

**An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna**

**Department of Education and Skills**

**Programme Evaluation  
Transition Year  
REPORT**

**Coláiste Phádraig CBS  
Lucan, County Dublin  
Roll Number: 60264A**

**Date of inspection: 12 October 2010**



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

# **EVALUATION OF THE TRANSITION YEAR PROGRAMME**

## **INTRODUCTION**

This report has been written following an evaluation of the Transition Year in Coláiste Phádraig CBS. 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, 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.

Coláiste Phádraig CBS is a boys-only voluntary secondary school. The Transition Year (TY) programme was introduced to the school curriculum in 1995. 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.

## **1 QUALITY OF PROGRAMME ORGANISATION**

### **1.1 Whole school support**

There is a whole-school approach to the implementation of the TY programme. Based on discussions held during the course of the evaluation, the programme offered is achieving the three overall aims of the national programme. It is evident that TY is actively promoted in the school and that relevant information is regularly disseminated to the school community on notice boards, at staff meetings and in written correspondence with parents.

Student achievement in TY is celebrated at an end-of-year ceremony. This further supports and promotes the uniqueness of the programme in the school.

The core team reviews the programme annually in collaboration with senior management. At this point, the programme would benefit from a whole-school approach to its evaluation in order to establish the feasibility of continuing to offer the TY as part of the school curriculum into the future and to reinvigorate its support networks. This evaluation should include all aspects of the programme, and the process should seek the input of all partners, including those external to the school but who are closely involved in providing services such as work experience opportunities for the students. This will assist management in establishing indicators that will help raise and assure the quality of the programme in meeting the needs of the students.

### **1.2 Resources**

Senior management has established an enthusiastic and effective core team to implement, monitor and review TY and to work with the students. Each year members of the teaching staff are invited to teach an element of the programme and offer ideas for its development. This is very good practice. Evidence suggests that teacher turnover in relation to TY is low, indicating a good level of engagement with the programme in the majority of instances

The TY co-ordinator is facilitated in holding two meetings per year with the whole TY teaching team. Information on the programme content, progress and outcomes is discussed at these meetings. Currently, there is no detailed reference to TY in the teacher handbook nor does it form part of a teacher induction programme for new teachers who may be involved in delivering aspects of the programme. It is recommended that the co-ordinator, in collaboration with senior management and with the core team, explore the development of an induction module for teachers who are new to the programme, with a particular emphasis on planning for content and teaching methodologies and strategies, including assessment modes. This information should then be included in the teacher handbook and reviewed and updated regularly.

In keeping with good practice, the school's ICT facilities are used in organising and in implementing the programme.

### **1.3 Student selection and support**

Delivery of information concerning TY to third-year students and their parents is timely. It is commendable that the information evening for parents this year included an input from fifth-year students who had prepared a very good PowerPoint presentation on their experience of TY. Students and their parents also have access to the school's Guidance services to assist them in deciding on the suitability of the programme for their sons.

With the exception of one year when two class groups participated, access to the programme is limited to one mixed-ability class group of twenty-four students each academic year. The number of applicants to participate in the programme varies between thirty and forty. In discussions held with the principal it was evident that he is keen that TY should continue to be available to one class group only. Nevertheless, the principal is very clear about the benefits accruing to students who participate in the programme and in turn on how the school in general benefits from their holistic learning during TY as they progress through senior cycle. This being the case, it is recommended that management consider the feasibility of extending the availability of the programme to a greater number of students.

It has been established practice in the school to interview applicants for placement in TY. It was reported that the interview process this year was followed by a lottery due to difficulties in discriminating between candidates. The lottery was carried out internally with no independent adjudicator present. This is not good practice. It is recommended that management in co-operation with the core TY team reconsider the use of the lottery system and that careful consideration be given to the selection process and procedures. This would offer an opportunity to review and refine the interview criteria. Furthermore, in the interest of openness and transparency, it is recommended that all school partners be clear on the process and procedures for assigning places to applicants.

Following the TY admissions process for the 2010/2011 academic year, the school undertook a review of its TY admissions policy. It is urgent that work on this draft be completed for ratification by the board of management in time for the processing of next year's applications for first year and TY. As was recommended in the WSE report, it is again recommended that the school's admissions policy be amended in light of this development.

The opinions of students who do not apply to participate in the programme have never been sought in any formal manner. In order to ensure that the programme is serving the needs of the whole-school community, it is recommended that students who do not apply, and their parents, be

surveyed in order to establish their reasons for not considering TY. Their ideas and recommendations regarding the programme and its content should also be canvassed.

The level of contact between the TY co-ordinator, the TY class tutor and the class group is very good. It was evident that both the co-ordinator and class tutor work very closely with the students and the core team of teachers to ensure that the students derive maximum benefit from the programme offered. A weekly timetabled class assigned to the class tutor to meet with the students facilitates the provision of support for the students throughout the year. As well as being provided with programme information during this period, students are asked to reflect and record their experiences. This is good practice and should be further developed to include their reflections on their learning and to develop their awareness of themselves as learners. The class tutor also co-ordinates weekly activities for the students and supervises these along with other teachers as appropriate. The TY co-ordinator, who also delivers the students' Guidance input, has regular weekly contact with the students.

The school offers a very good induction programme for the students. One element of this involves their participation in adventure activities in Baltinglass at the beginning of the school year. Both students, past and present, and teachers spoke very positively about the contribution this activity makes to the students' experience of the year. Students' comments and observations on their experience indicate that it does indeed assist them in getting to know other students, their skills and talents, and that it is particularly effective as a team-building exercise.

#### **1.4 Home-school links**

Communication with students' homes is regular and is very good. Modes of communication include information evenings, a parent-teacher meeting, examination reports and other communications relating, for instance, to the schedule of activities through out the year.

## **2 QUALITY OF PROGRAMME PLANNING AND COORDINATION**

### **2.1 Planning**

The school has a TY plan which comprises the sections required. However, this document is not dated and does not contain any evidence of having been presented to the board of management at any point. The document would benefit from the inclusion of a contents list and also from setting the programme in the context of the school's mission statement.

The core team holds regular meetings and minutes are recorded. Activities are well organised, and tasks and duties are delegated among members. This is good practice.

The programme content is evaluated. However, the evaluation needs to be more robust, particularly in the area of curriculum.

### **2.2 Co-ordination**

The current co-ordinator has gained ten years of experience in co-ordinating the programme and participated in the TY induction course when first appointed. The duties assigned are extensive and are carried out very well and with a keen interest in the programme. The TY co-ordinator is also the school's Programme Co-ordinator, and the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme co-ordinator. Up to two weeks prior to this evaluation, the TY co-ordinator also fulfilled the duties of

Leaving Certificate Applied co-ordinator, a role which was then taken over by the principal. A complete review of programme co-ordination is necessary. It is recommended that senior management refer to circular 17/02 when reviewing the role of Programme Co-ordinator.

## **2.3 Curriculum**

The curriculum offered has remained largely unchanged since the introduction of TY and presents as a traditional Leaving Certificate programme on the timetable. While the core subject areas and the activities are very well provided for as part of the curriculum, it does not include all of the four layers required in a TY programme. In order to ensure that the curriculum offered is fully in line with the aims and objectives of the programme, it is strongly recommended that this issue be addressed as a matter of priority. The curriculum must include modular and subject sampling layers in addition to the core subjects and calendar activities layers already in the plan.

Minutes of core-group meetings indicate that the curriculum is reviewed and that the introduction of Art is currently being considered. Plans for individual subject areas varied widely in quality from some which were very good to those that were poor. A small number of plans offered no indication of the content to be covered during the year. It is recommended that a consistent approach and a common template be used in developing and presenting the plans. Guidance on the headings and sub-headings to be used is available in the brochure *Writing the Transition Year Programme* ([www.slss.ie](http://www.slss.ie)). Such an approach will provide greater clarity when planning cross-curricular links, a key element of TY programme planning, which was in evidence in some plans only. Plans indicated that there is considerable scope for the development of the area of assessment. A minority of plans provided evidence that they had been evaluated and reviewed. This good practice should be extended to all plans on an annual basis.

Currently, students engage in two blocks of work experience, each for a two-week period. The first block takes place immediately prior to Christmas holidays and is preceded by a week of in-house examinations. This timing of work experience is not in keeping with Circular M1/00 and should be discontinued. It was reported that, due to difficulties being faced by students in acquiring work experience placement in the current economic climate, the second block, which is scheduled to take place around Easter, is under review. It is recommended that students participate in a maximum of two weeks' work experience. The work experience should be fully integrated with curriculum delivery in order that students can, along with preparing adequately, benefit from an opportunity to reflect on their experiences and discuss their learning as part of their Guidance lessons.

The programme offers students opportunities to participate in a good range of social and personal development programmes and courses through out the year.

## **3 QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING**

### **3.1 Planning and preparation**

Planning and preparation for the lessons observed was of very good quality in over half the lessons observed. In the case of a third of the lessons, more consideration should have been given when planning to the class contact time available. In the case of one of the subject areas evaluated, the plan had not been developed by the teacher delivering the course, and this person indicated that the plan would not necessarily be followed. Plans for the content should be devised by the teacher

delivering the course in collaboration with the students, and should be reviewed regularly and amended where necessary.

### **3.2 Learning and teaching**

The lesson objectives and tasks were shared with the students and written on the board at the outset in a small number of lessons. This is very good practice and should be extended across the curriculum. Excellent practice concerning the development of students' understanding of their learning and self-assessment skills was observed in one instance. Having shared the expected learning outcomes with the students at the beginning, the teacher afforded them time at the conclusion of the lesson to record their reflections on their learning.

Lesson structure was very good in a small number of cases. All lessons included a variety of activities. In some instances, however, lessons were too teacher-centered and did not fully reflect TY approaches to teaching and learning. Best practice was observed where, following a presentation or demonstration by the teacher, students were then afforded an opportunity to implement their learning individually or in small groups and learning was checked. The instance in which peer tutoring took place, where students with prior experience of the subject and skills to be learned shared their knowledge and helped their peers in completing tasks, is particularly commended. A number of group-work and pair-work tasks were observed. While students were given clear instructions as regards the task, they were often unclear about their individual role in the groups, time limits were not always set and feedback was not sought in any case. Furthermore, in a number of instances the tasks and work sheets should have been used to assist in differentiating learning. In one instance it became apparent during the course of the lesson that a copy of the worksheet distributed had been previously worked on by students. Students continued to have significant difficulty with the standard required of them to complete the worksheet. Such a situation indicates that there is considerable scope for the development of reflective practice and the development of skills to differentiate learning.

Questioning was used to check learning in all lessons. However, the questions posed were predominantly lower-order. It is recommended that teachers review their questioning styles and that the range used be fully exploited to address the needs of and to challenge all learners present.

A number of the lessons observed were based in a computer room. The one instance in which there was a clear emphasis on students' use of ICT as a learning tool is highly commended. Teachers should share their skills in using ICT in a creative way and promote its use as a learning tool among students. In the case of a language class observed, it is recommended that greater use be made of the target language to benefit learning and that strategies other than translation to or from English be used to aid understanding. Opportunities arising from listening and reading in the case of such lessons should also be used to develop students' accuracy in pronunciation.

Classroom management in all instances was very good. In some cases very good use was made of the classroom space available to vary and create a different learning environment for the students. This is commendable. Students engaged well with the tasks assigned in most cases. This was demonstrated by their willingness to ask topic-related questions of their teachers. Homework was assigned in some classes.

Roll was not called in all classes and no records of attendance were available in the case of two lessons observed. This should be addressed and school policy in this regard should be implemented in all instances.

### **3.3 Assessment**

Students sit formal house examinations around the second week in December. Outcomes of these assessments are forwarded to parents. It is commendable that the school has developed a separate report form for TY. It was intimated that consideration was being given to the introduction of a second set of house examinations at Easter for TY students in light of difficulties regarding access to work experience placements. It is recommended that this should not proceed. Conducting two formal house examinations would not be in keeping with the spirit of TY and would limit the opportunity, range and value of alternative but equally valid modes of assessment available for use.

Although the practice is not regular, homework is assigned in some areas, as indicated by a random sample of student journals. Very good practice in this regard was observed in one of the classes visited, where students were required to record their learning and store it in specially prepared folders. This practice should be extended across the curriculum. Students' reflection journals and self-assessments should be included when considering their overall achievement during the year. In order for this to be effective, it will be necessary to set out and share the criteria with the students at the outset. Almost all curricular areas include project work. One of the main benefits of this approach is that cross-curricular facets can be explored and extended, including knowledge and skills. It is recommended that cross-curricular links be included when planning for the projects to be completed in different subject and module areas and be recorded in the planning documents, as had been done in a minority of cases.

It was noted that there is scope for the use of portfolio assessment in order to extend and support the modes of assessment used. The European Language Portfolio could, for instance, be used in the case of languages. In the case of Gaelige, consideration should be given to Teastas Eorpach na Gaelige (European Certificate for Irish), which can be accessed through NUI Maynooth ([www.teg.ie](http://www.teg.ie)).

Participants are awarded school-based and other certificates at the end of the year. Areas in which certificates are awarded include the Young Scientist, Outdoor Pursuits, Driving Lessons, GAA Coaching.

At the time of the evaluation there were no assessment records available for the current cohort of TY students.

## **4 SUMMARY OF STRENGTHS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT**

The following are the main strengths identified in the evaluation:

- The TY programme in Coláiste Phádraig is actively promoted and receives a good level of support in the school. Current and past students spoke very positively about their experiences of TY.
- An enthusiastic and effective co-ordinator and core team work with the students, parents, teachers, school management and school community in implementing the programme.
- Resources available to support the co-ordinator and the core team to complete their duties are very good and include regular team meetings.
- The dissemination of information about TY to parents and students is timely.
- The school offers a very good TY induction programme for students.
- The TY plan comprises the required sections and the programme content is evaluated.

- Student achievement is celebrated at the end of the school year and a separate report form has been developed for TY students.

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

- In order to establish the viability of TY in Coláiste Phádraig into the future and to reinvigorate support for it, it is recommended that an evaluation of the programme involving all the partners in the school be carried out.
- It is urgent that the draft TY admissions policy be finalised and ratified by the board of management.
- Students who do not apply for TY, and their parents, should be surveyed in order to establish their reasons for not applying, and they should also be canvassed for ideas and recommendations regarding the programme and its content.
- The TY curriculum should comprise four layers. In addition to the core subject and calendar activities layers, the school must now develop subject sampling and modular layers.
- Planning for individual subjects should be reviewed as a matter of priority. A common template should be used in all instances and all plans must include details of content, learning outcomes, teaching and learning methodologies to support differentiation and modes of assessment.
- TY should form part of an induction programme for new teachers involved in delivering the programme and details should be provided in the teacher handbook.
- Periods of work experience must be planned in compliance with circular M1/00.
- The role of Programme Co-ordinator should be reviewed.



# **Appendix**

**SCHOOL RESPONSE TO THE REPORT**

**Submitted by the Board of Management**

## **Area 1 Observations on the content of the inspection report**

We accept the report and have begun to implement the recommendations suggested.

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

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

- (1) The Transition Year Admission Policy has been ratified by the Board of Management and has been inserted into the schools overall Admissions Policy dated Thursday, 20 January, 2011.
- (2) All current third-year students have been surveyed as to the reasons why they (a) have, (b) have not applied for Transition Year. The current third-year cohorts' parents have been spoken to in two information sessions relating to Transition Year and surveyed in relation to same.
- (3) An evaluation of the current Transition Year students and their parents/guardians will take place later in this academic year. These evaluations will be considered by the Transition Year core group and school management for the Transition Year Academic year 2011/2012.
- (4) The inclusion of a modular section and a subject sampling element will be included in the Programme for 2011/2012.
- (5) Student "reflective" journals will be the norm for all Transition Year students in 2011/2012.
- (6) The current practice of two, two week work experience placements and their timing will be changed as suggested by the inspection report. Students will have their initial work experience placement in late November and will return to school before the Christmas holidays for assessments. A one week social placement is being considered during the second school term.
- (7) Formulation of a common template is scheduled for the next Transition Year group meeting. At this meeting an induction programme for teachers new to Transition Year will be drawn up and an insertion for this induction will be included in our teachers' handbook.