

School Self-Evaluation Report on Assessment Practices

1. Introduction

1.1 The Focus of the Evaluation

A school self-evaluation of teaching and learning at Scoil Aireagail, Ballyhale was undertaken during the 2014/15 school year. Assessment practices in Assessment of Learning (AoL) and Assessment for Learning (AfL) were evaluated in respect of five year groups.

This is a report on the findings of the evaluation.

1.2 School Context

Scoil Aireagail is a rural co-educational post primary school under the patronage of Kilkenny Carlow Education and Training Board. There is a mainstream enrolment of 189 students and 16 in a PLC programme. Transition Year is well established in the school. The schools participation in the TL21 programme greatly assisted the compilation of the report and subsequent School Improvement Plan. The principal and four teachers participated in the programme constituted the SSE steering group.

2. The Findings

AoL and AfL were evaluated separately, the findings are thus presented separately. The following is a summary of the findings of the AoL and AfL action research. The findings are based on quantitative (surveys) and qualitative (focus groups) data, whole staff evaluation and steering group (TL21) evaluation.

Assessment of Learning

Prevalence of Assessment Types

- Survey findings indicated that a wide variety of assessment instruments were evident in teaching and learning practices.
- Written homework was the most recognised form of assessment across both data types.
- Focus group findings suggested that class tests are most useful form of assessment.
- Discrepancies evident in relation to teacher and student perceptions of the prevalence of a number of assessment instruments.

Homework

- Survey findings suggested there is a considerable discrepancy between student and parent perceptions in relation to the amount of time being spent doing homework;

43% of students say they spend more than 1.5 hours doing homework, 58% of parents believing this to be the case.

- Focus group findings consistent with survey findings in relation to amount of homework being done.

Strengths

- There is relatively good compliance regarding homework completion.
- A variety of homework type is evident across year groups; written homework, revision, practical work, rote learning, reading. Proportion of homework type varies dependant on year group.
- Strong correlation between student and teacher perceptions of type of homework assigned.

Areas for Improvement

- Some general concerns being expressed by teachers in relation to the amount of time being spent on homework, 35% of students spending less than one hour doing homework being an example.
- Regular monitoring and collection of homework in 1st and 2nd Year groups, less regular in 3rd and 5th Year groups (focus group finding).

Attitudes to Examinations

Strengths

- High level of agreement among students, parents and teachers that examinations are a positive motivating factor.
- High level of agreement among students, parents and teachers that regular testing assists learning.

Areas for Improvement

- The findings indicate a wide discrepancy among the respondents in relation to exam preparation; 52% of students agree that they know how to prepare for exams, 66% of parents and 25% of teachers agree this to be the case. 65% of teachers disagree that students know how to prepare for exams.
- 42% of students say they give themselves enough time to prepare for exams, 65% of parents and 15% of teachers agree this to be the case. 75% of teachers disagree that students allow adequate time for exam preparation.

Focus Group Findings

- Focus group findings are consistent with survey findings.
- Recognition that some students are not motivated by testing. Comments such as 'can't study' attributed to this group.
- Recognition that even motivated students have difficulty with regard to exam preparation, difficulty in particular in 'getting started'.

Assessment for Learning

The findings are based on the results of a survey of all teachers and students and on the views of staff deriving from a staff planning session. The questions are designed to measure the prevalence of a number of AfL methodologies in teaching and learning.

Student/Teacher Perceptions

Discrepancies

- There were considerable discrepancies between student and teacher perceptions in relation to the prevalence of a number of AfL methodologies.
 - 76% of teachers stated that they always or mostly shared the lesson's learning objective with the students, 40% of students stated that this was the case.
 - 58% of teachers stated that they always or mostly offered opportunities for pair/group work in class, 24% of students stated that this was the case.
 - 84% of teachers stated that they always or mostly checked for understanding at the end of a lesson, 40% of students stated that this was the case.

Consensus

- There was a fair to large degree of consensus around the prevalence of other AfL methodologies.
 - 37% of teachers stated that they always or mostly provided opportunities for student self-assessment, 33% of students stated that this was the case. 79% of teachers stated that they sometimes provided opportunities for peer assessment, 66% of students stated that this was the case.

Feedback to Students

- In the area of feedback to written homework the picture was mixed
 - 16% of teachers always/mostly give a mark only for feedback – students 20%.
 - 42% of teachers always/mostly give a mark and general comment – students 29%.
 - 58% of teachers always/mostly give a mark and comment on how to improve – students 34%.
 - 42% of teachers always/mostly give a comment on how to improve only – 16% students.
 - Feedback always/mostly tells students how they can improve: teachers 100% - students 56%, 23% don't know.
 - A recent subject inspection recommended that 'all teachers should consistently and regularly apply assessment for learning practices on students' written work, especially the use of written comments that effectively guide students to improve their work.'

AfL Methodologies

- In feedback from the staff planning session teachers identified the AfL methodologies that should be prioritised for intervention; in order of most frequently stated preference
 - self and peer-assessment
 - statement of learning objective
 - clarification on criteria for success
 - descriptive feedback

3. Summary of School Self-Evaluation Findings

3.1 Our school has strengths in the following areas:

- A wide variety of assessment instruments are utilised in teaching and learning practices.
- There is good compliance regarding homework completion.
- A variety of homework type is evident across year groups.
- High level of agreement among school community that examinations are a positive motivating factor.
- High level of agreement among school community that regular testing assists learning.
- AfL methodologies are utilised across all year groups and subject areas.

3.2 The following areas are prioritised for improvement:

- The quantity and quality of completed homework will be addressed by the whole school community.
- A comprehensive study skills programme will be implemented involving the whole school community.
- Greater coordination of examination preparation strategies on a whole school basis.
- Greater consistency in the utilisation of key AfL methodologies in teaching and learning.
- The following AfL methodologies will be targeted on an ongoing basis over the three years of a school improvement plan;
 - self and peer-assessment
 - statement of learning objective
 - clarification on criteria for success
 - descriptive feedback

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

Please refer to Appendix 1 with relevant policy checklist.