

**An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna**

**Department of Education and Skills**

**Programme Evaluation  
TRANSITION YEAR  
REPORT**

**St Mary's C.B.S.  
Portlaoise, County Laois  
Roll number: 63430G**

**Date of inspection: 27 February 2014**



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

## REPORT ON THE QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN TRANSITION YEAR

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### INFORMATION ON THE PROGRAMME EVALUATION

<b>Dates of inspection</b>	26 <sup>th</sup> and 27 <sup>th</sup> February 2014
<b>Inspection activities undertaken</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Review of relevant documents</li><li>• Discussion with principal and key staff</li><li>• Interaction with students</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Observation of teaching and learning during six class periods</li><li>• Examination of students' work</li><li>• Feedback to principal and relevant staff</li></ul>

### MAIN FINDINGS

- The quality of teaching and learning was very good in the lessons observed.
- Very good attention was given to developing students' literacy skills.
- Whole-school support for Transition Year (TY) is excellent.
- Students have access to a very wide range of co-curricular and extracurricular activities to enhance learning.
- Co-ordination of the programme is excellent.

### MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

- The good practices outlined in this report should be shared through peer observation.

## **INTRODUCTION**

St Mary's C.B.S., Portlaoise is a voluntary Catholic secondary school with a current enrolment of 639 boys. TY is optional. There are currently two TY class groups in the school.

## **TEACHING AND LEARNING**

- The quality of teaching and learning was very good in the lessons observed. Some excellent practice was noted. All lessons were very well planned. A wide range of interesting and relevant resources was used to engage learners.
- Teachers shared the learning objectives with students at the start of all lessons. Students' progress was monitored and their achievement of the learning objectives was assessed at the end of each lesson. This very good practice ensured that the lessons were purposeful and strongly supported the very good quality learning that took place.
- The main methodologies used were very high quality group work, student presentations, case studies, games and teacher exposition. Teachers mainly acted as facilitators of learning in the classroom and students collaborated and took responsibility for their own learning. The students in their meeting with the inspector described the extent and quality of the group work that they experienced in TY as being very beneficial to their learning. They also considered presenting to their peers as being of particular importance not only in terms of their learning but also for the development of their confidence.
- Learning was contextualised in some lessons by teachers choosing material that appealed to students' interests. For example, students provided commentary on a Gaelic football match in the Irish lesson observed. In keeping with best practice the students were surveyed by the teacher on their interests and the results of the survey is used to inform lesson planning.
- Two TY teachers have completed a course on 'Instructional Leadership' and the benefits of this were evident in the lessons observed. Very effective techniques were used to ensure that all students participated fully. This ensured that all students engaged meaningfully with the lesson's activities.
- A range of very effective questioning strategies was used by all teachers to encourage students to fully explore the concepts presented and to enhance class and group discussions. In the plenary phases of the lessons teachers were careful to take students' contributions as they were presented and to incorporate them unchanged into their explanations. This very good practice communicated the teachers' respect for students' contributions and encouraged more contributions.
- The quality of learning observed was very high. Throughout the evaluation students were confident in making presentations, asking questions and contributing to their lessons. They were very respectful and listened carefully to each other and to their teachers. In subjects where a personal response was expected, they showed great maturity in expressing their personal views and in responding to others' views. This is evidence of the secure learning environments that have been created by teachers and the mutual respectful relationships that exist.
- Very good attention was given to developing students' literacy skills in the lessons observed. Key words were highlighted and teachers used the meaning of the words to explain concepts

and to aid memory. Students' oral communication skills were developed as an integral part of each lesson also.

- Assessment for learning (AfL) strategies are used effectively in the correction of students' work with teachers including encouragement and advice on how to improve. Student self-assessment and peer-assessment were strong and valuable features of the classroom practice observed. These helped students to reflect on their work and to identify how they could improve. Students are also assessed by personal interview and on their portfolio work. In keeping with good practice students maintain a folder of their best work and this forms part of their assessment at the end of the year. 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. Teachers are encouraged and supported by school management to take risks and to try new approaches in TY. In addition, school management strongly values the teachers' efforts and contributions in TY and is cognisant of the importance of affirmation and appreciation in encouraging creativity. It is, therefore, recommended that they observe lessons in order to provide further feedback and encouragement to teachers.
- The resources for co-ordinating the programme, and for teaching and learning, which include information and communications technology (ICT), are very good.
- Admission to the programme is very inclusive. Although there is a formal application and interview process for selecting students for TY, almost all students, who are interested in enrolling in the programme, are offered places.
- An information evening is held for parents of third-year students to outline the options available to students when they progress into senior cycle. There is good communication with parents throughout the year.
- Students complete interest inventories and career investigations as part of the guidance provision for TY. They have one timetabled guidance lesson per week. They described to the inspector the benefits of this support when choosing subjects for the Leaving Certificate and when making decisions about their future as a particular advantage of participating in the programme.
- The TY curriculum is broad and balanced. It is appropriately structured around an academic core, optional subjects and subject specialisms. Work experience is integrated well into the programme. The TY programme is designed with student interests in mind and comprises many subjects that are not part of the Leaving Certificate programmes.
- Students have access to a very wide range of co-curricular and extracurricular activities to enhance learning. One particularly successful feature of the TY programme is the involvement of TY students in teaching ICT skills to older members of the local community.

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

- TY subject plans are comprised of content not on the Leaving Certificate syllabuses and include a variety of valuable experiences for students. They have a cross-curricular emphasis and outline a diverse range of methodologies to engage learners. This is very good planning practice.
- The members of the TY teaching team collaborate regularly and work very well together. To build on this, the good practices identified in this report should be shared through peer observation.
- The co-ordination of the TY programme is excellent. Regular meetings of the core team are held. The work of the co-ordinator is very well supported by the TY tutors, the senior management team and the subject teachers. Work experience is monitored through the completion of student diaries and through teachers contacting employers.
- The success of the TY programme is evaluated through student surveys. It is evident that the programme is informed from year-to-year by these surveys. As there is a stronger emphasis on the use of student-centred methodologies in teaching and learning in TY, consideration should be given to meeting with the students to discuss this and how it has affected the students' learning.

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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 was given an opportunity to comment in writing on the findings and recommendations of the report; a response was not received from the board.