An Roinn Oideachais
agus Óige
Department of Education
and Youth

Programme Evaluation in TY
REPORT

Ainm na scoile/School name	Ashbourne Community School
Seoladh na scoile/School address	Deerpark Ashbourne Co Meath
Uimhir rolla/Roll number	91495T
Dáta na cigireachta/ Date of evaluation	23/09/2025
Dáta eisiúna na tuairisce/Date of issue of report	19/11/2025

What is a programme evaluation?

The programme evaluation model of inspection is used to evaluate the quality and effectiveness of the following programmes and to provide advice and support to teachers, principals and school management in post-primary schools and centres for education:

- Junior Certificate School Programme (JCSP)
- Transition Year (TY) programme
- Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) programme
- Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP)

How to read this report

During this inspection, the inspector evaluated learning and teaching in TY under the following headings:

1. Teaching and learning
2. Programme provision and whole-school support
3. Programme planning, co-ordination and evaluation

Inspectors describe the quality of each of these areas using the Inspectorate's quality continuum which is shown on the final page of this report. The quality continuum provides examples of the language used by inspectors when evaluating and describing the quality of the school's provision in each area.

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.

Actions of the school to safeguard children and prevent and tackle bullying

During the inspection visit, the following checks in relation to the school's child protection and anti-bullying procedures were conducted:	
Child Protection	*Bí Cineálta*
1. The name of the DLP and the Child Safeguarding Statement (CSS) are prominently displayed near the main door of the school / in the reception area. *Following the school's adoption of the updated procedures 2025, it is also required to display a student-friendly version incorporating the name of the DLP beside the CSS*. 2. The school's child safeguarding statement has been ratified by the board and includes an annual review and a risk assessment. 3. All teachers visited were aware of who to go to if they had a child protection concern.	1. The school has developed an anti-bullying policy using Appendix A of *Bí Cineálta, it is reviewed annually (or earlier if required) and includes a student/pupil friendly version that is displayed where students/pupils and the school community can see it.* 2. The school's anti-bullying policy is published on its website and/or is readily accessible to board of management members, staff, parents and students/pupils. 3. The board of management minutes record that the principal provides an update to the board at each ordinary board meeting that meets the requirements of *Bí Cineálta*

The school met the requirements in relation to each of the checks above.

Programme evaluation in TY

Date of inspection	22/09/2025 and 23/09/2025
Inspection activities undertaken • Discussions with principal • Meetings with key staff • Review of relevant documents • Student focus-group interview	• Observation of teaching and learning • Examination of students' work • Interaction with students • Feedback to senior management team, and teachers

School context

Ashbourne Community School had an enrolment of 1,109 students at the time of the evaluation. It provided the Junior Cycle, Leaving Certificate, Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP), and Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) programmes. Transition Year (TY) was provided as an optional programme for students. The school had two classes for students with Autism and Level Two Learning Progammes (L2LPs) were provided where appropriate for students in these classes.

Summary of main findings and recommendations:

Findings

- The quality of teaching and learning was very good overall; some lessons were excellent and there were a few areas requiring improvement.
- Students demonstrated very good understanding of all the material taught and were confident in answering teacher questions and in engaging in class discussions.
- Whole-school support for TY was very good. The school's senior management team provided highly structured and supportive management of the TY programme.
- Work experience was very well organised and managed and there were very good relationships between local businesses and the school.
- Programme planning, evaluation, coordination and review were excellent. The TY coordinator with the support of the TY core team provided very high levels of advice, encouragement and support to TY teachers and students alike.
- There was a very high level of oversight of planning for teaching and learning in TY and the majority of subject plans were in line with the TY Programme Statement.

Recommendations

- The language teachers should explore creative ways to encourage and facilitate confidence in speaking and overall fluency in the target language.
- In some lessons, content was situated in its appropriate context, and this enabled students to gain a fuller and deeper understanding. However, this practice was not universal and should be extended to all subjects.
- All subjects, except for Mathematics, were taught in mixed-ability settings in TY. It is recommended that Mathematics be taught in mixed-ability settings using methodologies that allow students to progress at their own pace.
- The TY mathematics plan was overly textbook-driven, comprised mainly curricular topics, and was delivered in a year-long linear manner. A modular approach based on teachers' own interests and areas of expertise, including non-examination material, should be implemented.

Detailed findings and recommendations

1. Teaching and learning

- The quality of teaching and learning was very good overall; some lessons were excellent and there were a few areas requiring improvement. All explanations and instruction were clear. Lessons were well planned, and teachers had prepared a range of valuable resources for learning. It was especially noteworthy that teachers adapted lesson resources for students following L2LPs to support their inclusion and their learning.
- There was a very good focus on developing students' research, communication, and presentation skills in some lessons. Highly effective practice was evident when students researched a topic at home, discussed their findings in groups or pairs, or presented to the class as a whole. This valuable approach not only added interest to lessons but also encouraged students to participate actively and to engage.
- Students demonstrated very good understanding of the material taught and were confident in answering teacher questions and in engaging in class discussions. Teachers used probing questions to consolidate and deepen learning and this is highly effective practice.
- Highly effective use of student digital devices was a feature of most lessons. They were used to design posters, conduct research, and for students to manage their work. In a few instances, there was scope for teachers to provide additional research tasks for students to complete on their digital devices and this should be addressed.
- In the language lesson observed, the students engaged fully with the very well-designed learning tasks. However, while the teachers' use of the target language was excellent, there was limited use of the target language by students. The language teachers should explore creative ways to encourage and facilitate confidence in speaking and overall fluency in the target language.
- In almost all lessons, the teacher provided a very clear outline of the lesson plan, and detailed explanations of the learning intentions. Additionally, teachers checked the achievement of the intended learning during and at the end of lessons. There was scope to extend this good practice in a few lessons to guide the learning more effectively and create a sense of security in the learning experience for students.
- Teachers used a variety of highly effective student-centred methodologies, such as group and pair work, and in some lessons, students worked independently at their own pace. These approaches were effective in enabling students of all ability levels to progress in the various subjects. In a minority of lessons, whole-class instruction was the main methodology, and it was more difficult to differentiate learning for students. Methodologies that allow for more independent learning and for students to progress at their own pace should be favoured.
- In some lessons, the topics presented were situated in their appropriate contexts. For example, in History, castles in Ireland were linked to historical maps as well as to patterns found in place names and surnames. This lesson also incorporated the European and British contexts. There was also a very good logical approach taken to making the connections and seeing the full picture. In other lessons, topics were taught in isolation and out of context with insufficient connections made to support students' understanding. The good practice in History should be extended to all subjects.
- The quality of in-class assessment was very good overall. Teachers observed students as they were working, assessed their progress, and discussed their learning with them. The seating in a few classrooms made it difficult to get to every student and this should be addressed.
- The students in their focus group described how TY supported the development of their confidence. They said that participation in class activities, with outside speakers, and with learning outside the classroom enabled them to engage in many fun activities, make a wide range of friends, and gain experience and skills.

- Overall, the students were positive in relation to their work experience. Many of the students had work experience placements in line with their interests and their career aspirations. However, for some students, this aspect of the programme was more limited to working in part-time jobs they already had, or completing work experience that was not aligned to their career interests.
- The students described the TY show as being the best part of their TY experience as it supported a stronger sense of belonging in the school and helped them get to know people outside of their friendship group. They felt that the structure of the show, which comprised four separate productions, one from each base group, facilitated high levels of inclusion and participation.
- The students described learning in TY as being more project based and less focused on formal study. They greatly appreciated the efforts of their teachers in providing a worthwhile TY programme, and the social opportunities they received; they felt that these experiences improved their overall enjoyment of school and their wellbeing.
- The relationships between students and their teachers were warm and encouraging. There was a relaxed and supportive atmosphere in all classrooms visited.

2. Programme provision and whole-school support

- Whole-school support for TY was very good. The school's senior management team provided highly structured and supportive management of the TY programme. The coordinator and TY team had appropriate levels of autonomy in planning the programme and the senior management team encouraged innovation and creativity. All of the necessary resources for coordinating and delivering the programme were provided.
- The TY programme in the school was in line with the TY Programme Statement. The programme included the core subjects, English, Irish, Mathematics and a Modern Foreign Language. There was an opportunity for students to sample subjects they wished to take for Leaving Certificate, and many opportunities for learning and for fun outside of the classroom.
- The current year's TY was strongly focused on developing students' digital skills. Digital devices for all students were introduced, training was provided for teachers, and classes were provided to support students in navigating the necessary applications, become familiar with presentation software, and on how to digitally organise and manage their work.
- Almost all subjects were taught in mixed-ability settings. However, students were assigned to higher and ordinary level bands for Mathematics. It is recommended that Mathematics be taught in mixed-ability settings using methodologies that allow students to progress at their own pace. The section on the planning template on Universal Design for Learning should be used to support the mathematics department with this change.
- The approach to assessment in TY was very good. There was a credit system, and teachers had appropriate autonomy in using it to evaluate and report on student progress in their subjects. The students created a portfolio, which captured their experiences and learning. In past years, the need for formal lesson time to support students with this task was recognised and time was provided.
- Student digital devices were very well used to organise portfolios on the school's digital platform. There was a strong focus on facilitating students to set goals and review their own progress. Interviews were conducted at the end of the academic year to evaluate achievement. The students were actively involved in planning the graduation event, as a way of having a leadership role in celebrating their TY achievements.
- There was appropriate transparency in relation to the funding of TY. Students were charged a fee for participating in the programme. This fee covered all of the additional activities provided in TY. The operation of the TY was inclusive, and the school provided support where necessary.
- Students engaged in a range of co-curricular and extra-curricular activities. These activities included overnight school trips, competitions, workshops, outside speakers and community projects. There was a strong emphasis on charitable work in the schools' TY programme; the students raised fund through local collections, a relay marathon, and coffee mornings

with the senior citizens, for example. The bonding events and the TY show were described by students as being central to the development of confidence and self-esteem, and were highlights of the TY school year.

- Work experience was a valuable aspect of the school's TY programme. Students completed work experience on one half-day per week. It was very well organised and managed and there was very good communication between the businesses and school when the students were on placements. The school had very good relationships with local businesses; for example, a barbering and hairdressing course was provided in TY, which was very well received by students and supported students to access apprenticeships.
- The TY programme was open to all students and approximately two-thirds of students opted for TY. The school also provided the Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) programme and LCA students were encouraged to complete TY, which is good practice. There was a strong emphasis on encouraging good attendance in TY, and on emphasising the loss of opportunity and fun experiences if students missed days.

3. Programme planning, co-ordination and review

- Programme planning, evaluation, coordination and review were excellent. The school designed its TY programme around a different theme each year, with this year's theme focusing on 'values'. The programme coordinator together with the core TY team, and the wider teaching team were highly effective in ensuring that the dimensions of the TY Programme Statement and the year's chosen theme were evident throughout the planning and delivery of the programme. The TY team met regularly to plan for the running, review, and future development of the programme.
- There was a very high level of oversight of planning for teaching and learning in TY. The TY coordinator developed a planning template to reflect the requirements of the Programme Statement and individual subject departments used the template to develop and review their subject plans. The TY coordinator provided support and encouragement for the teaching team to plan in a manner that incorporated the spirit of the student dimension of '*Being a Learner*' in particular.
- Almost all subject department plans showed very good adherence to the principles of the Programme Statement. For example, the English subject plan included topics like, ambition, creative media, dystopian fiction, resilience, and creative and fun approaches to poetry. Additionally, English was modular with teachers covering modules aligned to their own passions and interests. This excellent practice made the subject attractive for students and supported them in becoming learners who were open to the excitement and wonder of learning.
- The TY Mathematics plan was overly textbook driven, comprised mainly curricular topics, and was delivered in a year-long linear manner. This approach offered little opportunity for students to explore the wider mathematical landscape and was limiting in terms of enabling students to develop the skills of being a mathematics learner. A modular approach based on teachers' own interests and areas of expertise should be considered with necessary mathematical procedures taught in context rather than as stand-alone topics.
- The review of the TY programme was very comprehensive and designed to gather the authentic views of teachers, parents and students; they completed questionnaires and their views were fully taken on board. It was evident that changes had been made on foot of these evaluations and reviews.

The draft findings and recommendations arising out of this evaluation were discussed with the principal, deputy principals, programme coordinator, TY year head, and the school's special educational needs coordinator at the conclusion of the evaluation.

The Inspectorate's Quality Continuum

Inspectors describe the quality of provision in the school using the Inspectorate's quality continuum which is shown below. The quality continuum provides examples of the language used by inspectors when evaluating and describing the quality of the school's provision of each area.

Level	Description	Examples of descriptive terms
Excellent	**Provision that is excellent** is exemplary in meeting the needs of learners. This provision provides an example for other schools and settings of exceptionally high standards of provision.	Excellent; exemplary; outstanding; exceptionally high standard; with very significant strengths
Very good	**Provision that is very good** is very effective in meeting the needs of learners and is of a very high standard. There is potential to build on existing strengths to achieve an excellent standard.	Very good; of a very high quality; very effective practice; highly commendable; very successful
Good	**Provision that is good** is effective in meeting the needs of learners. There is need to build on existing strengths in order to address the aspects to be developed and achieve a very good standard.	Good; of good quality; effective practice; competent; useful; commendable; good standard; strengths outweigh the shortcomings; appropriate provision although some possibilities for improvement exist
Requires improvement to achieve a good standard	**Provision that requires improvement to achieve a good standard** is not sufficiently effective in meeting the needs of learners. There is need to address certain deficiencies without delay in order to ensure that provision is good or better.	Fair; less than effective; less than sufficient; evident weaknesses that are impacting on learning; experiencing difficulty; shortcomings outweigh strengths; must improve in specified areas; action required to improve
Requires significant improvement to achieve a good standard	**Provision that requires significant improvement to achieve a good standard** is not meeting the needs of learners. There is immediate need for significant action to address the areas of concern.	Weak; poor; ineffective; insufficient; unacceptable; experiencing significant difficulties; serious deficiencies in the areas evaluated; requiring significant change, development and improvement to be effective