The Learning School Project

2016-2017

Laurel Hill Secondary School

An Investigation into tracking student progress and implementing personalised intervention.

Contents

Section 1: <u>Context and Rationale</u>

School Context:

School background:

Laurel Hill Secondary School FCJ is an all-Girls Voluntary Secondary Catholic School in the FCJ tradition. The school is run under the auspices of the FCJ Trustees. It follows the curricular programmes prescribed by the Department of Education and Science, which may be amended from time to time in accordance with sections 9 and 30 of the Education Act (1998). It operates within the regulations laid down by the DES, which may be amended from time to time. The school depends on the grants and resources provided by the DES, voluntary contributions and fund-raising and school policy in all areas has regard to the resources and funding made available to us by the DES.

The school's Board of Management is appointed by the FCJ Trustees. The members come from the following constituencies: FCJ Trustees (4 Nominees); Parents (2 Elected Nominees); and Teachers (2 Elected Nominees).The Chairperson of the Board is appointed by the FCJ Trustees from among the eight nominees. The Principal is the Secretary of the Board of Management.

Philosophy of Education

Laurel Hill Secondary School's philosophy Statement, '*courage and confidence in the pursuit of excellence*' outlines the FCJ approach to education. We aspire to celebrate a joyful Christian faith that finds expression in daily life. We aim to offer our students a stimulating learning environment, in which each student has the opportunity to develop the fullness of her academic and personal potential. We work to promote a school culture which values diversity and nurtures an ethos of respect for self, others and the wider community.

The School Programme

Every effort is made at Laurel Hill Secondary School FCJ to offer students a broad and enriching educational experience. In addition to the (usual) Junior and Leaving Certificate, all students complete a Transition Year Programme. Other features of the school are the establishment of CSPE, SPHE and ECDL for Transition Year pupils. Fifth Year students are offered the opportunity of the Leaving Certificate

Vocational Programme, which is completed over two years and is taken in addition to the normal subjects. The management and staff keep themselves informed of current educational developments for the benefit of the students. The school offers a study skills programme through the Deans of Study and there is after-school supervised study available for Junior and Senior students. Physical Education is an integral part of each student's development. Students are encouraged to become involved in a variety of activities outside the curriculum, such as sport, music, debating, drama, charitable fund raising, quizzes and foreign trips.

Staffing

In the academic year 2016/2017 the school has a Principal, Deputy Principal, and approximately 40 teachers. The staff includes a Guidance Counsellor, Resources Teachers, P.E. Teachers, Transition Year Co-ordinator, LCVP Co-ordinators, Deans of Study and 6 Year Heads. The school has a Pastor assigned on part-time basis and a Priest from the Parish of St. Joseph's works with the school. The school also comprises administrative, caretaking and cleaning staff.

Admissions and Special Educational Needs Policy

Laurel Hill Secondary School operates an open admission policy, promoting equality of access participation and benefit for all; in as far as the school can fulfil the needs of an individual student. The Board of Management is committed to ensuring full entitlement and access for pupils with special educational needs to high quality education with a broad, balanced and relevant curriculum, so that they can reach their full potential and enhance their self-esteem. This is consistent with the provisions of the Educations for Person with Special Educational Needs Act 2002.

Finally, a current objective for the school and its Special Education Needs Department is to introduce a whole school literacy promotion which will aim at increasing the literacy levels throughout the school.

Rationale

Research Focus

Our project aimed to take the first steps into formally tracking student progress and implementing targeted intervention for students who required it. Our background to tracking students' progress involved informally following student progress by means of end of year reports or classroom tests. These tracking methods however were often only focused on one teacher tracking their students and lacked an overall approach to tracking students. I personally had experience of tracking students' progress formally having taught in England.

Why did our school become involved?

Laurel Hill Secondary School has taken part in The Learning School Project a number of times previously. As part of our School Self Evaluation, we find taking part in the Learning School Project very beneficial as we get to self-evaluate an aspect of school life with the hope to identify areas that we can improve upon.

The school became involved specifically this year with this area as it was a topic recommended for further development in a WSE report. The staff involved were Andrew O'Regan, Michael Cregan and Susan Garrahy. There were also a number of teachers involved in the implementation of the project.

Who did we hope to involve in this project?

The students involved were one class of 2nd year students. A mixed ability group was selected as we felt it better represented the students in the school. A range of teachers were also involved as we felt it would be good to involve teachers in implementing targeted intervention.

Long term we hoped this project would involve tracking a full year group and eventually the whole school. The year heads will be involved in the roll out of this tracking long term.

B) Specific indicators for the school:

What were the objectives?

The objectives for this project were to take the first steps into formal tracking within the school. Each group had their own specific objectives:

Objectives:

Leader:

- To conduct and produce a Leaning School Project within the school with a basis in raising awareness of the different methodologies in tracking students.
- To research via Learning School Project hub meetings and through staff consultations a relevant and feasible tracking project.
- To ensure our Learning School Project is an agenda item within the school plan, staff meetings.
- To conduct a project managing a range of staff and students to achieve a goal.
- To present all results in an easily understood format.
- To liaise with staff, students and LSP committee on progress.

Project Team

- To meet with individual students to discuss project.
- To set goals with students in regards what students are achieving and what they should be achieving.
- To create a revision plan for students.
- To explain any difficult areas in topics if possible to students.
- To be a liaison for student when necessary.

- To build rapport with students.
- To liaise with project leaders on progress of student.
- To make suggestions where necessary on the project could be further improved.
- To be available to staff for information advice regarding the project.
- To meet, collaborate, reflect and evaluate on the project, via oral discussion at meetings.

Students:
- The meet with project team and discuss progress.
- Explain to project team where they require assistance and what may help their progress.
- To follow any intervention given by project team.
- To meet with project team once a week.
- To focus on improvement in areas shown by project team.

Senior Management:
- For this project senior management were involved directly in the project and accordingly had the same objectives as the leader.

C) Methodology

What specific actions did we take?

Firstly the leaders collaborated and discussed with other school teachers at a Learning School Project hub meeting possible project ideas. Initially we had a range of project ideas and they were eventually whittled down to our tracking project. We reviewed our WSE report and picked an area outlined within the report which had scope for improvement.

The leaders discussed how this project could be carried out. Having previous experience in England of formal tracking within school setting was helpful for the leaders. From this a template was drawn out of how student progress could be tracked. Students levels were taken from standardised tests all students had taken. These scores were converted into average target grades for students. Students Christmas results for 2015 were used as examples of their results and compared to their target. If a student was on target their name showed up in green and if they had not met their target their name showed up in red. The students whose names showed up in red were then the students selected for the targeted intervention.

Staff were invited to volunteer their time at a staff meeting to select one student from a list of 7 students currently off target. All students received volunteers. These volunteers formed the project group and were briefed on the targets for those students and their current performance. The project team were advised to meet with their students initially and explain the project and inform them their participation was voluntary. If the students did not want to take part they did not have to. All students who were selected chose to take part.

After the first meeting the project team were advised to devise a schedule to meet with their targeted individual. A rough guide of once a week was recommended. The project group were to look over the areas which the student had failed to reach their target and asked for ways to improve this trend. The intervention was purposely left vague as the teacher and student could devise what was best to help them improve.

The project leaders checked in with the project team frequently to check on progress and ask if there were any issues. Advice was given where necessary on the best ways to assist students progress. No intervention was given to students who already had reached their target. This was the control in the investigation. The results of the students in question was reviewed with Summer 2016 results and their progress was compared to their target.

This progress was then discussed within the project team and leaders team on how the project had gone and the viability of this project to be rolled out as a whole school project.

What methods did we employ?

We employed a range of qualitative and quantitative methods. Our quantitative methods involved tracking students' progress using figures and numbers to check and see if students were on track.

We also employed qualitative methods through intervention using discussions and discussions between all members involved in the project.

D) Resources:

- Hand-outs from the Learning School Project personnel, including the 'Project Record Book' and Reflection Diary'.
- Advice from senior management, project team, staff, principal and Learning Schools Project staff.
- In-school policies on assessment.
- For designing and collating data the following ICT devices were used: Laptops, Computers, Memory Sticks, Microsoft Word, Excel, PowerPoint and Microsoft Dictionary for Word.
- For supplying and creating the materials we used photocopiers and printers.

Section 3: Outcomes

A) Data Collection:

- Data was input onto ePortal by class teachers at Christmas 2015. This data involved every class teacher putting a final result for the students for Christmas tests.
- This data was turned into a table by administrative staff in the school so the data was easy to understand.
- The standardised testing was carried out by the management in the school.
- The targets were set by the project leaders for each student based on these standardised tests.
- The summer 2016 results were also input by class teachers and then placed in table form by administrative staff.
- The Christmas 2015 and Summer 2016 final table (see appendix) were created by the project leaders upon all of this data being collected. These tables were created using Microsoft Excel.

Data results:

The appendix shows the Christmas and Summer results for our project. As can be seen all students who had a green YES next to their name were on target and those who had a red No were not on target. Upon our first data analysis (Appendix A) it can be seen that 7 out of the 30 students in the class were not on target. These 7 students received targeted intervention. It can be seen from the Summer results (Appendix B) that 5 of the 7 students that were not on target at Christmas had been brought on target by the summer testing. This shows that 71% of students that were not on target initially had now reached their desired target.

It has to be noted however that 3 new students were now not on target. There may be a couple of reasons for this change. Firstly it is possible that the summer exams were more difficult than the Christmas exams as they contained more information covered for the whole year rather than just to Christmas. It may also be worth considering that the students not receiving individual targeted assistance may have been at a disadvantage to those who were receiving individual assistance.

B) Data Analysis and Recommendations:

To what extent have our goals been realised?

The goal of conducting a tracking project within the school was achieved. This means the project can be used as a stepping stone to rolling out tracking within the school on a wider basis. Our goal of completing the recommendations of our WSE report were also realised upon completion of this project. This was an important step in our continued school improvement.

Our goal to use ICT to assist in tracking students was realised as we used ICT resources such as Excel to show the progress of students through all subject choices. Our aim to carry out a whole school project which involved input from senior management, teaching staff and students was realised upon completion of this project as it took all of these members of a school community to complete this work.

The goal of raising awareness with staff was achieved as staff were more familiar with ways in which students could be tracked and how they could track their own students. Improve rapport between staff and students has also achieved as students were able to spend time and speak with staff members which may have helped their relationship within the classroom setting. Our goal to improve students attainment who were no longer on their target has been realised as 71% of students who were targeted improved their results to the point where they were now considered to be on target.

Impact of the Project for the Project Team:

In general, the Project Team found this to be an enlightening and educational experience. The Project Team were well supported by senior management with advice and their time attending meeting. The principal was happy to oblige with providing data on the students and was very response to our final suggestions and recommendations, for example rolling tracking out as a whole school approach.

Attending LSP hub meetings allowed the project leaders to gain valuable help and information from tutors on how best to conduct this project and projects into the future. The Project Team found it beneficial to discuss how students would improve their results in terms of improving attainment and rapport with the students. The Project Team also saw first-hand how a whole school project may be carried out if they were interested in becoming Project Leaders in the future.

Impact of the Project on Students' Learning:

The quantitative information from the project shows a big improvement in attainment for students who received individual intervention. Anecdotally it was seen that students felt if someone was keeping an eye on them that they knew they had to perform to their potential. Students used the opportunity to ask questions on how best to answer on particular areas etc. which they may not have had the confidence to do in a full classroom setting. It is also important to note that none of the students who were off target had been receiving resource assistance. This showed the team that some middle ability students had been falling through the cracks of the system. No students receiving resource assistance were off target and this is a credit to the resource system in itself. Short term the impact on these targeted students was very positive in most cases. The long term benefits remain to be seen.

Future Recommendations:

There are a number of future recommendations which have resulted from this project based on the results. There is also scope for future work in this area:

- Tracking should be rolled out on a whole school level, tracking students' results at each major in-house exam.
- Year Heads should be provided with training in how to track students and to keep an eye on performance on all students in their year.
- The use of ICT should be used in any future tracking endeavour. This should involve the tracking packing included in ePortal.
- There is scope for targeted intervention for each student in a year group that is off target.
- Students who did not benefit from intervention (29%) may need additional assistance to reach their target.
- Students should be tracked for a longer duration than the duration of this project, possibly from 1st year through to 3rd year as an integrated project involving multiple year heads.

<u>Conclusion</u>

In conclusion, the findings have highlighted significant achievements of the Project Team completing its key objective of improving students' attainment by carrying out targeted intervention of students off target. The majority of students involved in this project have seen improvements in their attainment and there is great scope to continue and expand this project further across the school. Our sincerest thanks must be given to Carmel and Grainne who helped us at every turn in this project as without them it would not have been possible. Also our thanks to all staff involved in this project and all students who were willing to take part.