedback is provided to students. It is recommended that the school develop an accreditation system across all areas of study of the programme and that this accreditation system accompany the very good report template that issues to homes in February and at the end of the year.

A random sample of homework diaries reviewed indicated that the diaries are not used to record homework. It is recommended that all teachers set homework and that the homework set seeks to foster independence in student learning in innovative ways. A review of student copies and folders indicated different levels in the amount of material covered across the different areas of study. It is recommended that this practice be reviewed in the context of a complete overview of assessment in the TY programme.
4 SUMMARY OF STRENGTHS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT

The following are the main strengths identified in the evaluation:

- Senior management is a strong advocate of the value of the programme.
- A clear vision for the programme has been developed and implemented by the co-ordinator.
- Students are encouraged to find a career sample work placement.
- Very good short-term planning was observed in all lessons evaluated and short-term preparation for the majority of lessons was also very good.
- The quality of learning and teaching was good or very good in all of the lessons evaluated.

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

- It is recommended that inclusive criteria for use in determining students’ suitability for participation in TY be formally developed and documented at whole-school level.
- TY should be formally included as a regular item on the agenda of staff meetings and a whole-staff in-service regarding TY should be organised.
- Provision should be made for the effective transfer of the skills, insights and expertise of the current co-ordinator to a new co-ordination team as anticipated at the end of the current academic year. The formation of a formal core team for TY should be considered and a formal meeting should be facilitated on a regular basis.
- The TY plan is in need of review in terms of the organisational details and in the approach adopted in subject plans. There is scope for the increased use of ICT in both the planning for and the delivery of subjects across the programme.
- There is a need to develop the timetabled modular layer of the programme so that planned activities in different subjects are not interrupted and consequently compromised by modules provided through the borrowing of classes.
- It is recommended that assessment in TY be reviewed to develop agreed methods for formative and summative assessment and that the outcomes of all assessment are included in a whole-school accreditation system for the programme.
Appendix

SCHOOL RESPONSE TO THE REPORT

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

The Board of Management welcomes this report and its findings.

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

As anticipated at the time of the inspection, the then TY Coordinator has retired and a three-member team has since taken over the coordination of the programme. The new Coordination Team has already met with the previous Coordinator, has received inservice training and is very active. A number of the recommendations of the report have already been implemented and plans are in place to address the other recommendations, as we work to build on the very significant strengths of the programme in our school.

**These are the areas that have been already addressed:**
- 1.1. TY formally included on the agenda of staff meetings, where necessary.
- *1.4. TY Parents will be invited to attend the 5th year parent-teacher meeting.
- 2.2. New assessment procedure in place, incorporating an accreditation system and portfolio assessment.

**These are the areas that we are in the process of addressing in the current academic year:**
- 1.1. Induction process for teachers in TY including resource pack.
- 1.3. Admissions policy to document inclusive criteria for suitability for participation in TY
- 2.1. Evaluation Procedure to include all staff, senior management, etc.
- 2.2. Review of TY Plan (in the early stages.) Efforts are being made to address the formatting inconsistencies and to incorporate a generic ten-point subject plan template.

**These are the areas that we hope to address in the next academic year:**
- Whole-school TY inservice training?
- Time-tableing (subject sampling, modular layer, etc.)