

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

**DEIS EVALUATION 2015**

**DRAFT REPORT FOR FACTUAL VERIFICATION**

**Athy Community College,**  
**Athy,**  
**Co Kildare**  
**Roll Number:70650L**

**Date of evaluation: November 2015**  
**Date of issue of report: 29 January 2016**



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

## DEIS EVALUATION 2015

### Report of Evaluation

The Inspectorate of the Department of Education and Skills undertook a focused evaluation of DEIS action planning for improvement in Athy Community College in November 2015. 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.

#### 1 School Context

Athy Community College participates in the DEIS action plan, 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, Junior Certificate School Programme (JCSP), the Leaving Certificate and the Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) programmes. At the time of the evaluation there were 398 post-primary students enrolled in the school. The school also has an ASD unit to cater for six students.

#### 2 Findings and recommendations

The following key findings arise from this evaluation:

- The quality of leadership of DEIS planning by the senior management team is excellent.
- The planning structures which require all members of staff to be a member of a DEIS task group aligned to one of the DEIS themes are a key strength.
- DEIS planning is very well co-ordinated and the co-ordinator has very good expertise in planning.
- Data in some areas of DEIS show evidence of improvement.
- The commitment of staff, the HSCL co-ordinator and the SCP personnel to realising the DEIS targets is very good.

The following key recommendations arise from this evaluation:

- The tests which are currently used to establish baseline data relating to student attainment in the area of literacy and numeracy should be reviewed in line with the recommendations in the body of this report.
- A whole-school strategy in relation to attendance should be developed and accurate baseline data should be collated.
- A key strategy in the realisation of DEIS targets across a range of themes should be the implementation of a whole-school approach to the use of assessment for learning (AfL).

#### 3 DEIS Planning Process

The quality of leadership of the DEIS planning process by the senior management team in the school is excellent. DEIS planning is a unified and streamlined process. In engagement with staff it was evident that a whole-school approach is adopted. The planning structures which require all teachers to be a member of a DEIS task group aligned to one of the DEIS themes are a key strength. Planning is very well co-ordinated and the co-ordinator has significant expertise in the area of planning. There is good practice in relation to SMART target setting although in some instances more differentiated targets could be set. Good strategic actions are

devised and implemented. However, more of these targets could be linked to teaching and learning in the classroom. Impact and progress are measured and very good templates have been devised for the review stage of the planning process.

Confirmation was provided that the board of management has formally adopted the *Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-primary Schools* without modification and that the school is compliant with the requirements of the *Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools*.

## 4 DEIS Themes

### 4.1 Literacy, Numeracy, and Examination Attainment

#### *Literacy*

- The process of planning for improvement in literacy is carried out by the literacy task group and is generally good. A clear and comprehensive role for the convenor of the literacy task group has been documented. It is suggested that the role be rotated among members of the group in order to build capacity. Other roles should also be clearly defined and documented.
- Data gathered in relation to first-year students from the Group Reading Test (GRT) forms the baseline data in relation to literacy. Four targets are set, three of which are SMART. These three targets are set in relation to three groups within the overall cohort categorised on the basis of reading ages. Qualitative data was also collected in relation to reading and student and parent surveys were carried out. The use of the GRT should be reviewed, as data in relation to students' reading ages is not the most appropriate for target setting. The CAT 4 is suggested as this gives a more reliable data set on which to base targets. Targets in relation to oracy should also be set.
- Many good strategies related to the targets are listed in the DEIS plan such as Drop Everything and Read (DEAR), Spelling Bee, Word of the Week, cross curricular Art and Literature initiative, school book club and increased use of the school library. The good practice of monitoring implementation of strategies at intervals in the course of the year is noted. Most of the strategies are designed to be implemented by the teachers of English thus providing a narrow focus. Whole-school strategies which now need to be incorporated into the plan relate to the promotion of oracy in all lessons, the establishment of a print-rich environment in classrooms, the use of key words and the promotion of reading within subject areas. Fostering a love of reading must become a whole-school responsibility. In order to implement these strategies teachers will need to document in subject department plans the teaching and learning methodologies that promote oracy in lessons. Specific targets for reading related to different subject areas should also be in subject plans.
- The impact of the strategies and attainment of targets is documented in the literacy plan. The SMART targets set to raise the reading ages were shown to have been realised when students were retested at the end of second year and there is also a sense that more students are using the library and reading in the school.

#### *Numeracy*

- The baseline data in relation to numeracy is gathered from entrance tests and attitudinal surveys. In future data in relation to numeracy should be gathered from a cognitive ability test and aligned with data gathered from Mathematics competency tests devised by the Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST). The subsequent performance of students in the house examinations and Junior Certificate Examinations should be tracked against this data.
- The targets are referred to as desired outcomes and some are not SMART. The target referring to promoting positive student attitudes to Mathematics should be rewritten and the desired increase in percentages of students responding positively to certain

questions could be stated as a target. Equally the desired percentage of students attempting numeracy puzzles could be set as a SMART target. Targets relating to uptake of higher and ordinary levels in Mathematics in the certificate examinations are SMART. Consideration should be given to widening the scope of the targets to include the wider STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) subjects. This would align very well with the targets for progression currently being worked on by the Guidance Counsellor.

- Some excellent strategies are in place to promote positive attitudes to Mathematics include numeracy puzzles, the exam tracker and the removal of the foundation level classes and the use of the Maths help desk and Maths week.
- The school is commended for very good progress in relation in particular to targets set for the elimination of foundation level as an option for Leaving Certificate students.

#### *Examination Attainment*

- Data in relation to house examinations is collated and data from the certificate examinations is analysed by the principal. Five targets, four of which are SMART, relate to increasing overall percentages achieving higher level in these examinations. Targets should be set in relation to students taking foundation and ordinary level. Teachers, in the context of subject department planning, should take responsibility for analysis of examination data, and set targets to raise attainment within their own subject areas with increased attention on raising uptake and attainment levels. This should be very clearly documented in subject plans. An annual report of analysis, strategies and review should be given by each subject department to the board of management.
- The very good practice of having differentiated targets for students with special educational needs (SEN) and students in the ASD unit is noted.
- The strategies established to realise the targets include the provision of an after school study club, assisting students with motivation and goal setting. The use of the exam tracker system across subjects is very good. A whole-school approach to teaching and learning strategies, in particular strategies associated with assessment for learning (AfL) which will raise student attainment should be implemented.
- The support document produced by the Learning Support team which profiles each class group and outlines the most appropriate methodologies is excellent and should be implemented in classroom practice.
- Strategies in relation to assignment of and formative feedback on homework, tracking student progress from point of entry to point of exit, and student goal setting need to be considered also. The use of the student journal needs to be reviewed.
- Good progress has been made in relation to targets and the overall trend in relation to improvements in achievement in the certificate examinations is very positive, particularly in relation to uptake at higher level.

#### *4.2 Attendance, Retention, Educational Progression*

- The school has documented that the attendance data is unreliable due to the numbers of students who leave school in the course of the school day. Two of the five targets which have been set are SMART. There is a need for more SMART targets to be set in relation to attendance.
- Some strategies selected are general, such as checking roll call register at the end of each month and informing the JCSP class of a competition to encourage attendance. In 2014 an excellent strategy was employed whereby individual letters were sent to parents giving the cumulative total of absences. This resulted in significant improvement in attendance. It would be worth considering using this strategy again.

- It is timely with the introduction of the new computer system that a whole-school attendance strategy be established. In this context, the use of tutor time needs to be reviewed, as does the number of students suspended each year. The SCP provides great support to students to encourage attendance and these interventions should be integrated into the attendance strategy and the DEIS plan.
- Some data in relation to retention has been gathered but the data collection mechanism needs to be reviewed and SMART targets need to be set along with specific strategies to realise these targets. The interventions by SCP personnel are excellent, in particular their role in relation to the canteen and the care of students.
- Two SMART targets in relation to educational progression have been set in relation to numbers of students accessing higher education and STEM courses. Targets need to be set for students in relation to accessing further education and training and specifically educational progression for students taking the LCA or for students who leave school early. The very good practice in relation to targets for students transitioning from the ASD unit is noted.

#### 4.3 *Partnership with Parents and Others*

- Partnership with parents is central to the DEIS planning process and the HSCL plays a pivotal role in relation to this aspect of DEIS. Very good data in relation to parents' attendance at parent teacher meetings has been gathered and is used to set SMART targets. Excellent strategies such as HSCL follow-up visits to parents who do not attend are implemented. Other strategies to ensure parents are involved in the school include classes for parents, advice in relation to household budgeting, healthy eating initiative and a film club for parents.
- Partnership with the local community and other agencies is also excellent. Strategies such as the very effective library link align well with literacy development in the school and the partnerships with local business align with progression targets. The HSCL co-ordinator works with the community to promote positive mental health and runs an initiative called 'Athy Supporting Wellness'. The school is very generous to the community and opens the school facilities to local schools and clubs.

## SCHOOL DATA

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