

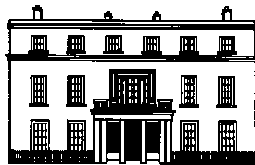
An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

**Programme Evaluation
TRANSITION YEAR
REPORT**

**St Mel's College
Longford, County Longford
Roll number: 63750B**

Date of inspection: 1 May 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	30 th April and 1 st May 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 six class periods• Examination of students' work• Feedback to principal and relevant staff

MAIN FINDINGS

- The quality of teaching and learning ranged from good to outstanding in the lessons observed.
- The levels of student participation and engagement were highest in lessons where the methodology chosen allowed students to be active learners.
- The atmosphere in each of the classrooms visited was relaxed and secure.
- The school's Transition Year (TY) programme is very good and is very well co-ordinated, although there is scope in some subjects to ensure that the curricular content is different from Junior and Leaving Certificate syllabus material.
- Whole-school support for TY is very good.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

- When planning TY lessons teachers should fully consider how they will stimulate students, exploit their interests and enable them to engage with the content on a deeper level.
- As there will be an additional TY class group formed next year and more TY teachers will be needed, teachers should be surveyed on their interest in teaching the programme and this should be taken into account, where possible, when choosing teachers for next year's TY teaching team.
- Where relevant, TY subject plans should ensure that most of the curricular content of the TY programme is not on the certificate examinations' syllabuses.
- Lesson planning should focus on developing key skills among TY students such as learning to work together, communicating and presenting, critical thinking, reflection, independent learning, problem solving, and learning to learn.

INTRODUCTION

St Mel's College, Longford is a voluntary Catholic secondary school with a current enrolment of 426 boys. TY is optional. There is currently one TY class group in the school.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

- The quality of teaching and learning ranged from good to outstanding in the lessons observed. All teacher explanations and instructions were clear. All teachers shared the learning objectives with the students and checked students' achievement of the learning outcomes as the lessons progressed or at the end. These very good practices ensured that lessons were purposeful and structured.
- A variety of classroom activities was observed. These included the use of PowerPoint presentations, science practicals, video clips and demonstrations with historical artefacts. They were most effective when they were used in ways that made the content relevant for students and where they captured the students' imaginations. This very good practice should be extended to all lessons. It is recommended that when planning lessons teachers fully consider how they will stimulate students, exploit their interests and enable them to engage with the content on a deeper level.
- The levels of student participation and engagement were highest in lessons where the methodology chosen allowed students to be active learners. The students in their discussion with the inspector expressed a preference for computer work, group work, project work and outdoor activities. They reported that they enjoyed lessons more when active learning methodologies were used. Further use of these methodologies in TY lessons is, therefore, recommended.
- The atmosphere in each of the classrooms visited was relaxed and secure. Students displayed confidence and maturity in their interactions with each other and with their teachers. Teachers regularly praised and affirmed students for their efforts.
- Teachers monitored students' progress and assessed learning well through questioning and observation. Best practice was noted where higher-order questions were used to challenge students and to encourage them to think.
- The school's assessment practices are in keeping with the aims of TY. Teachers provided students with encouragement and advice on how to improve. Students are assessed by continuous assessment. Opportunities are provided for the celebration of student achievement.

PROGRAMME PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- The school's TY programme is very good. It has a good combination of optional subjects and subject specialisms. However, in some subjects there is a need to ensure that most of the curricular content is different from Junior and Leaving Certificate syllabus material. Work experience is integrated well into the programme.
- The TY timetable is very good overall. However, there are three TY religious education (RE) lessons timetabled with three different RE teachers. This is unsatisfactory and should be addressed. The school's library has been redeveloped and consideration should also be given to timetabling library sessions for TY students. This will allow them to engage in research, reading for information and pleasure and will also contribute to their literacy development.

- There is currently one TY class group. Interest in the programme has grown and next year there will be two TY class groups. This will necessitate more teachers being deployed to teach TY. It is recommended that teachers be surveyed on their interest in teaching the programme and that this be taken into account, where possible, when choosing teachers for next year's TY teaching team.
- Whole-school support for TY is very good. The resources for co-ordinating the programme, and for teaching and learning, which include information and communications technology (ICT), are very good.
- Students have access to a range of valuable co-curricular and extracurricular activities to enhance learning and to facilitate personal development. Of particular value are the social and environmental awareness activities for students which take place throughout their TY. These include contributing to the Tidy Town's initiative and organising events for elderly residents of a local nursing home. In addition, students provide sports coaching for pupils in a local primary school and organise fundraising events for charity. These are very good examples of the school's overall aim for TY, which is to provide students with opportunities for self-development.
- Students complete interest inventories and career investigations as part of the guidance provision for TY. They receive inputs from the guidance counsellor before making their Leaving Certificate subject choices. They sample almost all Leaving Certificate subjects. Subject teachers also provide valuable advice on careers and job applications for TY students. Students described to the inspector the benefits of this support when choosing subjects for the Leaving Certificate and making decisions about their future as a particular advantage of participating in the programme.
- There is very good communication with parents of TY students throughout the year. Information evenings are arranged, parent-teacher meetings are held and regular reports are sent home.

PROGRAMME PLANNING, CO-ORDINATION AND EVALUATION

- Some subject plans outline a range of methodologies and a wide variety of resources for delivering the content. These include practical, outdoor, and writing activities, discussion, project work, and group work. In addition, the use of ICT, film and various media sources are valuable features of some subject plans. However, there is scope to extend these good practices. Therefore, lesson planning should focus on the development of key skills such as learning to work together, communicating and presenting, critical thinking, reflection independent learning, problem solving, and learning to learn.
- The co-ordination of the TY programme is very good. Regular meetings of the core team are held. The work of the co-ordinator is very well supported by senior management and the TY subject teachers. Work experience is monitored through the completion of student diaries and by teachers contacting employers while the students are on work placement.
- The success of the TY programme is evaluated through student surveys. Last year's questionnaire responses indicated a very high level of satisfaction with the programme. It is evident that the programme is informed from year-to-year by these surveys. It is recommended that a question about teaching and learning in TY, the content taught and the methodologies used be included in the evaluation questionnaire.

The draft findings and recommendations arising out of this evaluation were discussed with the principal, deputy principal and relevant key staff at the conclusion of 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.

Published October 2014

Appendix

SCHOOL RESPONSE TO THE REPORT

Submitted by the Board of Management

Area 1 Observations on the content of the inspection report

The Board are very happy with the report and take on board the recommendations made.

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

Since the inspection senior management have looked at the staff involved in teaching the TY course and other teachers were brought into the team for 2014/15.

Staff were urged to work outside the Leaving Certificate syllabus and to use more innovative methodologies.