

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

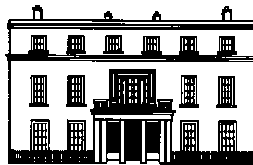
Department of Education and Skills

**Programme Evaluation
TRANSITION YEAR**

REPORT

**Loreto Secondary School
Balbriggan, Co Dublin
Roll number: 60010P**

Date of inspection: 27 March 2015



**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	25 and 27 March 2015
Inspection activities undertaken <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Review of relevant documents• Discussion with principal, deputy principals 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, deputy principals and relevant staff

MAIN FINDINGS

- The quality of teaching and learning in all of the lessons observed was very good.
- The level of student collaboration and co-operation was very high in all lessons.
- A range of valuable modes of assessment is used for monitoring and evaluating students' achievement in transition year (TY).
- Whole-school support for TY is excellent.
- The co-ordination and management of the TY programme are excellent.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

- TY students should complete a career investigation as a research project.
 - The students should be facilitated to provide feedback on the quality of the learning process in TY, how it differed from learning in the Junior Cycle years and what aspects of TY learning should be extended to other year groups.
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INTRODUCTION

Loreto Secondary School, Balbriggan is a voluntary Catholic secondary school with a current enrolment of 1,235 girls. TY is compulsory in the school.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

- The quality of teaching and learning in all of the lessons observed was very good. Many examples of excellent practice were noted. All lessons were well planned with a wide range of interesting and stimulating resources prepared to support learning. Lessons were well structured and purposeful. The learning objectives were shared with the students at the beginning and assessed throughout each lesson.
- The school is participating in the *Forbairt Action Learning Project* to extend active learning across the school and there is widespread use of active methodologies in TY. The variety of methodologies observed included engaging teacher exposition, drama activities, brainstorming, pair work and the use of games. Information and communication technology (ICT), in the form of presentations, video clips and online maps, was used very effectively to enhance lessons.
- The level of student collaboration and co-operation was very high in all lessons. Students are provided with many opportunities to develop independent learning skills. Project work, group work, presentations and research tasks are strong and valuable features of teaching and learning. The students, in their focus-group meeting, described many benefits in participating in these activities to the quality of their learning, the depth of their understanding and the development of their confidence.
- A range of valuable modes of assessment is used for monitoring and evaluating students' achievement. These include project work, end-of-year interviews and formal examinations. Furthermore, extensive use of assessment for learning strategies, in providing feedback to students, was noted in the evaluation. The use of these strategies is valuable in encouraging students to be self-directed learners.
- While it is good that project work is emphasised, the timing of project completion in some instances, when a number of projects are due at the same time, places unnecessary pressure on students. Therefore, it is recommended that the timing of the completion of projects be better co-ordinated amongst the subject teachers.
- Effective strategies to develop students' literacy skills were used in all lessons. For example, key words were highlighted and their meanings were discussed. In addition, all students are expected to read for pleasure and complete at least three book reviews as part of the programme.
- The relationships between students and their teachers were warm and encouraging. Teachers have created secure learning environments where students demonstrated confidence in expressing themselves and respect in listening to the contributions of others.

PROGRAMME PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- Whole-school support for TY is excellent. Teachers are assigned to TY on the basis of their interest in teaching the programme. The resources, including ICT, for co-ordinating the programme and for teaching and learning are very good. In addition, a whole-school sense of pride is evident in the many displays of students' work around the school.
- The TY curriculum is very broad and balanced. It is appropriately structured around an academic core, optional subjects and subject specialisms. Work experience is well integrated into the programme. The programme comprises many subjects not on the Leaving Certificate programmes and is adapted from year to year to ensure that it reflects students' interests.
- Students complete interest inventories and can avail of individual appointments with the guidance counsellor. In addition, advice and support with making Leaving Certificate subject choices is provided by the TY core team, year head and subject teachers.
- In discussion, the students were appreciative of the benefits of participating in very well-chosen work experience in helping them make choices about their future. It is recommended that students complete a career investigation as a research project, as this will support them in making subject choices for the Leaving Certificate.
- In addition to participation in trips out of school, students engage in valuable co-curricular and extra-curricular learning experiences. These include *Junk Kouture*, a health and beauty course, *Gaisce*, and the Driver Education programme. They participate in the *School Link Project* which involves them in teaching literacy and numeracy to pupils of the local primary schools. Additionally, a musical is staged and this is a particularly successful and valuable aspect of the programme.
- The TY year head makes a significant contribution to managing the programme and plays an important role in promoting the students' high level of motivation and their work ethic. Attendance and punctuality of TY students are very good.

PROGRAMME PLANNING, CO-ORDINATION AND EVALUATION

- TY has a long and successful history in the school and there are excellent structures and procedures in place. The current co-ordinator holds the position in an acting capacity and has built very effectively on the work done in the past with the full co-operation of the TY year head, the TY core team, TY tutors, and subject teachers. This is a significant achievement considering the range of activities provided and the size of the TY cohort. The co-ordinator's excellent work has contributed greatly to the success of the programme in the school.
- The members of the TY team are allocated two timetabled class periods for planning per week. The minutes of these meetings highlight very effective distribution of duties and team work. Minutes also indicate that the focus of meetings is on logistical organisation and administration of the programme. It is recommended that more emphasis be placed on discussion about teaching and learning.
- Communication between the TY team and the wider school community is very good; in addition to regular team meetings, the co-ordinator reports to staff and to the board. There is a suggestion box for students, a blog on the school's website and appropriate opportunities for communication with parents and the celebration of students' achievements.

- The quality of provision is evaluated through student and parent surveys at the end of the year. These surveys focus on the students' experience in terms of the activities undertaken. It is recommended that the students be facilitated to provide feedback on the quality of the learning process in TY, how it differed from learning in the Junior Cycle years and what aspects of TY learning should be extended to other year groups.

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