



SAPERE AUDE

DUNDALK GRAMMAR SCHOOL

Dundalk Grammar School

Dundalk, Co. Louth

63920A

School Self-Evaluation Report

School Improvement Plan

Evaluation period: May 2013 to May 2014

Report issue date: June 2014

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 THE FOCUS OF THE EVALUATION

An in-school self-evaluation of teaching and learning in Dundalk Grammar School was undertaken during the period May 2013 to May 2014. During this evaluation, teaching and learning in the following curriculum areas were evaluated by the literacy group with a focus on literacy in English:

- Reading ages of first year intake and change in same over course of year 1
- Understanding of key words* by first year students in all subjects

An independently assessed survey of students, parents and staff was also commissioned from Kirkland Rowell Marketing. It was carried out in November 2013 and analysed results were received in March 2014. The DES (Dept. of Education and Skills) conducted a WSE/MLL (Whole School Evaluation in Management Leadership and Learning) in the school in March 2014 and the findings of surveys carried out as part of this process also became part of the evaluation process.

*Key words are best described as words of central importance to the understanding and communication of a subject (e.g. “theorem” in mathematics, “hyperbole” in English, “totalitarianism” in history etc) but they can also non subject specific or relate to questioning (e.g. “analyse”, “compare and contrast” etc).

1.2 SCHOOL CONTEXT

Dundalk Grammar School is a co-educational boarding and day school under Protestant management with a secondary school population of 550 students. Students come from a very wide catchment area throughout north east Leinster with many feeder schools contributing to the intake including Dundalk Grammar School’s own purpose built Junior School. Students are prepared for Junior and Leaving Certificate State examination with twenty two subjects on offer at Leaving Certificate level. The Transition Year programme is well established and compulsory.

All subjects are organized on a departmental basis headed by a subject co-ordinator. Management is supported in the planning and implementation of school development by Year Heads, Pastoral and Care Teams and relevant staff. There are 73 students on the SEN (Special Educational Needs) register, 28 of whom qualify for funded resource hours. All of these receive tailored support with specific focus on Mathematics, English and Science. There are 21 EAL (English as Additional Language) students and 78 students with a DES sanctioned exemption from Irish (this figure includes some non-national students).

2. THE FINDINGS

All subject departments analyse results from the Leaving and Junior Certificate examinations annually and are being referred to the PDST online tool to assist in this process. The majority of subjects compare very favourably to national norms. These findings are recorded in the respective subject department plans. Over 95% of Leaving Certificate students annually progress to third level courses.

The standardised test results for first year students are analysed by the SEN co-ordinator. These results, together with the results from the DGS scholarship exams, provide an academic profile of first year students on entry.

Following the staff reflection on the overview of good practice, using the evaluation criteria in the SSE (School Self Evaluation) Guidelines, there was general agreement that the area of students understanding and use of key words should be evaluated. There are four mixed ability first year classes and it was agreed all departments would test these groups on subject specific key words. It was also considered relevant to monitor changes in reading ages over the course of first year.

ATTAINMENT AND RESULTS

Reading Age: A representative sample of first year students were retested in April 2014 to compare their reading ages with those of their initial assessment tests. The retest was the same format as the initial assessment. An average increase of 1.4years was recorded (the average was 1.8years for non SEN students).

Key Word Results: Class averages for key word tests were obtained from subject teachers for all first year classes in May 2013. From these an overall average of 51.4% was generated. Based on these results staff decided that while the increase in reading age was very satisfactory, the key word results indicated that this is an area that required improvement.

Following this analysis of key word test results and staff reflection on teaching and learning using the SSE guidelines, it was agreed to emphasise the selected subject specific key words using a variety of methodologies and to employ these with both first and second year students with the objective of increasing the average percentage by 5% in the course of the following school year. (Methodologies to be used include classroom displays, word banks, oral and written focus during lessons). Each subject department agreed to audit their teaching approaches and coordinated common annual testing.

3. SUMMARY OF SCHOOL SELF-EVALUATION FINDINGS

3.1 OUR SCHOOL HAS STRENGTHS IN THE FOLLOWING AREAS:

- Attainment in the majority of subjects at both Junior and Leaving Certificate is well above the national norms with in excess of 95% of students progressing to third level (learner outcome)
- The improvement in average reading age during the course of first year is significantly above the norm (learner outcome)
- There is already widespread use of AfL (Assessment for Learning)* techniques by staff (teacher practice)
- There is good evidence of shared good practice and resources within subject departments (teacher practice)
- There are very good pastoral and SEN structures in place (teacher practice)
- There is already widespread use of AfL techniques (learner experience)
- Students are exposed to a print rich environment (learner experience)
- The results of the commissioned survey show that in the top 20 areas ranked as most important by parents the school scored an overall satisfaction rating of 85.5%

*AfL (Assessment for Learning) is about using assessment in the classroom as a tool to improve students' learning, and is characterised by sharing learning goals with students, helping students to recognise the standards they are aiming for, involving students in assessing their own learning, providing feedback, which helps students to recognise what they must do to close any gaps in their knowledge or understanding, communicating confidence that every student can improve and adjusting teaching to take account of the results of assessment.

3.2 PRIORITIES FOR IMPROVEMENT:

- Teachers to focus on the development of literacy in particular Key Word skills in Junior Cycle and expand the range of methodologies used by staff to facilitate this (teacher practice)
- Extend the use of AfL and improve the variety and frequency of oral and written feedback to students (learner experience)
- Aim to improve attainment in key word testing by 5% in the first year (learner outcome)

3.3 All legislative and regulatory requirements have been addressed.

DGS School Improvement Plan

<p>SUMMARY OF MAIN STRENGTHS IN SSE REPORT JUNE 2014</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attainment in the majority of subjects at both Junior and Leaving Certificate is well above the national norms with in excess of 95% of students progressing to third level (learner outcome) • The improvement in average reading age during the course of first year is significantly above the norm (learner outcome) • There is already widespread use of AfL techniques by staff (teacher practice) • There is good evidence of shared good practice and resources within subject departments (teacher practice) • There are very good pastoral and SEN structures in place (teacher practice) • There is already widespread use of AfL techniques (learner experience) • Students are exposed to a print rich environment (learner experience) • The results of the commissioned survey show that in the top 20 areas ranked as most important by parents the school scored an overall satisfaction rating of 85.5%
<p>SUMMARY OF MAIN AREAS REQUIRING IMPROVEMENT AS IDENTIFIED IN SSE REPORT AND SCHOOL SURVEY</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Key Word skills in Junior Cycle and the range of methodologies used by staff to facilitate this (teacher practice) • The use of AfL and the variety and frequency of oral and written feedback to students (learner experience)
<p>IMPROVEMENT TARGETS</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teachers to focus on the development of literacy in particular Key Word skills in Junior Cycle and expand the range of methodologies used by staff to facilitate this (teacher practice) • Extend the use of AfL and improve the variety and frequency of oral and written feedback to students (learner experience) • Improve attainment in key word testing (learner outcome)

REQUIRED ACTIONS	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Teachers (Junior Cycle) to choose from a variety of methodologies to support attainment of key word skills including word banks, print rich environments, increased key word emphasis and focus, quizzes/crosswords etc• Annual/biannual testing of key words in first and second year.• Further staff training in AfL in line with new methodologies necessary for new Junior Cycle.• Focus on quality and content of feedback to students both oral and written
PERSONS RESPONSIBLE	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• All teaching staff are responsible for implementation in their own subject areas.• Subject coordinators are responsible for collating results and updating department folders with detail of agreed approaches/methodologies and results.
TIMEFRAME FOR ACTION	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Sept 2014-May2015
SUCCESS CRITERIA/MEASUREABLE OUTCOMES	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The aim is to improve attainment in key word testing by 5% in the first year (learner outcome)• A survey measuring student satisfaction with feedback from teachers will be conducted to assess improvement in this area. Results to be compared with previous surveys.
REVIEW DATES	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• May 2015