REPORT ON THE QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN JUNIOR CERTIFICATE SCHOOL PROGRAMME

INFORMATION ON THE PROGRAMME EVALUATION

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<th>Dates of inspection</th>
<th>7 and 8 October 2014</th>
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<td><strong>Inspection activities undertaken</strong></td>
<td>• Observation of teaching and learning during six class periods</td>
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<td>• Examination of students’ work</td>
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<td>• Feedback to principal and relevant staff</td>
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<td>• Review of relevant documents</td>
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<td>• Discussion with principal and key staff</td>
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**MAIN FINDINGS**

- The quality of teaching and learning observed during the course of the evaluation generally ranged from good to very good, with some examples of excellent practices noted.

- Engaging and active methodologies were employed in almost all lessons. In a small number of lessons, there was scope for improvement in supporting students’ learning.

- Junior Certificate School Programme (JCSP) methodologies underpin the manner in which the school’s “nurture room” for students with additional educational needs delivers emotional and social learning integrated with literacy and numeracy support.

- The JCSP programme is very well co-ordinated, supported by a very high-quality JCSP plan.

**MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS**

- Structured whole-staff discussions should be organised at regular intervals, enabling teachers to share practice and learn from the very good methodologies observed in some classrooms, particularly in the areas of activating prior knowledge and of assessment for learning (AfL).

- Over the coming years, JCSP and DEIS planning should inform each other, in the areas of literacy and numeracy support planning.
INTRODUCTION

Moyne College is a co-educational, second-level school under the management of Mayo, Sligo and Leitrim Education and Training Board (ETB). It has an enrolment of 147 students drawn from a range of social, cultural and economic backgrounds. The school participates in the Department of Education and Skills’ action plan for delivering equality of opportunity in schools (DEIS).

TEACHING AND LEARNING

- The quality of teaching and learning observed generally ranged from good to very good, with some examples of excellent practices noted. In a small number of lessons, there was scope for improvement in supporting students’ learning.

- The school and many classroom environments support, encourage, and celebrate students’ achievement in the programme.

- Students were strongly affirmed and encouraged for their contributions in every class visited.

- Almost all lessons were well planned and appropriate resources were prepared in advance to enhance students’ learning experiences.

- In a number of lessons, teachers very effectively activated students’ prior knowledge and highlighted links between new concepts and students’ everyday lives. This was an area for development in a few lessons.

- Differentiation was evident in some classes through carefully sequenced and distributed questioning, through teachers’ preparation of handouts customised to students’ needs, and through structured pair work and group work tasks.

- Various approaches were incorporated into lessons to raise students’ awareness of keywords. Also, good examples of numeracy support observed included frequently-changed displays of subject-specific statistics on classroom walls to prompt discussion and the use of an online calculator, projected on a screen, to act as a double check for students’ calculations.

- Learning was supported by clear teacher instructions and board work, by the use of graphic organisers, by teachers’ JCSP “statements of learning” work with students, and by creative planning to ensure students who are sometimes absentees get Science coursework completed.

- Afl strategies were utilised very effectively in some classes. Most commonly, learning outcomes were shared with students at the outset of lessons and recapped throughout, to check for understanding. Other individual Afl strategies were also used by some teachers. If colleagues were to share Afl insights and practices from across the various subjects, then that would be a means of further increasing whole-school capacity in the area.
**PROGRAMME PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT**

- School management has a strong vision for the positioning of the programme in the school. This is supported by very committed leadership from the JCSP and special educational needs (SEN) co-ordinators, in particular.

- Staff are active in seeking professional development in aspects of learning and teaching, and this is benefiting the delivery of the JCSP.

- The procedures for selecting students for the JCSP are based on clear criteria and are clearly documented. Evidence from core JCSP team meetings indicates that very careful consideration is given, year-on-year, to the needs of specific incoming first-year groups for JCSP support. It is commended that all junior cycle students will experience aspects of the JCSP programme, to support the self-esteem of all, even though intensive profiling will only be completed for students in the target groups.

- Student induction to and participation in the school is supported by a three-day summer camp for incoming students staffed by teachers volunteering from the school, by a specific two-day programme during their first two days at school, and later by support programmes such as Big Brother, Big Sister and Friends for Life.

- Clear guidance is provided to students and their parents regarding JCSP. It is commended that the school is prioritising the development of even stronger links with parents at present.

- Students supported by the JCSP programme have access to a broad and balanced curriculum and to a range of co-curricular and extra-curricular activities to enhance learning. In particular, students reported enjoying learning the skills of working with others and of planning and sharing ideas arising from JCSP initiatives such as Make a Bodhrán and Make a Book.

- In addition to mainstream English provision, first years are provided with a weekly literacy class that teaches a broad range of literacy skills, including a specialised vocabulary enrichment programme and support for developing students’ writing skills. This is a valuable support to student learning.

- The school’s “nurture room” approach delivers a holistic learning experience for part of the school day to students with additional educational needs. The use of practical activities, guided by cross-curricular JCSP statements, is also a strength of “nurture room” delivery. The school is commended for developing this approach, which was reported as being very helpful to learning by a focus group of students interviewed.

- The school supports students with English as an Additional Language (EAL) needs using EAL-specific testing resources and learning programmes such as Catch Up Literacy, Rapid Plus Reading, and Comprehension Strategies Instruction. This multifaceted approach to supporting the literacy needs of students with EAL needs is highly commended.

**PROGRAMME PLANNING, CO-ORDINATION AND EVALUATION**

- The school has a very high-quality JCSP plan. A single-sheet tabular layout of planned initiatives for the year across all subjects and a summary monthly calendar of JCSP events and meetings is distributed to all teachers, thus supporting communication and programme implementation.
• Co-ordination structures and practices for the programme are very good, with some excellent practices observed. The fact that the core programme team comprises two past JCSP co-ordinators, now serving in other roles, is a significant strength.

• The entire teaching staff receives regular updates on elements of the programme, while newly appointed members of staff also meet individually with the co-ordinator.

• It is commended that formal evaluations are gathered from staff and students and informal feedback from parents to aid programme review and future planning.

• Over the coming years, it is recommended that JCSP and DEIS planning be brought into formal, systematic dialogue with each other, so that they can inform each other and hopefully reduce duplication of work where possible.

The draft findings and recommendations arising out of this evaluation were discussed with the principal 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.

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