

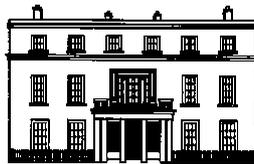
An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

**Programme Evaluation
Transition Year
REPORT**

**St Aidan's Community College
Dublin Hill, Cork
Roll number: 71101G**

Date of inspection: 17 November 2014



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

REPORT ON THE QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN TRANSITION YEAR

INFORMATION ON THE PROGRAMME EVALUATION

Dates of inspection	17 and 18 November 2014
Inspection activities undertaken <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Review of relevant documents• Discussion with principal and key staff• Interaction with students	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Observation of teaching and learning during nine class periods• Examination of students' work• Feedback to principal, deputy principal and the Transition Year co-ordinator

MAIN FINDINGS

- Very good teaching and learning was in evidence across the range of Transition Year (TY) classroom experiences observed.
- Teachers have high expectations for their students' progress in TY and for their progression and retention within senior cycle.
- A range of assessment modes is utilised within the programme.
- Students' engagement and achievements in the programme are recognised, recorded and affirmed.
- Provision of core and optional subjects, and modules, reflects a very well-balanced curriculum.
- The range of co-curricular and complementary activities provided significantly enhance the students' experience of the programme.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

- A TY assessment policy should be agreed and formalised to identify modes of assessment and their weightings across all TY subject areas, and to include provision for overall TY certification for students.
 - Individual subject planning for the programme should be further developed based on a more detailed pro-forma subject-planning template.
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INTRODUCTION

St Aidan's Community College is a co-educational school that is managed under the auspices of Cork Education and Training Board. It has a current enrolment of 560 students. At junior cycle, students are offered the Junior Certificate and the Junior Certificate School Programme (JCSP). Senior cycle students, on completion of the compulsory TY programme, are offered the established Leaving Certificate and the Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) programme. Currently, 101 students are engaged in the TY programme within four streamed class groups.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

- Teaching and learning experiences of very good quality that were fully appropriate to TY guidelines and philosophy, were observed in lessons. Students responded very positively to the stimulating and challenging lessons presented within a very positive and mutually respectful atmosphere. Established whole-school routines relating to punctuality, homework journals, uniform and expected behaviour had a very positive impact on the work that was ongoing in TY lessons.
- Very good practice was observed in lessons that had a coherence in their structure and that arose from, or were linked to, previous learning or lessons. In these lessons, the level of challenge in engagement, in learning and in the tasks presented to students, was appropriate to the students' ability and levels of motivation. The pace in these lessons also varied according to the streamed class group involved. Strategies were almost all student-centred and placed appropriate responsibility on students to engage and to participate. Appropriate homework was given. This was recorded by students and linked to the varying assessment strategies that were used or planned for, within subjects, options and modules.
- Very effective strategies to engage students within the planned lessons included: the use of the four language-learning skills and writing frames in a language lesson; a collaborative focus on understanding the language used to describe personal qualities in the context of preparing a curriculum vitae; a positive, affirming and creative atmosphere that built self-esteem and supported students of varying abilities and attention spans in a practical setting, and the use of very active group work in a carefully paced module on learning skills. In all lessons observed, the tasks and co-operative strategies selected were used by teachers to provide time to support individual students in their work.
- Where recommendations were made, they focused on the clarity and the level of challenge of the tasks set and the coherence of the planned learning for students. Issues of targeted and differentiated questioning to include and engage all students in lessons were discussed, as was the need to maintain a balance between scaffolding students' learning towards their full and independent engagement with tasks and the tendency to overly lead them in their learning.
- Cross-curricular links were observed to be used very effectively across a number of subjects. Particular examples, that were visible during the evaluation, included functional writing practice in English to assist students in planning and preparing for their upcoming work experience. Film studies linked English and Art in the preparation of a short film, while a field study looking at holy wells linked Gaelge, History and Geography. These, and a range of other activities and projects, were observed to be very effective and fully appropriate to teaching and learning in a TY programme.

- Strategies to encourage, affirm and reward students for their work and efforts were evident in all lessons observed. A range of appropriate assessment modes and processes is also in place. There is an appropriate balance between summative assessment in the form of end of unit examinations and coursework assessment based on reports, projects and group tasks. Students record their engagements and achievements on an individual student profile. Displays of students' work are visible in classrooms, along corridors and on noticeboards. It is recommended that these TY assessment practices should now be formalised into an agreed assessment policy that would outline appropriate modes of assessment and their weightings across all TY subject areas. The policy should also provide for overall TY certification for students arising from their completed student profile.

PROGRAMME PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- A comprehensive and appropriate curriculum, and a wide range of complementary experiences, is provided to students within the programme. Core subjects are studied throughout the year. Subject sampling is provided as sixteen-week engagements with each optional subject for Leaving Certificate. The range of complementary experiences is provided as rotating eight-week modules. Work experience and social and community experiences are also provided. The programme also provides a variety of appropriate out-of-school experiences including field trips and outings, charitable engagements, and programmes to support access to third-level education.
- It is clear that provision and support for the programme reflects the school's mission towards maximising and rewarding student achievement, and towards supporting students' retention in education, and their progression to Leaving Certificate level and beyond. Attention to student support and care provided by the year-tutor system and the structures to support students with additional educational needs, combine effectively with the work of the TY co-ordinator to provide a very positive and supportive experience for students.

PROGRAMME PLANNING, CO-ORDINATION AND EVALUATION

- The programme is very effectively co-ordinated. This role is currently filled in a voluntary capacity due to limitations in the availability of posts of responsibility. The commitment of the teaching team, the leadership of the current and previous co-ordinators, and the ongoing and effective communication within the team, and with students and with their parents, has ensured the creation of a vibrant and cohesive programme.
- Planning clearly underpins the quality of the elements of the programme provided and a programme plan is in place. There is scope to improve the written subject plans provided by teachers and subject departments annually to inform the overall TY programme plan. These should be further developed based on a more detailed pro-forma subject-planning template.
- A culture of review and evaluation also clearly underpins planning and provision for the full programme. The outcomes of consultations with student focus groups and staff are evident in a range of changes that have been introduced and then further reviewed. Such inclusive school-based evaluative processes reflect very good practice.

The draft findings and recommendations arising out of this evaluation were discussed with the principal, deputy principal and the co-ordinator of the programme at the conclusion of the evaluation. The board of management of the school was given an opportunity to comment on the findings and recommendations of the report; the board chose to accept the report without response

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