

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

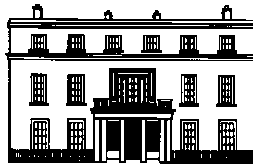
Department of Education and Skills

**Programme Evaluation
TRANSITION YEAR**

REPORT

**Saint Joseph's Secondary School
Rush, County Dublin
Roll number: 60343T**

Date of inspection: 4 March 2015



**A N R O I N N | D E P A R T M E N T O F
O I D E A C H A I S | E D U C A T I O N
A G U S S C I L E A N N A | A N D S K I L L S**

REPORT ON THE QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN TRANSITION YEAR

INFORMATION ON THE PROGRAMME EVALUATION

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| Dates of inspection | 2 and 4 March 2015 |
| Inspection activities undertaken <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Review of relevant documents• Discussion with principal, deputy principal and key staff• Interaction with students | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Observation of teaching and learning during seven class periods• Examination of students' work• Feedback to principal, deputy principal and relevant staff |

MAIN FINDINGS

- The quality of teaching and learning was very good to excellent in the lessons evaluated.
- Throughout the evaluation, students made confident contributions, listened carefully to each other and to their teachers and showed great maturity in expressing themselves and in responding to others.
- Strategies to develop students' literacy and numeracy skills were used purposively in all lessons.
- The transition year (TY) programme is reflective of students' interests.
- The co-ordination of the TY programme is excellent.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

- Consideration should be given to extending student-feedback mechanisms, to include the use of focus-group meetings, to ascertain the impact of the different methodologies used in TY on the quality of learning.
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INTRODUCTION

Saint Joseph's Secondary School, Rush is a voluntary Catholic school with a current enrolment of 410 boys and 248 girls. The school participates in Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS), the Department of Education and Skills action plan for educational inclusion. TY is optional in the school.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

- The quality of teaching and learning was very good to excellent in the lessons evaluated. All lessons were very well planned. A wide range of interesting and relevant resources was used to engage learners including video clips and newspaper articles.
- The main methodologies used were group work, art activities, drama exercises and student performance, editing tasks, computer work, games and teacher exposition. Teachers mainly acted as facilitators of learning and students collaborated and took responsibility for their own learning.
- The students, in a meeting with the inspector, described the variety of methodologies used as having a positive effect on the quality of their engagement. In particular, the students highlighted learning-for-understanding as a valuable feature of their experience. They also considered the extent and quality of the group work used in lessons as being beneficial to their learning.
- Strategies to develop students' literacy and numeracy skills were used effectively in all lessons. Such strategies include the study of grammar and punctuation in the journalism lesson and the careful teaching of measure in the animation lesson. Students' oral communication skills were developed as an integral part of each lesson through the opportunities provided for discussion.
- Teachers differentiated learning by using methodologies that allowed students to work at their own pace and by providing assistance where necessary. However, in one class group where students had studied the subject previously, it was evident that some students were under-challenged at times. Therefore, it is recommended that additional challenge be planned for them.
- The quality of learning observed was very high. Throughout the evaluation, students made confident contributions, were respectful and listened carefully to each other and to their teachers. In subjects where a personal response was expected, students showed great maturity in expressing themselves and in responding to others. This is evidence of the secure learning environments that have been created by teachers and the mutually respectful relationships that exist.
- A range of effective questioning strategies was used by all teachers to encourage student participation and to enhance class and group discussions.
- The quality of assessment is very good overall. Most teachers were observed to monitor progress effectively by observing students while they were working on individual tasks. However, in a number of lessons there was need to augment the assessment approaches used. As one means of augmenting practice, it is recommended that *mini white boards* be used during lessons. Student peer-assessment was a valuable feature of some lessons. For example,

students evaluated each other's performances in the drama lesson. This practice helped students to reflect on the work of their classmates and to identify how they themselves could improve. Students are assessed at the end of each module by personal interview, class tests, and on their project work. In keeping with good practice, students maintain a folder on an online portfolio system of their best work and this forms part of their assessment at the end of the year. Suitable opportunities are provided for the celebration of student achievement.

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 for co-ordinating the programme and for teaching and learning, including information and communication technology (ICT), are very good.
- School management has facilitated teachers' participation in initiatives such as *21st Century Teaching and Learning*, and *College for Every Student (CFES)* training. In addition, teaching and learning have benefited from the school's recent engagement in continuing professional development on promoting active methodologies in the classroom.
- Demand for places on the TY programme has grown over the last five years. There are currently four class groups with plans to increase this to six groups in the coming academic year. Although there is a formal application process for selecting students for TY, almost all students who are interested in enrolling in the programme are offered places.
- Students complete interest inventories and career investigations as part of the guidance provision for TY. They have one timetabled seven-week guidance module in the year. In addition, students benefit from the school's links with a number of university access programmes. They have the opportunity to sample a wide range of subjects and described this, and the guidance support they receive, as being of particular value to them when making Leaving Certificate subject choices.
- The curriculum is broad, balanced and reflective of students' interests. It is appropriately structured around an academic core and subject specialisms. Work experience is well integrated into the programme.
- Students have access to an extensive range of co-curricular and extra-curricular activities to enhance learning. These activities include tutoring of primary-school pupils in Mathematics, reading, French and German, participation in the school musical and engagement in many fundraising and social awareness activities.

PROGRAMME PLANNING, CO-ORDINATION AND EVALUATION

- The content of most subject plans is appropriate. However, the mathematics plan is an exception in that it is overly focused on Leaving Certificate material. Therefore, it is recommended that some material outside of the Leaving Certificate programme be included. All subject plans outline a diverse range of valuable methodologies to engage learners.
- The co-ordination of the programme is excellent. Regular meetings of the core team are held. The work of the co-ordinator is very well supported by the TY year head and tutors, the senior management team and the subject teachers. Work experience is monitored through the completion of student diaries and contact with employers.

- The success of the programme is evaluated through student surveys. It is evident that the programme is informed from year-to-year by these surveys. As there is now a strong emphasis on the use of student-centred methodologies in teaching and learning, consideration should be given to extending student-feedback mechanisms, including the use of focus-group meetings, to ascertain the impact of these methodologies on the quality of learning.

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 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.

Appendix

SCHOOL RESPONSE TO THE REPORT

Submitted by the Board of Management

Area 1: Observations on the content of the inspection report

The board of management of St Joseph's Secondary School is encouraged by the findings of this Inspection Report. This report affirms the board's policy of placing TY at the heart of the school's improvement strategy.

The board is particularly gratified that the inspector noted and commented on the respectful relationships that exist in the school.

The board congratulates the TY co-ordinator and teachers for their professionalism and teamwork as described in the report.

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

Following discussions with the Inspector, Applied Mathematics has been added to the modules for 2015-2016.

Mini white boards will be introduced to all groups in 2015-2016.

The school will continue to develop its Learner Voice Programme in collaboration with the relevant agencies.