Loreto Secondary School, Clonmel, Co. Tipperary

School Self- Evaluation Report

1. Introduction

1.1 The scool self-evaluation process was introduced in the school in October 2012, when it was

facilitated by an external facilitator. A process was identified to advance self-evaluation at the school.

1.2 **The focus for our school self-evaluation on literacy was arrived at following:**

- Teacher analysis of their subject attainment at Junior Cert. level, and comparison of these results to national averages.
- Analysis of a teacher checklist focussing on literacy levels across the student population identified concerns in the area of basic grammar. Consequently, English teachers explicitly taught First Year students how to use capital letters, full stops and commas. Assessment of the success of this intervention was integrated into the summer in-house exams. This is outlined in Section 3 below.
- Consideration of the future direction of education in post-primary schools, in particular the development of the JCSA and the increased emphasis on Key Skills.
- Awareness of the on-going work in Project Maths in-service and a desire to allow that work to be completed before we begin SSE in the area.

1.3 It was agreed that the quality of learning, the learning experience of students and the instructional methodologies implemented would be analysed through surveys for students and teachers. Such surveys are to emphasise literacy development across the whole school learning environment.

1.4 The promotion of reading has been already an established practice and reading age data has been collected and analysed as well as a survey on students attitudes to reading, thus providing both quantitative and qualitative data.

1.5 Teachers understanding of the SSE process was examined through the administration of a survey.

2. School Context

2.1 We are an all-girls voluntary secondary school in an urban area, under the trusteeship of Loreto Education Trust. There are 508 girls in the school at present. There are 14 feeder schools in the catchment area. 30 students avail of Learning Support, and 4 students are in receipt of additional teaching time as sanctioned by the NCSE. In February of 2013 the first Special Needs Assistant was allocated to the school. We offer four programmes: the Junior Certificate; Transition Year (TY), which is optional but has a very high level of uptake; the established Leaving Certificate; and the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP).

2.2 An SSE team school was agreed and arrangements were put in place for gathering data on student levels of literacy. The SSE Team was made up of volunteers from Senior Management, English, Guidance, Art and Learning Support.

3. Self-Evaulation of Literacy - Findings

Learner Outcomes – Attainment:

- The English Dept. analysed the outcomes of students in Junior Cert. English as an indicator of literacy levels.
- An analysis was also carried out of subject results by each subject department. This was done in order to use it as an indicator of existing standards and trends. Findings are recorded by the respective subject departments and filed.
- As a result of the analysis conducted in subject departments, Junior Cert. attainment, as a whole, was collated and analysed. Student attainment in Junior Cert. was then compared to CAT standard average scores for the same cohort. This data analysis was conducted as means of tracking student progress and developing performance indicators for Junior Cert. results, based on CAT scores.
- The results were noted and can be summarised as:
  It was found that the students consistently attained higher results than the national norms and the uptake of Higher Level English was over 90%.
  At Higher Level between 14% and 16% achieved an A and 94% achieved a C, or above.
  At Ordinary Level 100% of all students achieved a C or above, which indicates above average attainment for the lower ability student.
  Analysis STen scores for First Year 2012-2013 similarly indicated relative strengths in the area of literacy attainment. On entry, 36% of students achieved STen scores between 8 and 10, well above the national distribution of 15%.
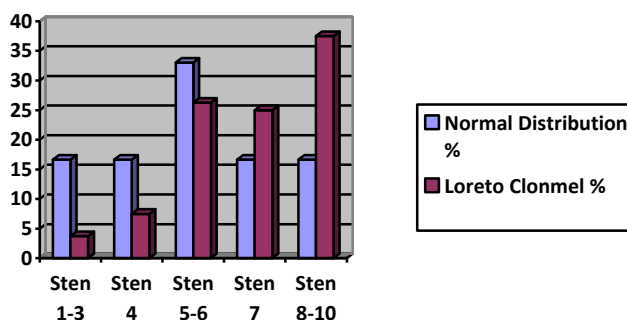
What is of concern is the percentage with 'reading age' of 10 – 12 Years at the start of 1st Year (27%) and end of 1st Year (23.9%). This represents approx 21 of the cohort and the improvement in reading age was only marginal (3.1%).

In the Survey on Attitudes to reading, it was reportd that 66% of students in the same First Year cohort considered reading enjoyable, 62% considered themselves to be good readers and 48% reported that they read for pleasure. However, we need to be more concerned for the 10% who do not like reading, the 38% who consider themselves poor readers and the 14% who never read.

As mentioned above following a staff completion of a checklist focussed on student literacy there was general agreement that the area of students' written work was in need of improvement. There are three mixed ability First Year classes. As part of the summer in-house exams 2013 an error analysis was conducted relating to the use of the comma, full stops and capital letters. As each student was examined across twelve different subjects, this allowed us to base our findings on 980 student tests.

Results were categorised on a standardised basis across the subjects as 'Excellent', 'Satisfactory' and 'Concern'. The findings were as follows:

Excellent   57.3%

Satisfactory   35.4%

Concern   7.3%

These results reflected an increased awareness of the three key grammar points following direct explicit instruction.

Learning Experience – Learning to Learn:

- At a staff meeting, teachers were brought up to date on the work that had been carried by the SSE Team to date. They were given the opportunity to look at draft Quality Statements and Evaluation Criteria to gain understanding of the SSE process. Following completion of a survey by staff the following became evident:
  63% of teachers expressed a good understanding of the SSE Process
  90% saw clearly the importance of the data collected to date to direct the approach for our   literacy strategy.
  73% were satisfied that they understood the methodologies required to improve 'literacy in our classes.
  Time was a real issue for most teachers and 91% of them highlighted the importance of allocating time to collaborate and share the various literacy skills and methodologies.
  Some qualitative feedback from staff included comments around the need for uniformity of approach by all departments, a whole school approach, thematic approaches and that the overall plan must a working document that leads to real improvement in student literacy and not just an aspirational 'policy document'.

- A student on-line questionnaire was designed using Survey Monkey and was administered to all Second Year students. The purpose was to get student perspective on how they learn in the area of literacy, and to gain a clearer insight into their learning environment. The results can be outlined as follows:

  11% of students like writing diaries/stories.

  20% of students are comfortable speaking in front of the class.

  56% of students prefer to learn on their own

  19% of students check their writing for mistakes

  These findings indicate that students prefer teacher directed learning and are less likely to adopt a self-directed approach to learning, especially in the area of writing.

  56% of students reported that they were regularly offered the opportunity to learn by 'listening to teacher and taking notes', while 39% reported that they regularly learned by 'working in pairs or small groups'.

- This correlates directly with the teachers survey where:

  26% of teachers indicate that they provide opportunities for students to learn 'by investigation/ self-directed learning', while 74% of students are provided the opportunity to learn 'by listening to (teacher) and taking down teacher's notes'.

- 40% of teachers say they only sometimes give attention to the systematic development of 'managing myself (student) skills'.

The opportunity for students to 'learn how to learn' and develop their own learning skills may be limited due to a more teacher centred approach. This is however contradicted within some of the answers provided in the teachers survey as outlined in section 'Teachers Practice- Teachers' Approach' and would identify a need to focus on methodologies that provide greater opportunities for student self-directed approach to their learning in the future.

In the last two years, teachers have adopted the 'key skills' approach to teaching and indeed have formally adopted at least four 'elements' of the proscribed key skills for the new JCSA. This may provide the answer to the apparent contradiction mentioned above.

Teachers' Practice - Teachers' Approach:

- An on-line survey was administered to teachers to discover how teachers' methods and approaches related to how students' learning preferences. Four questions in all were asked and these focused on:
  - learning skills
  - approaches to learning opportunities provided to students
  - teaching methodologies and their impact on students' learning styles
  - literacy improvement and development.

- In question one the focus was on the attention given to the systematic development of skills.
  100% and 80% of teachers respectively reported that they regularly attended to the 'Knowledge / Content and the Subject Specific Skills in contrast to only 50% regularly attending to the 'Being Creative Skills'.
  On the other hand 85% of respondent teachers regularly attended to the development of 'Communication' skills.
- In question two 95% of teachers indicated they provided opportunities for students to learn 'Independently' which contrasts with the finding that only 26% of teachers provide for self-directed or investigative approach to learning.
- Question 3 focussed on teaching methodologies and 90% of teachers said they 'regularly' provide varying visual and auditory methodologies to allow for different learning styles but only 45% regularly provide for the kinaesthetic learner in their methodologies.
- In the final question regarding the focus on Literacy, around 90% of teachers either regularly or sometimes give attention to the various literacy skills but 10% approx never attend to these skills.

4. Progress made on previously identified targets
(Not applicable as SIP not in place yet)

5. Summary of School Self-Evaluation findings

5.1 Our school has strengths in the following areas:
(as evidenced by statistical analysis, surveys students and teachers and DES inspection reports)
- Most students have reading ages above their chorological age.
- Take-up of Higher Level English and attainment in same are considerably higher than national level.
- Students are positively engaged in learning in school.
- Teachers are highly committed to the progress and development of all students.
- Teachers and students are committed to improving overall literacy standards.
- Teachers are adopting different methodologies and have adopted a process for developing 'Key Skills' of learning for their students.
- Realistic, challenging learning outcomes exist, including a continued commitment to improved literacy skills, as identified through CAT analysis, analysis of state exam results, reading age data and examination of STen scores.
- Teaching methodologies and approaches are increasingly more focused on the learner and the development of their Key Skill.
- Increased emphasis on 'differentiation' in teaching methodologies and approaches.

5.2 The following areas are prioritised for improvement

- Increased expectation in the frequency of reading and in reading for pleasure to include at least one 'on-line tool/activity'.

- Higher expectations of the quality of written work across all subject departments to develop 'literacy promotion strategies' and to include 'on-line' investigations and presentations where relevant or possible.

- Improve the 'self-directed' approach to our students' learning, specifically in the area of listening skills and 'oral presentation'.

Note : in the areas for improvement set out above there is a Digital or Online element which will allow for overall improvement in our students 'digital literacy'.