

**Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna**  
**Department of Education and Skills**

**Programme Evaluation**  
**Transition Year**  
**REPORT**

**Saint Patrick's Comprehensive**  
**Shannon, County Clare**  
**Roll number: 81007U**

**Date of inspection: 6 November 2014**



**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 (TY)

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### INFORMATION ON THE PROGRAMME EVALUATION

<b>Dates of inspection</b>	5 & 6 November 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 overall quality of teaching was good; however, there was scope to improve the methodologies employed in a small number of lessons.
- The current practices and procedures that are in place for work experience are in need of immediate review.
- The structures to support planning for the TY programme include formal meetings of the recently established TY core team and inputs, as required, at staff meetings.
- In line with best practice, the four layers of the TY curriculum are provided and some of the curricular plans reflect the three national aims of TY.

### MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

- There is scope for the greater use of strategies for differentiation to support student learning across the range of abilities.
  - A number of TY specific policies and procedures should be developed including an assessment policy, a programme-wide accreditation system, and procedures for the management of work experience.
  - Whole staff continuing professional development (CPD) for TY should be organised to support planning for TY at programme and subject level.
  - An action plan to guide the improvement agenda of TY should be agreed, implemented and reviewed.
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## **INTRODUCTION**

St Patrick's Comprehensive is a co-educational school with a total enrolment of 729 second level students. One mixed-ability group comprising 23 students is following Transition Year (TY) programme which is offered on an optional basis.

## **TEACHING AND LEARNING**

- The overall quality of teaching was good; however, there was scope to improve the methodologies employed in a small number of lessons.
- Where the level of preparedness for lessons was very good; lessons were generally well structured and had a purposeful pace with a defined number of shared learning outcomes. Such characteristics should be incorporated into all lessons.
- Among the significant strengths observed in the teaching and learning methodologies were the active participation of students in their learning, good student-teacher questioning strategies and the use of group work. Greater variety in the teaching and learning methodologies employed is needed across all areas of study.
- Most teachers circulated among the students during group activities and the extended use of this practice is encouraged. Group work could be further strengthened by allowing ample time for students to engage in the assigned task and by facilitating a follow up debriefing activity with all groups.
- In just over half the lessons observed teachers recapitulated the learning outcomes with the students. The further use of this approach is recommended as it provides opportunities for differentiation and inculcates independence in learners.
- An atmosphere of positive regard and mutual respect was evident in all classes. Students' efforts and contributions were affirmed and encouraged.
- In the classrooms visited the learning environment ranged from exemplary to that where there was scope for development.
- Homework was assigned in all lessons during the evaluation. A review of a random sample of students' homework journals indicated that homework is not always set in the majority of subjects.
- The criteria for projects and presentations should be agreed across all areas of study and be explicitly taught to encourage students to further engage in self and peer-evaluation.
- A programme specific assessment policy should be developed within the framework of the school's whole-school assessment policy. The policy should emphasise both assessment for learning and assessment of learning and agree guidelines for homework to foster consistency in this regard. It should also provide for the development of a programme-wide accreditation system.

## **PROGRAMME PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT**

- The principal is supportive of the programme and the positive impact it has on the school community. Senior management should progress an improvement agenda for the TY programme and should devise procedures to provide whole-staff training in the area of TY.

- It is recommended that the criteria for admission to TY be documented and included in the school's enrolment policy.
- The role of the co-ordinator is documented, and includes year head duties for the TY cohort. A time allocation of two class periods is assigned to the co-ordination of TY each week. In addition, the TY coordinator teaches four periods of TY Mathematics.
- The co-ordinator should be afforded the opportunity to convene an annual meeting with all teachers involved in the delivery of TY and should have a role in providing supports for teachers new to the programme.
- The TY co-ordinator does not have an office space and a TY student notice board has not been made available. As resources allow, provision should be made for such facilities.
- Up-to-date resources to support the organisation of TY, the delivery of TY subjects and the evaluation of the programme are available on the TY website at [www.tydst.ie](http://www.tydst.ie). It is recommended that these be accessed to support the implementation of improvements to the programme.
- Guidance is not timetabled for TY and dedicated class time to plan for work experience is not provided. The TY inspection was carried out during the week prior to the students going out on their first week of work placements. The information gathered pertaining to students' work placements was not adequate.
- The role of the co-ordinator in relation to TY work placements should be more carefully defined and it should be designed to ensure the learning benefits of work experience are optimised for students through well-structured planning, monitoring and debriefing.
- The TY curriculum incorporates the four key TY layers: core, subject sampling, modular components and calendar events. It is recommended that the number of class periods assigned to certain sampling subjects — eight in the case of scientific areas of study — be re-examined to ensure an appropriate balance and that any time freed up be reallocated to other subjects and modules.
- A student council does not exist in the school.
- Students and parents are given comprehensive information before and during the TY programme. A schedule of costs should also be included in the TY information provided.
- A formal induction programme is not place at the beginning of the TY programme. This should be reviewed and students could then identify their own learning goals for the year as part of this process.

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

- The structures to support planning for the TY programme include formal meetings of the recently established TY core team and inputs, as required, at staff meetings.
- Notwithstanding the informal collaboration between personnel involved in TY, LCVP and LCA; there is no system to support the co-ordination of work experience between the three programmes. The synergies to be gained from formal meetings between the three programme co-ordinators should be explored.

- It is recommended that a more systematic approach to evaluation of the TY be put in place. An evaluation of students who do not choose TY may also provide useful insights.
- The school has a written TY plan in place, however this plan does not reflect what is envisaged for TY planning in section three of the document *Writing the Transition Year Programme*. Neither does it provide a clear and current insight into the operation of the programme in the school.
- Policy documents that are included in the TY plan should not be stand-alone documents. Instead, they should be framed within relevant whole-school policies.
- Plans for almost all areas of study were available. Best practice was observed where plans reflected the national aims of TY; and where learning outcomes linked to methodologies, resources and assessment modes were detailed. This good practice should be replicated across all TY plans.

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