



Portlaoise College

School Roll Number: **71510A**

School Self-Evaluation Report

Evaluation period: September 2013 to June 2014

Report issue date: 1st September 2014

School Self-Evaluation Report

1. Introduction

All second level schools are now required to draw up school improvement plans (SIP) as part of a process of school self-evaluation. The Department of Education and Skills has requested that this plan would focus primarily on numeracy or literacy in the first years of the process. The SIP for Portlaoise College School will focus on literacy for the three years from September 2014 to June 2017. In September 2015 it will produce a further three-year plan on numeracy as well as reviewing the plan for literacy outlined here.

1.1 The focus of the evaluation

A school self-evaluation of literacy was undertaken during the period September 2013 to June 2014. During the evaluation, teaching and learning in subjects and programmes were collaboratively evaluated, with particular emphasis on whole school and subject specific literacy. School self-evaluation in this area is essential for school improvement and future development in the area of literacy.

1.2 School Context

Portlaoise College is a non-selective co-educational school that caters for second-level students. The school also provides for further education through the provision of Post Leaving Certificate (PLC) courses. It is administered by Laois and Offaly Education and Training Board (ETB) and the board of management, a sub-committee of the ETB. Portlaoise College is in the current Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) programme. There are currently 710 students enrolled.

A core team was created by requesting a volunteer from each of the following subject groupings: (a) Science & Maths, (b) English & History, (c) Practical Subjects, (d) IT & Business, (e) Career Guidance, (f) Learning support. This was to ensure that all subject areas were represented without the core team becoming prohibitively large. Each volunteer agreed to act as the liaison person for the development of literacy (and subsequent areas for SSE focus) in their area.

2. The Findings

Learner Outcomes

- The New Group Reading Test 1 (NGRT1) a standardised test was administered to first years to determine the reading level of our students. These were then compared with STen national average scores for reading (6th Class). It was noted that the STen scores for reading for the cohort are below the national norms. (See Table 1)

- The student's standardised test results and report cards from the primary school were analysed by the career guidance counsellor.
- All subject departments used the PDST tool for analysing results in the Leaving Certificate and Junior Certificate exams. This was done in order to use it as an indicator of existing standards. The majority of subjects compare favourably to national norms, taking due cognisance of school context.
- End of term and end of year and mock results are analysed by the English Department in order to band students into ordinary and higher level English classes. These results are monitored continually to allow students to move between levels if necessary.
- First year, students were surveyed to assess their attitudes towards English as a subject. The results were analysed at subject department meetings with a view to informing future planning needs.
- Following the staff reflection on the overview of good practice, there was general agreement that the area of students written work was in need of improvement.
- Samples of First Year classes' written work across the curriculum were picked at random and an error analysis was conducted under the following headings: spelling, punctuation & grammar, use of specific vocabulary, sequencing and development of answers.

Table 1
Summary of NGRT1 Scores for Reading

The NGRT 1(New Group Reading Test 1) was carried out with all First Year students. Reading age at or below 9 = Very Low, 10 – 11 = Low Average, 12 – 13 = Average, 14 – 15 = High, 15+ = Very High

STen Score	Very Low	Low Average	Average	High Average	Very High
School	38.5%	22.8%	22.8%	3.5%	12.2%
National	17%	17%	33%	17%	17%

Table 2
Summary of Error Analysis of a Sample of Written Work

	Spelling	Punctuation & Grammar	Vocabulary	Sequencing	Development of answers
Satisfactory	63.5%	51%	59%	66%	43%
Unsatisfactory	36.5%	49%	41%	34%	57%

Learning Experience

At a staff meeting, the whole staff team used the overview of good practice and the evaluation criteria in the SSE guidelines to reach a consensus on strengths, areas for improvement and priorities for action. Subsequently the Core Team designed a student questionnaire on attitudes to literacy and engagement in learning. The on-line questionnaire was designed using google forms and was administered to all 1st year students during three IT class periods. By using an on-line tool results were instantly collated and analysis began immediately. Parents were also surveyed to establish literacy attitudes in the home.

Findings

- The school has a significant number of students with a low –to-moderate literacy level.
- There is a willing staff, which is motivated to learn more about literacy and how they can improve it in the school.
- There is a very good staff-student relationship in the school, aiding the implementation of literacy improving measures.
- There are also good opportunities to promote literacy through co-curricular activities, especially through school clubs, leadership activities and School Completion Programme.
- Students are affirmed in their work.
- 15% of students read for more than one hour per week for enjoyment. The most popular reading materials are fiction (e.g. "The Hunger Games", "Twilight" etc.).
- 45% of students stated that they are never comfortable sharing or speaking their ideas while 30% of students feel most comfortable sharing their ideas in pairs/small groups; 20% stated that this was their favourite way to learn while 20% of students stated that they got a chance to learn this way.
- 16% of students stated that they like writing (e.g. diaries, letters, stories, speeches etc.). 14% of students believe that their writing is neat and easy to read and understand but only 6% of students stated they check their writing for mistakes. 10% of students stated that they do not like writing at all while only 7% like making my own notes from textbooks. 10% of students stated that they would like to have a checklist to help improve their writing.

Teachers' Practice

At a staff meeting in August 2013, the whole staff team used the SSE guidelines to reflect on teaching and learning to reach a consensus on strengths, areas for improvement and priorities for action and recorded them on the staff reflection sheet. Based on the feedback, the Core Team designed a survey on teaching approaches and this was administered on-line using google forms. After analysis of both the teacher and student survey.

Staff also agreed that it made sense to look at the key skills communicating and working with others as they tie in very well with the focus on literacy. Consequently as part of subject department planning teachers agreed to audit their teaching approaches.

Findings

3. **Progress made on previously identified targets identified in the current SIP N/A as year one as SIP not yet in place.**

4. **Summary of School Self-Evaluation findings**

4.1 **Our school has strengths in the following areas:**

- Principal, Deputy Principal, Teachers, Parents and the Board of Management collaborate to bring about school improvement through the implementation of the SIP.
- JCSP Programme.
- There is an awareness of the need for a whole school literacy approach to improve standards.
- Resources, including digital resources and ICT are very good.
- Teachers use a variety of teaching methodologies.
- Willingness of staff to try new approaches and to share good practice.
- Very proactive subject departments

4.2 **The following areas are prioritised for improvement**

- The key areas prioritised for improvement listed below have arisen out of meetings of the Core Team over a period of months in 2013/14 and from discussions at whole staff meetings.
- Continued development of literacy interventions to promote basic literacy skills, reading for pleasure, self-confidence in literacy and to promote an interest in and enjoyment of English as a subject.
- Use data gathered on reading ages; end of term/year and state exam results in order to identify appropriate goals; targets, approaches and interventions for the development of a Whole School Literacy Action Plan.
- Implementing consistent approaches to English in subject keywords and terminology among the teachers of all Subject Departments.
- Increased access to books, library facilities etc...
- Whole school approach to formatting copies.
- To retain Data from test scores e.g. CAT / class spelling tests / Reading Literacy tests for analytical purposes and future evaluations i.e. gathering of evidence.
-

- To introduce further “Assessment for Learning” techniques in 2013-2014 to improve levels of motivation and learning and to give students a greater sense of purpose and involvement in their learning.
- The increase use of the school library and the borrowing of books by students. To issue Borrower Cards to all students. Parents to be invited to act as Librarians once vetted.
- Increase the number of students taking higher level in certain subjects for both junior Certificate and Leaving Certificate.
- To increase students’ participation in Debating and Poetry Aloud.
- To place a folder for literacy scores and literacy resources folder on teachers public to share examples of good practice and further increase awareness.

4.3 The following legislative and regulatory requirements need to be addressed.

- Once legislative requirements are clear the school’s Admission Policy needs to be reviewed.
- Review of the school’s Code of Behaviour and Discipline needs to be finalised.
- A Whole School Guidance Policy needs to be reviewed and implemented

The specific targets for each key area of the plan are listed below. While these targets concentrate on actions involving teachers and students the support of the home is a vital part of implementing literacy improvements. The sharing of this plan is but a first step in engaging parents in effecting improvements. During 2014/15 we will explore further ways to measure success in the implementation of this plan.

IMPROVEMENT TARGET 1 - To increase the percentage of students reading for enjoyment for more than one hour per week.

IMPROVEMENT TARGET 2 – To develop students’ capacities to comprehend written and verbal questioning and to respond appropriately to it.

IMPROVEMENT TARGET 3 – Develop approaches that will enhance students’ verbal reasoning and communication skills across all subjects.

IMPROVEMENT TARGET 4 - To improve learner outcomes in state examinations and increase uptake of subjects at higher level.

The following actions will support the implementation of School Improvement Plan:

- Integrate staff reviews of the whole school literacy plan regularly in staff/planning meetings and in staff communications, to keep the issue alive and developing.
- Provide financial support where necessary to support literacy initiatives, for instance in the development of library facilities.
- Implement a range of specific actions around learner experience and teacher
- Blooms taxonomy to assist teaching strategies, on display in each classroom and student canteen.
- Examination key words printed and on display in each classroom.
- Target setting sheet, section on Keywords and study techniques included in student journal.
- Basic principles of Instructional Leadership (AFL) booklet for each staff member on teachers public.
- Literacy /JCSP Methodology Resource Pack devised and distributed to all staff.



Portlaoise College School Improvement Plan for Literacy September 2014 to May 2017



<p>Summary of main strengths</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Principal, Deputy Principal, Teachers, Parents and the Board of Management collaborate to bring about school improvement through the implementation of the SIP. ▪ JCSP Programme. ▪ There is an awareness of the need for a whole school literacy approach to improve standards. ▪ Resources, including digital resources and ICT are very good. ▪ Teachers use a variety of teaching methodologies and strategies (e.g. Bloom's Taxonomy, questioning strategies etc.) ▪ Willingness of staff to try new approaches and to share good practice. ▪ Very proactive subject departments.
<p>Summary of main areas requiring improvement as identified in last SSE</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Continued development of literacy interventions to promote basic literacy skills, reading for pleasure, self-confidence in literacy and to promote an interest in and enjoyment of English as a subject. ▪ Use data gathered on reading ages; end of term/year and state exam results in order to identify appropriate goals; targets, approaches and interventions for the development of a Whole School Literacy Action Plan. ▪ Implementing consistent approaches to English in subject keywords and terminology among the teachers of all Subject Departments. ▪ Increase access to books, library facilities etc.. ▪ Whole school approach to formatting copies. ▪ To retain Data from test scores e.g. CAT / class spelling tests / Reading Literacy tests for analytical purposes and future evaluations i.e. gathering of evidence. ▪ To introduce further "Assessment for Learning" techniques in 2014-2015 to improve levels of motivation and learning and to give students a greater sense of purpose and involvement in their learning. ▪ Increase the number of students taking higher level in certain subjects for both junior Certificate and Leaving Certificate.
<p>Actions to support implementation of School Improvement Plan</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Integrate staff reviews of the whole school literacy plan regularly in staff/planning meetings and in staff communications, to keep the issue alive and developing. ▪ Provide financial support where necessary to support literacy initiatives, for instance in the development of library facilities. ▪ Blooms taxonomy to assist teaching strategies, on display in each classroom and student canteen. ▪ Examination key words printed and on display in each classroom. ▪ Target setting sheet, section on Keywords and study techniques included in student journal. ▪ Basic principles of Instructional Leadership (AFL) booklet for each staff member on teachers' public. ▪ Literacy /JCSP Methodology Resource Pack devised and distributed to all staff and placed on teachers' public.

IMPROVEMENT TARGET	DETAILED ACTION PLAN	RESOURCES	EVIDENCE	SUCCESS CRITERIA	TIMELINE	REVIEW DATE
<p>To increase the percentage of students surveyed reading for enjoyment for more than one hour per week from 15 % in October 2014 to 25% in October 2015 and from 25% in October 2015 to 40% in October 2016 and from - 40% in October 2016 to 60% in October 2017.</p>	<p>Reading for enjoyment class for 1st Years, Book In The Bag for 2nd Years & "media watch" for 3rd Years.</p>	<p>English Department. Students bring in and read their own books. English teachers organise media notice board and nominate students responsible on a rotational basis</p>	<p>Increase in the number of students reading for enjoyment as measured by the student survey. At a minimum, maintain the number of students scoring a STen of 13 or more and reduce the number of students scoring a STen of 10 or less in the standardised reading test in 2015/16.</p>	<p>Reading for enjoyment class every month during 2014/15 for current 1st years. BITB during free classes & DEAR time for current cohort when they are in 2nd year in 2015/16. Media Watch in all classes at least one class a week for current cohort when they are in 3rd year in 2016/17.</p>	<p>Updates at staff meetings. Survey administered in October of 2015/16/17 to track progress & analysis of STen in 2015/16.</p>	
	<p>1st Year students record books read in their journal. Class tutor check the student's journals. Parents sign the journals. English teachers and students.</p>	<p>Records of books read in student's journals checked by tutor.</p>	<p>Records of books read in student's journals checked by tutor.</p>	<p>Every month in 2014/15/16</p>	<p>May 2015/16/17</p>	
	<p>The English Department will purchase three extra class sets of novels for 1st years. These novels are "Buddy", "The Bridge to Terabethia" and "War Horse".</p>		<p>Records of books read in student's journals checked by tutor.</p>	<p>Every month in 2014/15</p>	<p>May 2015</p>	

IMPROVEMENT TARGET / <i>Seo Reading</i>	REQUIRED ACTIONS	PERSONS RESPONSIBLE	MEASURABLE OUTCOMES / SUCCESS CRITERIA	INTERIM REVIEW POINTS	REVIEW DATE
To increase the percentage of students surveyed reading for enjoyment for more than one hour per week from 15 % in October 2014 to 25% in October 2015 and from 25% in October 2015 to 40% in October 2016 and from - 40% in October 2016 to 60% in October 2017.	Establish classroom-based themed libraries	All teachers.	Appropriate books in each classroom which can be used as a source of discussion. Each classroom in the school to have bookshelves.	End of first term	May 2015
	Develop a more practical school library.	Senior Management.	Greater utilisation of the school library for projects and debates.	New furniture and books purchased for library Sept 14.	December 2014
	Establish a culture of reading. The three first year English classes will go on separate visits to the local library.	English teachers and students.	Attitude of students to reading & seeking to understand characters	End of first term.	October 2014
	JCSP Reading Initiative with Scoil Bhrí primary school.	HSCL and SCP co-ordinators with 1 st year JCSP students.	Students uptake in library membership cards Increased self-confidence and more positive attitude of students to reading and storytelling.	2 nd Term	September 15/16/17
	JCSP paired reading initiative with parents	HSCL/JCSP co-ordinator. Parents of 2 nd year JCSP students.	Pre and post survey/evaluation with parents and students.	2 nd Term	September 15/16/17
	Development of a reading and writing noticeboard which will focus on texts being read, revision plans, upcoming events.	English & Maths Department.	Students to become more independent learners.	Survey September 15/16/17	September 15/16/17
	Whole school approach to formatting copies.	All teachers.	Reduction in the numbers of errors in student's work.	Survey September 15/16/17	September 15/16/17

MOVEMENT TARGET 2 <i>Re-questioning</i>	REQUIRED ACTIONS	PERSON/S RESPONSIBLE	MEASURABLE OUTCOMES/SUCCESS CRITERIA	TIMELINE FOR ACTIONS	REVIEW DATE
Develop students' capacities to comprehend written and verbal questioning and to respond appropriately to it.	Students will have easy access in each classroom to the meanings of the standard key words used in questioning.	All teachers.	Classrooms will display these key words and their meanings in a prominent place for students to see throughout the year Students will make use of the display before attempting to answer questions.	Continuous. Teachers to share their experiences of the use of group work at staff/planning meetings.	September 15/16/17
	Teachers will more consciously use AFL in increasing student capacities in responding to questioning. The teacher will ask students, prior to them answering questions, to explain the key words in the question and how these words will shape the answer.	All teachers.	Students will provide more appropriate answers more consistently.	Continuous. Teachers to share their experiences of the use of group work at staff/planning meetings.	September 15/16/17
	Teachers will prompt students to use key words when asking questions of the teacher.	Teachers and students.	Students will feel free to promote the use of the key words within their own questioning in the classroom.	Continuous. Teachers to share their experiences of the use of group work at staff/planning meetings.	September 15/16/17

IMPROVEMENT TARGETS <i>Re: Verbal Reasoning</i>	REQUIRED ACTIONS	PERSONS RESPONSIBLE	MEASURABLE OUTCOMES	TIMELINE FOR ACTIONS	REVIEW DATE
<p>Develop approaches that will enhance students' verbal reasoning and communication skills across all subjects.</p>	<p>All teachers will use a range of comprehension strategies that can also be used as pair/group work activities. To include at least one ICT/online tool.</p> <p><u>Examples</u> Graphic organisers Visual Verbal Square Word Trail Think-pair-share KWL Anticipation guide Study sack</p>	<p>Literacy core team trial strategies. Demonstrate to staff. All staff implement across the curriculum. All staff trained in use e.g. google docs.</p>	<p>An increase in the number of teachers who use comprehension strategies as measured by survey. An increase in the number of students who find that comprehension strategies aid their learning. An increase in the number of students making their own notes as measured by student survey. An increase in the standard of comprehension as measured by teacher observation & test results.</p>	<p>Implementation across the curriculum Sept 2014 onwards. Training in google docs Sept '14 Survey September 15/16/17</p>	<p>September 15/16/17</p>
	<p>Teachers to include classroom debates and student discussions in their teaching methodologies.</p>	<p>Teachers.</p>	<p>Improvement in students' abilities and willingness to speak in public and improve their debating skills.</p>	<p>Continuous. Teachers to share their experiences of the inclusion of classroom debates at staff/planning meetings.</p>	<p>September 15/16/17</p>

IMPROVEMENT TARGETS	REQUIRED ACTIONS	PERSONS RESPONSIBLE	MEASURABLE OUTCOMES SUCCESS CRITERIA	TIMING OF ACTIONS	REVIEW DATE
<p>Develop approaches that will enhance students' verbal reasoning and communication skills across all subjects.</p>	<p>Wider promotion of and increased participation by students, in debating clubs and Poetry Aloud.</p>	<p>Greater promotion of debating club and improved access to debating club.</p> <p>All 1st year students to participate in Poetry Aloud.</p> <p>Teachers will endeavour to increase their use of group work as a teaching methodology.</p>	<p>Greater participation in debating competitions and Poetry Aloud.</p> <p>Increase in amount of group projects which the students are engaged in.</p>	<p>Survey September 15/16/17</p> <p>Continuous Teachers to share their experiences of the use of group work at staff meetings.</p>	<p>September 15/16/17</p> <p>September 15/16/17</p>

IMPROVEMENT TARGET 1 Performance in state exams	REQUIRED ACTIONS	PERSONS RESPONSIBLE	MEASURABLE OUTCOMES	TIMETABLE FOR ACTIONS	REVIEW DATE	
To improve learner outcomes in state examinations and increase uptake of subjects at higher level.	Generate awareness of Bloom's Taxonomy classroom displays	All teachers and students.	Understanding of Bloom's Taxonomy and key examination words by all students as measured by teacher observations and results in state examinations	Classroom posters circulated to all classes Sept 2014. Giant Bloom's Taxonomy poster in school canteen Sept 2014.	September 15/16/17	
	Focus on questioning techniques in classroom practice.	All teachers.		Continuous	September 15/16/17	
	Key examination words included in school journal.	Senior Management.			Continuous	September 15/16/17
	Easter Revision courses in conjunction with SCP.	School Completion Programme.		Teacher observations and results in state examinations Numbers of students' participation in Revision courses.	Continuous	September 15/16/17