

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

**Programme Evaluation
JCSP
REPORT**

**St Vincent's Secondary School
Glasnevin, Dublin 11.
Roll Number: 60400F**

Date of inspection: 18 January 2011



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

EVALUATION OF THE JUNIOR CERTIFICATE SCHOOL PROGRAMME (JCSP)

INTRODUCTION

This report has been written following an evaluation of the JCSP in St Vincent's Secondary School. 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, with a core 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 and the programme co-ordinator at the end of the evaluation period.

St Vincent's Secondary School participates in the DEIS (Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools) programme and has JCSP in its curriculum since 2000. There is one JCSP class in every year of the junior cycle. The school is also part of the School Completion Programme (SCP) and benefits from the services of a Home School Community Liaison Co-ordinator (HSCL). 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.

1 QUALITY OF PROGRAMME ORGANISATION

1.1 Whole school support

The school's senior management team, in co-operation with the co-ordinator of the programme, actively supports the JCSP. Over the past two years the JCSP has been a focus of whole school development and many of the recommendations in relation to JCSP, made during a whole school evaluation (WSE) in 2008, have been addressed.

School management facilitates teachers in attending continuing professional development (CPD). Induction for teachers new to JCSP is carried out by the co-ordinator, the relevant class tutors and teachers who have taught the programme in the school. Over the years, the cohort of teachers teaching the JCSP has been reduced and it is commendable that there are nine teachers currently providing the programme to each year of the JCSP.

Indicators of the whole-school support given to the programme are the dedicated classrooms, the staff and student JCSP notice boards, the prominent displays of JCSP students' work, and the inclusion of JCSP on the agenda of staff meetings. It is noteworthy that the JCSP coordinator has given a presentation on the programme to all staff giving details of the structure of the programme as well as reinforcing its underlying principles. As there have been changes in the teaching staff since that presentation took place in September 2009, this is now a timely juncture for an up-to-date information session for all staff.

There is a good level of communication between teachers of JCSP and the rest of the teaching staff. JCSP planning meetings are held approximately once every six weeks and these are attended

by the JCSP coordinator, the learning support teacher and the resource teacher. Individual subject teachers can also attend meetings when necessary. Profiling meetings are held once per term and these are attended by all members of the JCSP teaching team. Minutes of these meetings are recorded and provided to senior management. It is good practice that members of the senior management team attend these meetings on occasion. There is effective communication between the SCP and HSCL co-ordinators and the school's senior management team. Meetings of the school care team take place each week and these are attended by senior management, the guidance counsellors, school completion co-ordinator and home-school-community liaison (HSCL) coordinator. The JCSP coordinator also attends these meetings when they concern a student in the JCSP.

It was evident that students are benefiting from their involvement in JCSP and those interviewed by the inspector expressed enjoyment in coming to school and in the education provided to them. They also expressed clear plans to remain in education and this echoes a trend observed in the school in recent years. This is commendable.

1.2 Resources

The school's JCSP is well resourced in terms of teachers, materials, class sizes and information and communication technology (ICT). The JCSP students have a base classroom for each year group and these contain displays of student work, celebrate student achievement and contain students' lockers. Management has plans to provide interactive white boards in each of the JCSP base classrooms and teachers have availed of in-house training in this regard. ICT is also used for storing, collating, and sharing resources for the JCSP. This has been augmented by the introduction of an e-portal system in the school. The school has a JCSP resource room which has a reading corner equipped with bean bags and a range of books. The school also has a number of Nintendo DS and audio books.

1.3 Student selection and support

Appropriate links are made with feeder primary schools before students enter St Vincent's Secondary School. An effective transfer programme is in place for students. This programme was reviewed in 2010 with considerable input from the JCSP coordinator and JCSP form tutors. The principal and the guidance counsellors visit feeder schools early in the preceding year and these visits are followed up by the HSCL coordinator.

The school's provision of a guidance programme is a valuable support for JCSP students. The school's JCSP guidance plan is in the course of further development by the newly-appointed guidance counsellor. A second teacher in the school is currently undertaking training in this area and this build up of expertise in the area is noteworthy.

The school has established selection criteria in order to select students for entry to the JCSP. They are based on results in assessment tests, teacher knowledge of students, as well as parent and student input. In order to mirror the good procedures taking place on the ground, the selection criteria and procedures should be included in the JCSP plan. There should also be a review at regular intervals of each student's participation in JCSP.

Students' learning is supported by the provision of learning support and resource teaching. This is provided by withdrawal in small groups and the provision of smaller classes. There is a good level of communication between the JCSP coordinator and the learning support department. Details of

the composition of the withdrawal groups, times of withdrawal and teachers providing the support are retained by the JCSP coordinator and were provided to the inspector at the time of the evaluation. Students outside the JCSP group also avail of educational supports in this manner. The students have access to a homework club three evenings per week and a good number of JCSP students avail of this resource.

1.4 Home-school links

The school's HSCL coordinator develops and maintains links between students' homes and the school through regular contact with parents. Parents attend open evenings, parent-teacher meetings and meetings of the parents' association. There is also contact through telephone and text messaging. The use of the student journal and the JCSP postcards also enhances the links between home and school. The practice of inviting parents to attend prize giving ceremonies and Christmas celebrations has been discontinued. Strategies to encourage more parental input to the JCSP should be discussed among the planning team with a view to providing more opportunities for parents to visit the school.

2 QUALITY OF PROGRAMME PLANNING AND COORDINATION

2.1 Planning

The JCSP planning group meet regularly to plan the school's annual programme and manage the JCSP initiatives. They also regularly discuss students' progress and care needs. Student attendance is tracked by the SCP co-ordinator and recorded by class teachers using the e portal system. This group should now shift its focus to the sharing of teaching and learning methodologies within JCSP. They should discuss how best practice in teaching and learning can be shared among the team of teachers and this should be on the agenda for the meeting of the JCSP teaching team at the start of the school year. This group could also look at the role of special needs assistants (SNAs) within the JCSP.

The school has a JCSP plan that includes the mission statement and an overview of the programme. The plan also details a recent whole-school approach to addressing students' literacy. This is a praiseworthy intervention and a similar approach to planning for the development of students' numeracy and their personal and social needs should now be considered. The JCSP plan should be extended to reflect the good practices which are already taking place in the school. It should include details of student selection criteria, the JCSP curriculum, assessment, profiling, learning and teaching, and programme review and evaluation.

The JCSP is evaluated at the end of the school year on an informal basis and changes have been made as a result. A comprehensive review should be carried out, preceded by a formal evaluation involving a survey of the parents, JCSP students, school staff, and former students of the programme. The destinations of the students who have graduated from JCSP should be analysed. The review should include the programme's aims, curriculum, student assessment, programme record keeping, teaching and learning as well as CPD for JCSP staff.

2.2 Co-ordination

Good collaboration between the JCSP co-ordinator and the school's management has brought commendable commitment, energy and expertise to the programme in recent years. The current co-ordinator has been involved with the programme since its inception. The post is carried out on a

voluntary basis with a time allocation of two hours for co-ordination activities. The co-ordinator is supported in her work by the commitment and enthusiasm of the JCSP teaching staff. Through the meetings of JCSP staff the co-ordinator ensures good communication among JCSP teachers and facilitates the sharing of resources among the team.

2.3 Curriculum

The JCSP curriculum offers a good range of subjects to its students. However, restrictions are evident due to the lack of practical rooms. For example, the school only has one art room. Currently a number of JCSP art classes are held in regular classrooms as access to the art room is restricted due to numbers. It is recommended that management address this imbalance in access to the art room. Management has plans to introduce Materials Technology Wood into the curriculum. This would be a welcome addition. An application has been made to the Department of Education and Skills for the necessary resources.

It is commendable that changes have been made to the school's JCSP curriculum in light of the WSE which was carried out in 2008. Noteworthy changes include the increase in the number of class periods allocated to Gaeilge Cumarsáideach and to French to align their provision with mainstream Junior Certificate classes and the NCCA guidelines. The celebrations of student achievement and other events and activities that take place in JCSP are highly valued by students.

3 QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING

3.1 Planning and preparation

Planning and preparation for lessons observed during the evaluation was of a good standard. The school shows good practice in that JCSP profiling statements are used in all subjects and cross-curricular statements are also used. It is suggested that opportunities for students to be involved more in the profiling process should be explored.

Students have JCSP folders which are stored in their base classrooms. There was evidence of the effective use of statements and learning targets in these folders. Some examples of good quality work were also observed in these folders and they were seen to give students a good sense of ownership of their work.

There was good quality planning for resources in most of the JCSP lessons observed. Frequently, this involved teachers either adapting existing teaching materials or creating sets of material. Some lessons made good use of ICT.

A key aim of JCSP is the personal and social development of students and the improvement of their literacy and numeracy skills. In St Vincent's, the JCSP commendably develops such skills through the curriculum and through numerous in-school initiatives which benefit students. These additional initiatives include the 'Make a Book' project, the involvement of guest speakers and peer-mentoring.

3.2 Learning and teaching

The teaching and learning observed in the JCSP was of a good standard. Lessons were well prepared which contributed to the good practices observed. The pace of teaching, which varied between lessons and subjects, was appropriate to students' ability levels. In all lessons, the

learning objectives were made clear to students at the outset. This was usually done verbally by the teacher. Best practice was seen when the teacher outlined these learning objectives on the whiteboard and checked at the end of the lesson to evaluate whether these targets had been achieved. This practice should be extended across all subject areas in the JCSP.

The good behaviour of students and their efforts were regularly affirmed. There was an atmosphere conducive to learning in all of the lessons observed. Students were enthusiastic and willing participants in most lessons, while the quality of interaction between teachers and students was positive and respectful. Students' attendance and punctuality were appropriately monitored in each of the classes visited and students were actively involved in their learning.

The individual attention and affirmation given to students by teachers and special needs assistants (SNAs) was commendable. The work of the SNAs in the school has a considerable bearing on the success of the JCSP. From observation, it is evident that they perform a highly valued function in assisting students in accessing their education.

The school's commitment to literacy was evident in lessons through the wide use of keyword lists and the attention to reading, spelling and pronunciation. In their interview, students affirmed their enjoyment of the programme and their regular use of the computer room and JCSP resource room. The classrooms were print-rich learning environments. The key skills of reading and spelling were encouraged in many lessons. The development of students' literacy in lessons will be further supported by the drawing up of a whole-school literacy policy which is currently underway.

The school's commitment to numeracy was evident through the use of JCSP mathematics-related posters. The development of students' numeracy skills was noted in the lessons observed and from discussions around everyday use of mathematics such as temperature, height and distance. It should be further supported by the drawing up of a school numeracy policy. The resources section on the www.jcsp.slss.ie website provides advice on the drawing up of school literacy and numeracy policies.

3.3 Assessment

Students are assessed through a range of modes and the JCSP profiling system facilitates tracking of students' progress. Students received homework in all of the lessons observed. Students are encouraged to note their homework in their journals and time was set aside in all lessons to do this. Observation of a number of student exercise books indicated that they are regularly checked and annotated by the teacher and this is good practice. School journals and JCSP postcards provide feedback to parents on students' progress. They also act as a source of motivation and affirmation for students. The school's success in tracking students' attendance is shown by the positive attitudes of students towards attendance and the fact that the JCSP has succeeded in increasing student retention.

4 SUMMARY OF STRENGTHS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT

The following are the main strengths identified in the evaluation:

- Good collaboration between the JCSP co-ordinator and the school's management has brought commendable commitment, energy and expertise to the programme in recent years.
- School management is supportive of JCSP and facilitates teachers in attending continuing professional development (CPD).
- Induction for teachers new to JCSP is carried out by the co-ordinator, the relevant class tutors and teachers who have taught the programme in the school.
- Profiling meetings are organised each term and these are attended by the JCSP teaching team.
- There was evidence of the effective use of statements and learning targets in students' folders.
- The individual attention and affirmation given to students in many lessons was commendable.
- The school's success in tracking students' attendance is shown by the positive attitudes of students towards attendance and the fact that the JCSP has succeeded in increasing student retention.

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

- It is recommended that management address the imbalance in the access of JCSP classes to the art room.
- The JCSP planning team should discuss parental input to the JCSP with a view to providing more opportunities for parents to be included in the programme.
- The JCSP plan should be extended to reflect the good practices which are already taking place in the school including details of student selection criteria, the JCSP curriculum, assessment, profiling, learning and teaching, and programme review and evaluation.
- A comprehensive review of the programme should be carried out.

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