

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

Programme Evaluation in Transition Year

REPORT

Ainm na scoile / School name	Athboy Community School
Seoladh na scoile / School address	Athboy County Meath
Uimhir rolla / Roll number	91517D

Date of Evaluation: 18-04-2018



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

PROGRAMME EVALUATION

The programme evaluation model of inspection is used to evaluate the quality and effectiveness of the following programmes and to provide advice and support to teachers, principals and school management in post-primary schools and centres for education:

- Junior Certificate School Programme (JCSP)
- Transition Year (TY) programme
- Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) programme
- Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP)

HOW TO READ THIS REPORT

During this inspection, the inspector evaluated learning and teaching in TY under the following headings:

1. Teaching and learning
2. Programme provision and whole-school support
3. Programme planning, co-ordination and evaluation

Inspectors describe the quality of each of these areas using the Inspectorate's quality continuum which is shown on the final page of this report. The quality continuum provides examples of the language used by inspectors when evaluating and describing the quality of the school's provision in each area.

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.

CHILD PROTECTION

During the inspection visit, the following checks in relation to the school's child protection procedures were conducted:

1. The name of the DLP and the Child Safeguarding Statement are prominently displayed near the main entrance to the school.
2. The Child Safeguarding Statement has been ratified by the board and includes an annual review and a risk assessment.
3. All teachers visited reported that they have read the Child Safeguarding Statement and that they are aware of their responsibilities as mandated persons.

The school met the requirements in relation to 1 above but did not meet the requirements in relation to 2 & 3 above and therefore was not fully compliant with the checks undertaken. However, the school has subsequently furnished evidence of compliance with these requirements.

Programme evaluation in Transition Year

Dates of inspection	16-18 April 2018
Inspection activities undertaken <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Meetings with principal and deputy principal• Meeting with TY coordinator and work experience coordinator• Review of relevant documents• Student focus-group	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Observation of teaching and learning of seven lessons• Examination of students' work• Interaction with students• Feedback to senior management team, board of management and TY coordinator

School context

Athboy Community School is a co-educational post-primary school under the auspices of Louth Meath Education and Training Board, and the Bishop of Meath. It caters for 550 students currently. The school offers the Junior Certificate, Leaving Certificate, Leaving Certificate Applied and the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programmes. Transition Year (TY) is optional.

Summary of main findings and recommendations:

Findings

- The overall quality of teaching and learning was good; there is scope to further integrate differentiated teaching approaches and to vary assessment methods.
- Student behaviour throughout the evaluation was exemplary.
- Students are aware of, and appreciate, the many opportunities for personal development they can avail of through their participation in TY, but there is scope to further promote leadership opportunities for students.
- The quality of the TY programme is good overall; the programme is offered each year to students however, uptake has fluctuated.
- The quality of programme planning and coordination is very good, although, currently, the curriculum is weighted towards practical subjects, ICT and work experience.

Recommendations

- Teachers should integrate differentiated approaches and use a greater variety of assessment methods to support student engagement.
- The amount of time allocated to work experience should be reviewed to ensure that there is a more balanced variety of learning experiences for students.
- Senior management and the TY coordinator should aim to increase uptake of TY through a more effective promotion of the programme.
- A formal whole-school evaluation of TY should be conducted with a view to providing a broader range of integrated learning experiences in the TY curriculum.

DETAILED FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. TEACHING AND LEARNING

- The overall quality of teaching and learning was good. In a few lessons very effective practice was observed, while in a small number of lessons practice was satisfactory or fair; there is scope to further integrate differentiated approaches and to vary assessment methods in lessons.
- Student behaviour throughout the evaluation was exemplary. Students demonstrated a good understanding of subject content in many lessons and were able to apply their knowledge in a meaningful way when engaging in collaborative tasks.
- The majority of lessons were clearly structured around learning intentions which focused on the development of key skills such as investigation, research, debating, designing and working as team. To build on this effective approach, teachers should allow more time for a plenary session in order to consolidate learning and to facilitate students to evaluate their own progress.
- Throughout the majority of the one-hour lessons, students were given opportunities to work individually, in pairs or in groups focusing on project-based work. Student participation and engagement were highest in lessons where the methodologies allowed students to be active learners and provided opportunities for them to have an input on lesson content.
- Some effective examples of differentiated approaches to teaching and learning were evident in oral questioning and, in a few instances, with the use of well-designed worksheets to scaffold learning. In one highly effective lesson, a differentiated approach to the completion of a task using a '*must, could and should*' approach was adopted. This approach challenged all students effectively in the mixed-ability setting and there was a clear sense of achievement by students by the end of the lesson. This type of differentiated approach should be extended to other lessons.
- In some lessons, there was a good focus on the development of students' literacy and numeracy skills. Students were encouraged to explore subject-specific terminology and work out numerical calculations, for example, specific dimensions for a prototype.
- Students in the modern language lessons observed had varying experiences of the target language. Some students who had not studied the language at junior cycle spent a significant amount of time working through English. It is recommended that a greater emphasis be placed on developing students' oral skills and planning for the learning needs of students who have not engaged with the language previously.
- The overall quality of assessment is good. An effective range of assessment approaches was used in monitoring and evaluating students' learning. In the majority of lessons, an effective combination of lower and higher-order questions were used to initiate class discussions successfully. In this way, students' were facilitated to make links with prior learning and consolidate their knowledge.
- Students engage in regular self-assessment during their tutorial class and they also complete weekly reflection essays on various aspects of TY. The TY co-ordinator appropriately

monitors students' engagement and supports them well to make further progress. However, students reported that they wrote too many of these type of essays. It would be worthwhile for teachers to review the effectiveness of the current level of self-reflection practices.

- At the time of evaluation, the majority of the lessons observed were held in the computer room as students were working on the completion of projects for many subjects. Students reported feeling under pressure to complete these assignments as a result of the work involved in the production of a musical. Subject teachers should liaise with the coordinator in relation to assessment deadlines to ensure these do not overlap with other major activities and to ensure students are provided with sufficient time complete assigned work.
- Students are aware of, and appreciate, the many opportunities for personal development they can avail of through their participation in TY, but there is scope to further promote leadership opportunities for students.

2. PROGRAMME PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- The overall quality of the TY programme is good. TY is well supported by senior management and the dedicated efforts of the coordinator. Teachers showed great commitment to the philosophy, aims and successful implementation of the programme.
- The TY programme is offered each year to students however, uptake has fluctuated. In an effort to address this, the TY coordinator should review and monitor student uptake and liaise with senior management in relation to more effective promotion of the programme. The student council could play a valuable role in researching students' perceptions of the programme. An evaluation of the views of students who did not choose TY may also provide useful insights.
- At the time of the evaluation the school's admission policy references entry to TY by interview. There is also a separate admissions policy for TY which details the entry criteria. It is recommended that these policy documents be reviewed to ensure they reflect the current practice for entry and the overall aims of TY programme accurately.
- Currently, TY students are not receiving Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE). As a matter of priority, the school should ensure that all students are timetabled for RSE in line with Circular 0037/2010.
- A well-organised and monitored work experience programme forms a significant aspect of the school's TY programme. Students engage in work experience every Friday during the school year and for a week in December and in May. Work experience takes up approximately twenty percent of the time allocation to the programme; this allocation is excessive and should be reviewed to ensure a more balanced variety of learning experiences for students over the school year.
- In general teachers are deployed appropriately to the programme. The school is making ongoing efforts to address recruitment issues related to Mathematics and Physical Education.

3. PROGRAMME PLANNING, CO-ORDINATION AND REVIEW

- The quality of programme planning and coordination is very good.
- The overall TY curriculum is well planned around core subjects, some subject sampling, TY specific subjects and additional once-off activities such as the school market and foreign trip. The curriculum is weighted currently towards practical subjects, ICT and work experience. With a view to providing a broader range of integrated learning experiences for students, a formal evaluation of TY should be conducted, in collaboration with relevant stakeholders.
- The quality of teachers' individual curriculum planning for subjects and modules was good. It was noted in some subject plans that there was a greater emphasis on course content rather than linking learner outcomes with the development of key skills and assessment. Curriculum plans would benefit from linking the assessment processes to the learning outcomes.

Appendix

School response to the report

Submitted by the Board of Management

Part A: Observations on the content of the inspection report

The board of management welcomes this report which acknowledges the quality of teaching and learning, student behaviour, programme content, programme planning and coordination currently displayed in our Transition Year Programme.

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

In planning for future Transition Year Programmes, the school will promote differentiated and varied assessment methods and reduce the amount of time devoted to work experience. Efforts will be made to further promote the programme among prospective pupils and a whole-school evaluation of Transition Year will be conducted.

The Inspectorate's Quality Continuum

Inspectors describe the quality of provision in the school using the Inspectorate's quality continuum which is shown below. The quality continuum provides examples of the language used by inspectors when evaluating and describing the quality of the school's provision of each area.

Level	Description	Example of descriptive terms
Very Good	<i>Very good</i> applies where the quality of the areas evaluated is of a very high standard. The very few areas for improvement that exist do not significantly impact on the overall quality of provision. For some schools in this category the quality of what is evaluated is <i>outstanding</i> and provides an example for other schools of exceptionally high standards of provision.	Very good; of a very high quality; very effective practice; highly commendable; very successful; few areas for improvement; notable; of a very high standard. Excellent; outstanding; exceptionally high standard, with very significant strengths; exemplary
Good	<i>Good</i> applies where the strengths in the areas evaluated clearly outweigh the areas in need of improvement. The areas requiring improvement impact on the quality of pupils' learning. The school needs to build on its strengths and take action to address the areas identified as requiring improvement in order to achieve a <i>very good</i> standard.	Good; good quality; valuable; effective practice; competent; useful; commendable; good standard; some areas for improvement
Satisfactory	<i>Satisfactory</i> applies where the quality of provision is adequate. The strengths in what is being evaluated just outweigh the shortcomings. While the shortcomings do not have a significant negative impact they constrain the quality of the learning experiences and should be addressed in order to achieve a better standard.	Satisfactory; adequate; appropriate provision although some possibilities for improvement exist; acceptable level of quality; improvement needed in some areas
Fair	<i>Fair</i> applies where, although there are some strengths in the areas evaluated, deficiencies or shortcomings that outweigh those strengths also exist. The school will have to address certain deficiencies without delay in order to ensure that provision is satisfactory or better.	Fair; evident weaknesses that are impacting on pupils' learning; less than satisfactory; experiencing difficulty; must improve in specified areas; action required to improve
Weak	<i>Weak</i> applies where there are serious deficiencies in the areas evaluated. Immediate and coordinated whole-school action is required to address the areas of concern. In some cases, the intervention of other agencies may be required to support improvements.	Weak; unsatisfactory; insufficient; ineffective; poor; requiring significant change, development or improvement; experiencing significant difficulties;