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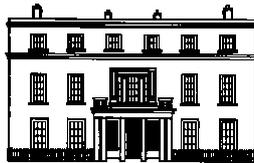
Department of Education and Skills

**Transition Year Programme Evaluation
REPORT**

**St Andrew's College
Booterstown Avenue, Blackrock, County Dublin**

Roll Number 60650F

Date of inspection: 8 April 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 St Andrew's College, 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 TY core team, the TY co-ordinator, the school principal, deputy principal 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, TY programme co-ordinator and the TY year head at the end of the evaluation period.

TY has formed part of the curriculum at St Andrew's College for the past fifteen years. The college offers a six-year cycle in which TY is offered as a compulsory programme. In exceptional circumstances students may request to opt out of TY. There are currently seven class groups of approximately 24 students following the programme. The stated aim of the TY programme in St Andrew's College is to provide the necessary skills, maturity and responsibility for students in advance of entering the Leaving Certificate programme. This aim is fulfilled through many aspects of the diverse curriculum offered to TY students. 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.

1 QUALITY OF PROGRAMME ORGANISATION

1.1 Whole school support

Senior management has put good structures in place that foster a whole-school approach to promoting and implementing the TY programme. The school community can access high quality information regarding TY on the college website. The TY notice board in the school's central corridor displays significant TY information including events and competitions for students. Communication with teaching staff regarding TY is very good and efficient systems have been put in place to ensure that staff are informed and consulted on relevant matters pertaining to TY. Regular contact and consultation with students is also a key strength of TY programme provision. TY form teachers meet their respective class groups each morning during assembly and the TY form tutors are timetabled for TY tutorial lesson periods each week. This is good support provision for students and is commended.

Student achievement is celebrated by the whole school community at the end of the year. TY students are afforded the opportunity to showcase their work, projects and achievements gained across a wide range of subjects. This important event culminates in the awarding of certificates and prizes. The acknowledgement of students' work is commended.

1.2 Resources

The TY timetable is well structured to deliver the intended programme and the different elements of the TY programme are in the main appropriately timetabled. Some modifications to the

timetable will prove necessary with emerging curricular needs. Staff expertise is appropriately assigned to teach the programme. Staff development is critically important to any successful TY programme and evidence provided at the time of the evaluation indicates that staff continuing professional development (CPD) is supported and facilitated by senior management. The impact of this training has made a positive impact on the quality of TY provision and on teaching and learning. For example, following recent staff training a module in first aid will be introduced to the TY curriculum in the next academic year. Information and communication technology (ICT) is utilised effectively in the planning, implementation and delivery of the programme and students have good access to ICT facilities.

1.3 Student selection and support

The college convenes an information event for parents of third-year students regarding TY. Parents and students are given an overview of the programme and requested to complete option forms. In the current year, seven TY class groups have been formed. It is praiseworthy that the college accepts admissions from students directly to TY, including those with English as an additional language (EAL). The college offers a six-year cycle to students with almost all students completing TY. To clarify the school's position on TY, it is recommended that a TY policy be formulated and that the school's admission's policy makes reference to TY provision.

School fees cover the majority of TY costs. On enrolment to the programme, parents agree to the payment of an additional contribution to cover expenses for some additional activities.

TY form tutors meet students at the outset of the academic year to outline their programme of work and to explain the nature and purpose of TY. A trip is organised for all students to the Aran Islands and to an outdoor education centre. This is good provision as it provides students with valuable experiences of working together in advance of partaking in the full and comprehensive TY programme.

TY students are provided with a timetabled eight-week guidance module. Students are provided with an outline of the points system for entry to third level colleges and are advised on career options. Students are well supported in their subject choices and career options. Differential aptitude testing and vocational interest testing form a key part of this module. As an additional support, a series of career lectures is scheduled for students in advance of the work experience placement. This is very good practice.

The TY team endeavours to ensure the inclusion of all students in the TY programme. Students with additional needs including those with EAL needs are very well supported. Good practice is informed by school assessments, recommendations from psychological reports and information from parents and subject teachers. Every effort is made to ensure that all students can participate fully in lessons. A small number of TY students attend learning support on four occasions throughout the week. The specific programme includes improvement in writing, comprehension and reading skills.

The weekly timetabled tutorial lesson provides a very good support mechanism to students on an ongoing basis. Form tutors address queries from students in many areas including particular focus on project work, work placements and assignments. This is very good provision.

1.4 Home-school links

Parents are made aware of the nature and purpose of TY through the TY brochure, the school website and through regular communication from the TY co-ordinator. Information regarding activities, projects, special events and assessment is regularly relayed to parents by letter, text, email and through schools publications. Senior management, the TY co-ordinator, form teachers and the TY year head maintain close links with parents throughout the year. Good links have been forged with the parents' association, which supports TY in many ways including provision of guest speakers and work experience placements.

Parents are invited to significant events throughout the year, including the Christmas Fair, the Model United Nations and the TY awards night where they can avail of the opportunity to interact with teachers. Form teachers meet parents formally on one day during the year. It is recommended that consideration be given to having the student present for at least part of this meeting. In this way, parents can receive useful information on progress and teachers can receive useful evaluative feedback on the student's TY experiences. This provision will further support the school's communication process with parents.

2 QUALITY OF PROGRAMME PLANNING AND COORDINATION

2.1 Planning

The college has a very good level of planning in place. The small TY core team consists of the TY co-ordinator, the TY year head and a deputy principal with special responsibility for TY. Members of the core team meet to plan and implement the programme. Minutes of meetings are maintained and provide good evidence of the vast extent of the work undertaken. Meetings are also convened with the team of form tutors to ensure that they are fully informed and supported in their ongoing work with students.

An appropriate current written plan is in place for the TY programme. The TY written plan comprises of an overview of many aspects of the programme for the current year together with a synopsis of the individual subject and module plans. TY organisational details are clearly outlined and quality information is provided on TY assessment, work experience, social awareness and practical skills. Details regarding the timetabling of TY are also provided. The plan is well designed with a comprehensive appendix section which includes additional useful information regarding TY provision. Individual subject departments provided detailed subject plans. To further develop the TY plan, it is recommended that 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. In particular, areas in need of attention include review and evaluation, cross-curricular planning, teaching and learning strategies, and modes of assessment. Some departments may wish to develop 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 TY programme is dynamic and effective due to good in-built review mechanisms. Parents, students, subject teachers and core team members all play a vital role in ensuring that the TY programme is modified on an ongoing basis to meet student needs. Resulting from internal evaluation, TY options change from year to year, continuous assessment has been introduced into core subjects and the number of projects students are required to complete has increased. School ongoing review of TY is very good.

2.2 Co-ordination

The TY co-ordination team consisting of the TY co-ordinator and TY year head maintain very good communication with school management, TY teachers and students. The co-ordinator has regular class contact with TY students. The TY co-ordinator holds the post of programme co-ordinator in the college. The formal co-ordinating structures in place are operating very effectively and have led to enhanced experiences for TY students. TY co-ordination duties are extensive and are carried out very effectively. There is a strong commitment from the co-ordination team to the programme and to its successful implementation. Specific duties outlined include communication with the school community, liaison with subject co-ordinators and senior management and daily support for students regarding TY. Duties have been agreed with school management. Resources including ICT are used effectively in the co-ordination of the programme.

2.3 Curriculum

The TY programme curriculum is broad, varied and balanced. Needs, interests and abilities of students are prioritised and active learning, group work and teamwork have been successfully integrated into the college's TY programme. Students are encouraged to build on their skills and achievements and to prepare for senior cycle and their future role in society.

Curriculum delivery is very well structured and timetabled. Irish, English, Mathematics and a modern European language are taken by all students. It is praiseworthy that students can also opt to study a second European language. Students are required to choose one subject from Science, Geography, History and Business. This requirement is being examined by the college with a view to extending this requirement so that sampling of each of these subjects is made possible. This would strengthen the subject sampling element of TY in line with TY guidelines. The college offers a very extensive range of optional subjects and this is very good practice as important life-changing skills are taught within these options. For example, Film Studies, Clothes Design, Latin and mini company all form part of this element of the curriculum. Practical skills modules rotate between Wednesdays and Thursdays and include modules on ICT, Driver Education, Guidance, Research Skills, Cookery and Development Studies. This provision is very good. The timetabled lectures on Tuesday afternoons cover a wide range of topics including careers and charitable organisations. The Friday afternoon timetable offers great variety to the curriculum with a focus on physical education and sporting activities. Students undertake new sporting challenges with expert timetabling to ensure that students learn a wide range of new skills. There is good Social Personal and Health Education (SPHE) provision with a double period timetabled each week. The programme offered is well designed to meet students' needs.

Social awareness is built into students' experiences throughout the curriculum. For example, at Christmas a social action day is organised whereby students partake in an event in support of chosen charities. The school's ongoing Uganda project continues to promote social action and to fulfil essential TY aims regarding personal and social awareness. Student awareness of issues in the developing world is taught through the Development Studies Module. Through fairs, concerts and sponsored walks, students raise funds for schools, hospitals and orphanages in Uganda. A number of students and teachers travel to Uganda each year to work on designated and worthy projects. This aspect of the curriculum is highly commended. To help ensure that all students gain worthwhile social outreach experience, it is recommended that the TY timetable be reviewed to

include some aspects of community service for all students. For example, one week of community service could formally replace a week of work experience.

Activities outside the classroom are encouraged and supported by the college, as these activities are seen by the school community as a vital element of the TY programme in the college. Many activities promote important character development skills and promote TY aims in this regard. Students partake in a variety of out-of-school activities, including An Gaisce, the President's Award, Model United Nations, contributions to the college magazine and participation in national and local competitions.

Work experience plays an important part in the development of students' experiential learning. Students are required to partake in four weeks of work experience which is organised by the TY co-ordinator and TY year head in collaboration with school administration staff. Students are encouraged to find different work placements and are well supported in this task by the college. Careers and tutor lessons, preparation of a curriculum vitae, career lectures and support from teaching staff all contribute to a successful student experience. Employers are provided with appropriate information, they receive selective visits from the co-ordinators and they return an evaluation form. Students complete an extensive work experience diary which is submitted and graded. This work contributes to the overall TY assessment grade. This is very good practice.

3 QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING

3.1 Planning and preparation

Subject departments have drawn up written plans for the various subjects, modules and activities in the TY curriculum. In some cases, subjects are split into discreet eight-week modules with students rotating between each module. Individual lessons were well planned. There was effective planning for the use of resources with handouts, materials and practical and ICT equipment ready in advance of lessons. The good level of advance planning for lessons led to effective student learning.

3.2 Learning and teaching

The quality of teaching and student learning was high for all lessons observed. An atmosphere conducive to learning prevailed in all lessons visited. Teachers displayed high expectations of students thus ensuring that students were sufficiently challenged to maximise their potential. A key feature of many classroom experiences was the very good level of teacher expertise in their subject area. This contributed to enhanced student interest and motivation. Students exhibited positive attitudes to learning. 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. Relationships in the classroom were very good and student learning was enhanced as a result. Confidence building measures were included in some lessons in line with TY aims. For example during one lesson observed, students exhibited good communication skills while delivering a presentation to fellow students. In another lesson, students discussed social issues such as stereotyping, prejudice and discrimination. Students' varied experiences across the curriculum are in line with TY aims.

Lessons were well structured and classroom management was effective in the majority of lessons. Student seating arrangements were good overall, however, in some lessons; teachers should allocate places to students thus ensuring that overall participation by students is improved. The

pace of lessons was appropriate to students' abilities. In many lessons, teacher inputs were appropriately short, clear and concise.

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. There was particularly effective use of ICT in one lesson visited whereby photographs were expertly used as an aid to teaching on the theme of the developing world. ICT was well utilised in many lessons with relevant websites expertly utilised as an aid to developing lesson objectives. Group work played an important role in some lessons and this good practice should be extended in order to enhance student involvement and contribution to lessons. In some lessons, the use of worksheets was good, as their use provided important feedback to the teacher on student learning. This practice should be extended. Teachers circulated the classroom, providing students and groups with individual help, advice and support. Students were frequently active in their learning and practical skills were very well organised and supported.

Good use was made of various questioning strategies in lessons visited. Global questions were often used when teachers introduced a topic, while individual questions elicited specific responses. The extended use of individual questions in some lessons would aid student participation. Teachers set good levels of challenge in terms of learning and a key feature of many lessons was affirmation of students' contribution to the lesson.

Evidence was provided in the course of the evaluation to indicate that students' understanding of material was of a high quality. In some subjects, there was good continuity from junior cycle while preparing for senior cycle. Students were in mixed ability groups for almost all lessons. The value of forming ability groups for any subject in TY should be discussed at whole school level to determine if this arrangement best meets the needs of TY students.

3.3 Assessment

Assessment in TY is frequently reviewed with a view to best meeting the needs of students and parents. Good quality assessment criteria are set out in the TY plan. Teachers are encouraged to review appropriate assessment methods for their subject. Various modes of assessment are utilised including continuous assessment, formal examinations, assessment of projects, portfolio assessment and certification. The school's approach to assessment in TY is highly commended. There are two portfolio assessment days, in December and May. Students are interviewed on their best work in TY. This is praiseworthy. Students complete three TY projects all of which are assessed through structured marking criteria.

Parents receive meaningful feedback on student progress by means of school reports sent home on four occasions throughout the year. Work experience diaries are graded and employers assess students' work experience and return an evaluative report to the college.

TY students receive categorised certificates and TY students have exhibited high achievement in many projects and competitions throughout the year. This is praiseworthy and the commitment of teachers is highly commended.

5 SUMMARY OF STRENGTHS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT

The following are the main strengths identified in the evaluation:

- Senior management has put good structures in place that foster a whole-school approach to promoting and implementing the TY programme.
- The TY timetable is well structured to deliver the intended programme.
- The college has a very good level of planning in place for TY.
- TY co-ordination duties are extensive and are carried out very effectively. There is a strong commitment from the co-ordination team to the programme and to its successful implementation.
- Self-evaluation measures in place have had a positive effect on the delivery and implementation of the TY programme in the college.
- The TY curriculum is broad varied and balanced. Needs, interests and abilities of students are prioritised and active learning, group work and teamwork have been successfully integrated into the college's TY programme.
- The quality of teaching and student learning was high for all lessons observed.
- Confidence building measures were included in some lessons in line with TY aims.
- The variation in methodologies ensured that students' interest and motivation were maintained and that opportunities for learning were maximised.
- Assessment in TY is frequently reviewed with a view to best meeting the needs of students and parents.

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

- To clarify the school's position on TY, it is recommended that a TY policy be formulated and that the school's admission's policy makes reference to TY provision.
- It is recommended that consideration be given to having the student present for at least part of the meeting between parents and the form tutor.
- 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.

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