

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Oaklands Community College
Edenderry, County Offaly

DEIS EVALUATION 2014
RECORD OF EVALUATION
REPORT

Date of evaluation: 10 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

DEIS EVALUATION 2014

Report of Evaluation

A focused evaluation of the DEIS planning process in Oaklands Community College school was undertaken by the Inspectorate of the Department of Education and Skills in November 2014. During that evaluation, aspects of the school's work in relation to attendance, retention, progression, examination attainment, literacy, numeracy, and partnership with parents and others were reviewed. The evaluation involved interviews with school personnel and others, review of school documents and records, observation of students' learning and of other activities before, during and after school, inspection of students' work, questionnaires for students and parents, and a focus group meeting with parents. Following the evaluation, a meeting to discuss the findings was held with the principal and a number of teachers. 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.

1 School Context

Oaklands Community College participates in DEIS. It has the services of a full-time home school community liaison (HSCL) coordinator and participates in the School Completion Programme (SCP). It offers the Junior Certificate, Junior Certificate School Programme (JCSP), the Transition Year (TY), the Leaving Certificate and the Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) programmes. At the time of the evaluation 570 post-primary students were enrolled in the school.

2 Findings and recommendations

The following key findings arise from this evaluation:

- The quality of leadership provided by the principal in relation to DEIS planning is outstanding.
- The quality of DEIS planning process is excellent and has led to significant improvements across all strands of DEIS.
- The commitment of the personnel directly involved in DEIS planning and of teachers to improving outcomes for students is exemplary.
- The impact of targeted interventions across the range of DEIS strands for students who are most at risk is highly effective.
- DEIS targets have been met and surpassed in all areas and this is due to the tremendous dedication of all staff.
- Excellent reflective practices in relation to planning leading to improved outcomes for students were evident throughout the evaluation.

The following key recommendations arise from this evaluation:

- In order to continue to improve educational outcomes, it is recommended that all teachers gain a full understanding of the rationale and impact of assessment for learning (AfL) and implement AfL strategies on a very regular and a whole-school basis.
- The excellent work the school has done in relation to school self-evaluation (SSE) should now be integrated into the DEIS plan.

3 DEIS Planning Process

The quality of leadership of the DEIS planning process in the school provided by the principal, deputy principal and the members of the DEIS core team is excellent. DEIS planning is very clearly understood by the relevant personnel who take responsibility for individual components of DEIS. The very regular communication and collaboration among members of the DEIS team ensure that the process is unified. The rigorous collection and analysis of data have provided a solid basis for setting specific, measurable, attainable, realistic and time bound (SMART) targets. The selection of strategies identified are very clearly linked to the targets. There is good implementation of strategies on a whole-school basis with some scope for development in the area of literacy and numeracy. The impact and progress of the implementation of the strategies is also measured in a rigorous manner through effective analysis of data. The excellent work in relation to SSE should now be integrated into the DEIS plan.

4 DEIS Themes

4.1 Literacy, Numeracy, and Examination Attainment

Literacy

- Very good baseline data in relation to students' literacy levels has been collected by the school. Statistical analyses of tests such as CAT, STEN and GRT are carried out and this data provides the basis for the targets which have been set in the current DEIS plan. The targets are quite general and it is recommended that greater emphasis be placed on setting targets which are SMART.
- A number of good strategies have been selected to improve students' literacy skills. On a whole-school basis there is an emphasis on key words, word of the week and DEAR. Other strategies which are designed for targeted groups of students, such as students following the JCSP include the Spelling Bee competition, reading and spelling challenges and word millionaire.
- The implementation of the whole-school strategy in relation to key words is good as a print-rich environment containing key words was evident in classrooms. To build on this, it is recommended that teachers encourage students to use the key-word notebook in all lessons and that teachers ensure that students have the opportunities to use key words in the course of lessons.
- The very good practice of retesting students who have benefitted from targeted interventions such as the Spelling Bee is noted as is the improvement in attainment.

Numeracy

- The standardised test scores in Mathematics and results of the CAT tests provide baseline data in relation to numeracy. The introduction of a mathematics competency test for first-year students is commended as this will provide very rich data in relation to students' numerical skills and will greatly assist in the area of target setting. It is recommended that in future years this test be corrected as early as possible in the school year as this will inform teachers how to redress the areas where students are in most need.
- Some targets in relation to numeracy are quite general and it would be beneficial if all targets were SMART. The selection of strategies to realise the targets is very good. The introduction of common tests in Mathematics in first year with cross correction among the mathematics teaching team is an effective strategy which benefits teachers and students alike. The targeted intervention *Reach a Teacher* has proved very successful. The monitoring and review of this intervention to address ongoing student needs has been very effective.

- The implementation of certain strategies on a whole-school basis is at an initial stage. It is recommended that the information gained from the mathematics competency test be shared across all staff to enable subject departments to develop a cohesive approach to the development of numeracy in individual subject areas. The implementation of this will be assisted by the fact that there is a numeracy committee in place.
- The progress in relation to numeracy targets is very good. Particularly commendable is the fact that the target in relation to reducing the amount of students taking Mathematics at foundation level has been very well met.

Examination Attainment

- Very good data in relation to examination attainment has been gathered and analysed. SMART targets have been set to improve educational outcomes and a wide range of appropriate strategies have been decided upon to realise these targets.
- The implementation of excellent strategies such as common tests in junior cycle, tailor made study skills programme at whole-school and subject level and curricular reform has all contributed to raising student achievement. The tracking of progress in assessments and house examinations is very good as is the target setting among students.
- Interventions such as the homework club for targeted students and in particular the provision of a teacher to assist with Mathematics is an example of excellent practice.
- Good work has been done on implementing AfL strategies in many lessons. In order to continue to raise attainment it is recommended that all teachers implement AfL strategies in all lessons.
- Attainment in the certificate examinations has improved over the last number of years and this is due to the tremendous collaboration and dedication of all staff.

4.2 Attendance, Retention, Educational Progression

- A significant effort is made to monitor student attendance and as a result the school has very good data. It is very good practice that the targets relating to attendance also include a target relating to punctuality.
- Very good resources have been put in place to ensure the careful monitoring of attendance. Students who are poor attenders are discussed at weekly year-head and care-team meetings and targeted interventions are put in place. The good practice of scheduling a music programme on Fridays to increase attendance of a target group on that day proved highly successful. Overall student attendance is improving.
- Data in relation to retention is carefully maintained and SMART targets have been set. Excellent interventions for students who are most at risk of dropping out of school are in place. The SCP and HSCL coordinators are most proactive in working with these students and their families to retain them in school. Targets have been met and very good review of interventions takes place. In all cases where students have not been retained the SCP coordinator has ensured that alternative education placement has been found. This is excellent practice.
- Comprehensive data has been gathered in relation to educational progression and SMART targets have been set. Excellent interventions have been put in place, in particular by the guidance counsellor, to raise expectations among both parents and students in relation to educational progression. It was evident that there is a high level of self-reflective practice in relation to the interventions. It is particularly noteworthy the extent to which the guidance department includes student voice in the process of self-review. The data shows a significant improvement in educational progression to further and higher education.

4.3 Partnership with Parents and Others

- The emphasis on building partnership with parents is excellent and the effective work of the HSCL in this regard is outstanding. Parents reported tremendous satisfaction with the open door policy in the school. Very good data in relation to parents' involvement in the school is maintained and excellent targets have been set based on the data available.
- The wide-ranging variety of interventions to realise these targets is outstanding. It was evident that the school is going out of its way to involve parents. An intervention that has been particularly successful is the distribution of student' reports to parents at the start of parent-teacher meetings. This has resulted in a significant rise in the attendance of parents at these meetings. Other interventions such as classes for parents in particular in relation to curricular changes such as *Project Maths* are excellent and indeed very well attended. The very well thought out interventions to reach parents whose first language is not English are to be highly commended.
- Very effective monitoring of strategies takes place through comprehensive review of the data and new and innovative strategies are constantly being considered.
- The school has very good links with the community. Intensive work has been done to link and build relationships with feeder primary schools. This work has undoubtedly contributed very well to the big increase in enrolment that the school has experienced in the recent past. This work has also enriched the data about incoming first-year students which in turn has fed into many of the targets relating to DEIS. There are many excellent links with agencies in the locality which benefit students greatly.