

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

DEIS FOCUSED EVALUATION 2011

RECORD OF EVALUATION

St Kevin's College
Ballygall Road East, Finglas
Roll Number: 60581M

Date of evaluation: 18 November 2011



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OIDEACHAIS | EDUCATION
AGUS SCILEANNA | AND SKILLS

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Record of Evaluation

1 Introduction

A focused evaluation of the DEIS planning process in St Kevin's College was undertaken by the Inspectorate of the Department of Education and Skills in November 2011. During that evaluation, aspects of the school's work in relation to attendance, retention, progression, 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 other activities 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, deputy 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.

2 School Context

St Kevin's College participates in the DEIS action plan. It has the services of a full-time home school community liaison (HSCL) co-ordinator and participates in the School Completion Programme (SCP). It offers the Junior Certificate, an optional Transition Year (TY), the Leaving Certificate and the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP). At the time of the evaluation there were 466 students enrolled in the school. This represents a significant increase over the last five years. The school caters for a diverse student intake and has a generalised target list of eleven percent of its student intake.

3 DEIS Themes

3.1 *Attendance, Retention, Educational Progression*

- The school has set an overall target for improving attendance by 1.12 percent, and for those whose absenteeism exceeds twenty days a year, 2.33 percent. Targets are realistic and based on data gathered and analysed. It has successfully introduced a number of tracking measures and provides incentives. The attendance strategy is led by the deputy principal and supported by the SCP. All teachers have a role in its implementation. The school's care team is effective. The timetabling of a Tuesday tutorial or study period in the senior cycle should be reviewed.
- There has been an improvement in the attendance rate. To build on existing good practice, an analysis of the impact of existing strategies should be carried out. Some good work has been done in identifying particular target groups and this should be progressed. Programmes such as the LCA would target some students since it credits attendance and should be considered.
- The school plans to improve retention by two percent based on data gathered. Retention is good. Approximately fifty-one students are targeted through the SCP. An integrated approach ensures that different areas are targeted by the same interventions. Key personnel are very effective. A menu of interventions is provided through the joint efforts of the HSCL scheme and the SCP. These are supported through a well-developed pastoral care structure and guidance programme. The school is about to introduce a breakfast club. The targeted students should be tracked and encouraged to

attend. It is commendable that the HSCL co-ordinator monitors participation of targeted students in extracurricular and co-curricular activities. A very good sports programme exists. There is scope for more diversification to cater for different interests. An area for development is evaluating the impact of interventions at school level. It is acknowledged that the SCP completes an evaluation in relation to all schools in the cluster.

- Progression targets relate to further education and third level. Targets set are a two percent increase in numbers going to Post Leaving Certificate (PLC) courses and a one percent increase in numbers going to university or institutes of technology (IT). Some measures mentioned in the summary plan are not specific to targeted students. Others such as the Access programme are. After-school study is of benefit to all students. There is evidence of an increase in progression rates, year on year and this is commended. Targets for specific students should now be developed based on an evaluation of progress and more specific baseline data.
- The school should extend its definition of educational progression to include all transition points. Good measures are in place to support transfer to post-primary school. A mentoring programme gives a leadership role to fifth-year students but mentors need more formal training. The homework club is another well-considered strategy and some useful evaluation of its effectiveness has taken place. A similar homework initiative might work in the senior cycle. A wider definition of progression would allow targets to be set for those presenting with any identified risk factor and would link in well with retention and attendance targets. Most students transfer to the senior cycle but there are attendance issues. Measurement of impact is not formalised and is an area for development.

3.2 *Examination Attainment, Literacy and Numeracy*

- A whole-school literacy target to reduce the numbers reading below their chronological age by four percent each year is not a specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and time-bound (SMART) target because not all targeted students can be expected to progress at the same rate. The school should adopt a more discrete approach. Commendably, new pre-entry assessment tests are now in use and there is a plan to retest in third year.
- A number of strategies are being implemented and indicate a deep commitment to improving literacy and numeracy. A library programme is in place. The range of books needs development. The Junior Certificate School Programme (JCSP) would be of great benefit to the school. Implementation of literacy strategies is a whole-school issue. The role of parents should be recognised in the promotion of reading. All subject departments have been requested to factor literacy and numeracy strategies into their planning but this has not been fully implemented. All actions now taken should be linked to the national literacy and numeracy strategy. Tracking progress should not be confined to performance in the Junior Certificate English examination.
- The target of decreasing the number of students with numeracy problems by five percent is not SMART. The more specific target of reducing the number taking foundation level Mathematics is realistic based on available data. However, this is subject specific and might be more appropriate to attainment.
- Strategies need to be more focused on cross-curricular numeracy improvement. Some mentioned in the plan are not appropriate. The *Build a Bike* initiative is a creative retention measure with a numeracy focus.
- Classroom practice is critical to success. Evidence suggests that cross-curricular numeracy strategies are not being implemented. Teachers in all subject areas should apprise themselves of targeted students' reading ages, numeracy ability and learning needs in order to successfully implement the relevant targets.

- So far, there has been no measurement of impact of numeracy and literacy strategies and this should be addressed since it would facilitate better target setting and more directed strategy development.
- The school has set targets for examination attainment but the data range is narrow and targets are not SMART. This needs to be addressed. Particularly commended is the decision to place first-year students in a mixed-ability setting this current academic year. The full impact of this strategy can not be measured for a few years but should help achieve the target of increasing higher-level uptake.
- Implementation is the responsibility of teachers and subject departments. Commendably, the senior management team has initiated a professional development programme to support mixed-ability teaching and the learning-support department provides input into staff development. A sample of subject plans indicates that data collection and analysis is not routine and should be addressed. In some lessons, differentiation has not yet been fully embedded. In others, there was evidence of high expectations being set. Attainment is good on the whole.
- It is positive that the school is strongly considering the introduction of the JCSP. The programme would support targeted students and enrich the learning experience of all. Students targeted for the JCSP should be fully integrated into mixed-ability classes.
- The majority of students surveyed feel they are supported in their learning and are ambitious to achieve and progress to third level or further education.

3.3 *Partnership with Parents and Others*

- The school enjoys the support of parents and is commended for developing positive relationships and working collaboratively with them. The HSCL co-ordinator is very effective. The paired reading programme is very good. Parent classes are provided and the Steps to Excellence for Personal Success (STEPS) personal development programme is reported to be beneficial. The school should now consider providing classes in the areas of literacy and numeracy to enable parents to support their sons.
- While communication is good and parents feel they are informed about attendance and progress, a considerable minority do not feel they have to sign the student journal. The school should address this issue.
- The school has developed very good links with a wide range of local community groups and agencies and has set targets.
- Measurement of impact now needs to take place in the area of partnership.

4 DEIS Planning Process

- The school has conscientiously engaged in DEIS planning. The three-year plan was ratified by the board of management in October 2010. Baseline data has been gathered in all areas. A very good informal core team of dedicated staff, including the senior management team, the guidance counsellor, HSCL and learning support, is in place and there is very good contact with the SCP local co-ordinator. The school needs a formal planning structure. It currently does not have a DEIS co-ordinator, a designated team or regular meetings to advance planning. Planning is taking place and a very good range of strategies and interventions is being implemented. Current key personnel could be constituted as the DEIS planning team. All members of staff could be encouraged to volunteer for a planning group in any of the DEIS planning areas. There was a commitment in the three-year plan to producing progress reports each November and this now needs to be addressed. It is recommended that routine regular retesting of the targeted groups be introduced to track progress and assess impact with

a view to refining measures. It is inadvisable to introduce new measures unless there has been adequate evaluation of the impact of existing strategies.

5 Conclusions

Among the positive features of the DEIS planning process in this school are the following:

- The level of staff commitment and effectiveness of key personnel
- Success already achieved in some areas
- Leadership by senior management and key personnel
- The good start made in formal DEIS planning
- The range of effective strategies in place
- The commitment to continuing professional development
- A good level of attainment overall

Aspects of the DEIS planning process that require development in this school include:

- More streamlined planning structures, more evaluation of progress to inform future planning, and a stronger focus on the role of all teachers and subject departments in the achievement of DEIS objectives
- SMART targets in all DEIS areas and more specific targeting of students.