



Dominican College

Taylor's Hill

Galway

62990Q

School Self Evaluation Report

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School Self-Evaluation Report

1. Introduction

1.1 The focus of the evaluation

In response to both the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategy 2011-2020 and the Department of Education and Skills' Guidelines for School Self-Evaluation (SSE), the staff of Dominican College, during the 2014-2015 school year, began an evaluation of teaching and learning within the school. The focus of the evaluation for the first year was on student literacy. This resulted in a number of initiatives being put in place to further enhance literacy amongst our students and in particular to encourage them to spend more time reading for pleasure (Appendix 1).

The following school year, 2015-2016, we focused on the area of numeracy and we put in place a number of initiatives to help enhance numeracy among the student population (Appendix 2).

For the school year 2016-2017 Dominican College identified attendance and punctuality as the area of focus. Our aim was to foster and develop a mature attitude and approach within our students towards regular attendance and consistent punctuality through a variety of initiatives (Appendix 3). Regular reviews of the three areas have taken place which help improve future practice on our chosen areas of development (Appendix 4).

Our current focus for the school year 2018-2020 is on the area of homework which has been mentioned by student's staff and parents as an area that may need to be adapted and reviewed in the content of the new Junior Cycle as well as the continued pressure that students especially in exam years feel under.

1.2 School context

Dominican College is an all girls' Catholic post-primary school in Galway city established in 1858. It is a non-fee paying school catering for 625 students. The student cohort comes from a cross section of socio-economic groups and from more than twenty different primary schools, including our feeder school Scoil Rois. We have a small number of students who do not have English as their first language. The school also has students with general learning needs.

Dominican College has a proud academic tradition along with many achievements in extra-curricular activities including sporting success. Parents are very supportive, have high expectations and the vast majority of students continue to third level. We strive to ensure that the Dominican philosophy of holistic education continues to form our pupils, enabling them to play an active and fulfilling role in society.

In recent years there have been many new initiatives, policies and syllabi introduced and this has added to the responsibilities that staff, parents and students face every day. As a school community, Dominican College is very much aware of its need to adapt and review its practices and processes to provide the best education possible to its students. As stated earlier we began this SSE on a formal basis in 2014 and are continuing to do this year on year. We acknowledge that is through our relationship with all members of the school community that we grow to our full potential. We aspire to create an educational environment where pupils come to learn and understand themselves, their abilities and their world. In this environment they learn to take responsibility for themselves and others and develop the necessary skills to become independent adults.

It was with this in mind that we began the current phase of SSE. During the school year of 2016-2017 many useful and beneficial ideas were expressed following a staff survey (Appendix 5) For that year Attendance and Punctuality was chosen. However, another area that featured high was the topic of homework. It was decided to look at this area for the school year 2018-2010

The following data sources were used in this evaluation:

- a) literature on homework
- b) survey of parents in relation to homework (Appendix 6)
- c) survey of staff in relation to homework (Appendix 7)

- d) survey of students in relation to homework (Appendix 8)
- e) information gathered from a focus group of First Year students (Appendix 9)
- f) information gathered following a meeting with the Student Council (Appendix 10)
- g) information gathered from a homework committee formed from members of staff (Appendix 11)
- h) Dominican College Homework Policy (Appendix 12)

2. The Findings

Literature

- A survey carried out by the National Parents Council in 2016 found that 27% of parents and 38% of children do not find homework beneficial. Furthermore 62% of parents find homework stressful and find it hard to cope.
- There is no Department of Education policy on home work in Ireland. Along with the NCCA and the NCSE they offer snippets of advice in relation to the overall grand aims of homework but there is no concrete or practical advice relating to homework in their publications.
- The ERSI's Growing up in Ireland series state that 97% of children receive homework four night a week and that teachers are in denial or are out of touch of how much family time it consumes.
- No clear cut relationship has been found between homework and achievement. In 2011 the OECD found a strong negative relationship between time spent in individual study and achievement in reading, maths and science.
- The National Parent Council research has found many negative effects of homework. They include increased gaps between high and low achievers, a denial of access to leisure time and fatigue, physical and emotional. In addition, homework being set a too high a level can result in low achieving children getting the message that they're incapable.
- It is believed that even if homework doesn't increase grades or test results, it has other benefits, like fostering good study habits and providing parents with a window into what their children are doing in school.

Parent Questionnaire

- 143 parents responded to this questionnaire. It was the highest response rate of any questionnaire we have sent out to parents in relation to SSE.
- 81% of parents said they saw a benefit to their daughter of doing homework.
- 74% of parents combined said that their daughter spends between 1-3 hours doing their homework each night. An additional 13% of parents said their daughters spend more than 3 hours doing their homework.
- Their daughter mainly does her homework in her bedroom with the second most common place being at after school study or at homework club at school.
- Parents stated that the following subjects take most of daughter's time-Maths, Irish, Sciences, English and Modern Foreign Languages.
- 42% of parents never check their daughter's journal. 10% said they check it daily and a further 34% saying they check it either weekly or monthly.
- 67% of parents stated that they think their daughter gets the appropriate amount of homework.
- 32% of parents said the amount of amount given was inappropriate in terms of the amount that was given and that it was too much given the fact that they have other subjects and activities to participate in.
- Over 71% of parents were aware of the school's homework policy with over 57% of parents or family members helping their daughter with their homework.
- Among the suggestions offered by parents as to how we could improve our approach to homework were to give more revision/exam questions/study as homework, have a more balanced approach in terms of other subject workloads, explain the homework clearly and encourage the students to use homework club at school.

Teacher Questionnaire

- The main reasons for teachers giving homework was to reinforce class work (94%) and to check their students understanding (77%).
- Over 50% of teachers stated that they give homework to their class from after every lesson.
- Over 30% of teachers expect first and second year students to spend an hour

on their subject homework every week.

- When it came to third year 45% of teachers expected them to spend over an hour on the specific subject with 56% and 71% of teachers expecting fifth and sixth years respectively to spend more than an hour.
- Correcting the homework in class as well as taking up the homework were the two main ways in which teachers correct the homework (94% and 66%)
- Teacher supply feedback on homework using a combination of grades and comments (72%)
- 63% of teachers differentiate the homework they give by giving ordinary level and higher level questions to students, tailoring the worksheets or activities, allocating less work or giving supplementary work to students.
- 44% of teachers do not use the school journal to communicate with parents.
- 41% of teachers always check that students write down their homework with a further 33% and 8% saying they rarely or never do this.
- Teachers set the homework in the main during the class and at the end of class (52% and 53%)
- First and Fifth years are the two year groups who most frequently present no homework (22% and 19%).
- 36% of teachers think that the amount of homework given is average with 19% saying it is just enough. A further 27% don't know if the amount of homework is too much or too little.
- When asked about the quality of the homework they receive no teacher said it was of excellent standard. It was between very good and average (47% and 44%)
- The most common approach to dealing with a student who has no homework is talking to the student (86%) followed by allocating points and writing it in the journal (58% and 41%)
- 63% of teacher do not like students doing their homework during the day on the corridor or during break and lunch time.
- 61% of teachers stated an interested in in participating in a pilot homework scheme.
- The main suggestions for improving homework in the school were be more flexible with amount we give and give more time to complete it as well as

check if homework is written in to the diary.

Student Questionnaire

- All year groups except TY filled out the questionnaire. The percentage of each year group that responded are as follows: First 23%, Second 18%, Third 23%, Fifth 16% and Sixth 19%.
- 50% of students stated that they always do their homework with 41% saying they sometimes do their homework.
- Not enough time, too busy with activities, given too much, need time to study are the reasons given for not always doing their homework.
- The majority of students (38%) stated that they spend one to two hours doing their homework each evening. A further 22% spend 2 to three hours. 11% of students said they spend 3 to 4 hours with a further 8% saying they spend 4 to 5 hours.
- Maths, Irish, Sciences, English. Modern Languages and History take the most time to complete.
- 63% of students feel they are expected to too much homework. 33% felt it was about right.
- 56% said they sometimes found the homework too hard to complete with a further 30% saying they rarely found them hard.
- Reasons why they find homework hard are that they have too much to do, the homework is confusing or not explained enough and they don't have enough time to do it.
- 65% of student said they have never spoken to teacher if they found themselves overloaded with homework.
- 98% of students do their written homework first.
- 53% of students do their homework in their room with a further 22% doing it at after school study. 6% said they do it during the school day at break, lunch and in free classes,
- Writing comments and giving grades on homework are the ways in which students believe teachers can help them improve their work.
- 54% of students always write their homework into their journal with a further

31% sometimes writing it in.

- The reasons for not always writing it in is they have no time, they forget to write it and homework was given too late.
- 51% of students only do revision before a test or exam.
- 82% said their parents/guardians never check their journal with 75% saying parents never check their homework.
- Written homework and revision are the two most preferred methods that help them learn best.
- Students said that homework helps them revise, practice, understand, remember and reinforce what is done in class.
- Suggestions for improving homework were give less (56%), make sure the students understand it/give clear instructions (56%) and give more time to complete it (56%).

Focus Group of First Year Students

- The majority of students spend between one and two hours on homework every night.
- The main type of homework given is of the written and learning variety and these are the types of homework liked least by the students.
- Some student remarked that they like to do research or revision for homework. However, many students also said that when revision is mentioned for homework they don't do it as they believe they already have the material covered.
- Almost 20% of students do not write the homework into their journal. The main reasons for not doing this was because they forget to do it, are lazy or have no time in class.
- The majority of students said that homework can have a negative impact on how they feel about the subject especially if too much homework is given, it's not corrected or it's the same type of homework given every night.
- All but one class said that homework does help them in relation to learning, improves their memory and helps their confidence.
- The suggestions for improving homework ranged from giving less, explain

homework more before giving it, allow more time to complete assignments, set a time limit on homework and balance homework with other subjects.

Student Council

- The Student Council were asked the same questions as the First Year focus group and they gave many of the same answers. This was interesting as the student council is composed of student's from all years but the information received was very much what was said in the first year focus groups.
- The majority of students on the council spend between one and three hours doing homework with the senior students spending closer to three hours.
- All members present stated that homework was an essential part of their learning and it helped their learning.
- The least favourite types of homework was written and learning and these were the types that they are mainly getting as homework.
- Maths History and the languages take the longest to complete and the reasons for this vary from the assignments are too hard to they are often confused as to what they need to do.
- When asked when they don't do their homework they said it was because they were tired, they forgot to write it down or they can't concentrate.
- Senior students suggested that more exam questions be given as homework as they see it as being more beneficial and meaningful.
- All the students present mentioned that they see revision homework as being more beneficial when coming up to exams.

Homework Committee

- The homework committee composed of eight teachers from many different subjects including English, Maths, Science, French, Biology, Home Economics and SPHE.
- We met twice and discussed the homework questionnaires, the school homework policy and the focus group answers.

- We decided on the following:
 1. We will target 2nd years in 2019-2010.
 2. All second year teachers will be involved.
 3. A 5-minute reminder bell will ring before class ends to assign homework
 4. All teachers will write homework on the board.
 5. All teachers will suggest a time frame in which the homework should be completed in.

3. Rationale for Reviewing Homework

We in Dominican College see homework as a fundamental step in fostering in students a spirit of independence, co-operation and responsibility. We wish to provide our students with the skills for lifelong learning and for active participation in life. It allows students to develop the practice of working independently and to take responsibility for their own learning, thus fostering lifelong learning skills.

However, we are aware that for homework to work effectively and help develop these lifelong skills it must be meaningful and have a clear objective. It needs to provide students with the opportunity to understand, practice, reinforce, apply or improve acquired skills and knowledge. It must take into account of levels of abilities and learning styles. It must offer an opportunity to develop links between parents, teachers and students and provide parents / guardians with opportunities to monitor their daughter's learning and progress. It must not be seen as an exercise in ticking the box, or punishment. It needs to be given and completed in the spirit in which it was intended-to help the learning process. In essence it must serve a purpose and that purpose must be articulated and understood by all. For that to happen homework requires co-operation on the part of the students, the teachers and the parents.

4. Summary of School Self-Evaluation Findings

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

- a. Our Homework Club, which is available to all Junior students, can help support those who find homework a challenge and allow them the space and support to complete their work. This eliminates the frustration and worry of not having homework completed and reduces the need to be absent the following day.

- b. We have many extra-curricular activities, which foster a positive school environment affords the opportunity to students who find it difficult to engage with the formal school curriculum to shine and show off their talents. These include:
 - o Student Council
 - o Green School
 - o A wide variety of sports
 - o Debating
 - o BT Young Scientist
 - o Library Committee
 - o Computer Coding Club
 - o Lunchtime Club
 - o School Prefects
 - o Glee Club

- c. Our Transition Year and LCVP programmes involve participation in a work experience module. The acquisition of practical work skills and on the job experience supports a student's life skills which can have positive benefits on their over all learning.

- d. Year group assemblies are held and where the importance of homework is emphasised.

4.2 The following areas will be prioritised for improvement:

- To encourage the student to write all homework into their journal after each lesson.
- To encourage students to spend the appropriate amount on their homework assignments.
- To encourage teachers to spend 5 minutes at the end of the lesson explaining the homework and allowing the students to express any concern re its implementation.
- To encourage teachers to be mindful of the workload placed on students and tailor the homework amount according.

4.3 The following legislative and regulatory requirements are outlined as follows
(Appendix 13)

SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT PLAN

Summary of main strengths as identified in SSE	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Our Homework Club, which is available to all Junior students, can help support those who find homework a challenge and allow them the space and support to complete their work.• Our many school activities including sports, annual musical, debating club, Young Scientist affords the opportunity to students who find it difficult to engage with the formal school curriculum to shine and show off their talents.• Year group assemblies are held and where the importance of homework is emphasised.
Summary of main areas of improvement as identified in SSE	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• To encourage students to write all homework into their journal after each lesson.• To encourage students to spend the appropriate amount on their homework assignments.• To encourage teachers to spend 5 minutes at the end of the lesson explaining the homework and allowing the students to express any concerns re its implementation.• To encourage teachers to be mindful of the workload placed on students & tailor the homework accordingly.

<p>Improvement Targets</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● To increase the number of students who always write homework in to their journal from 54% to 55% ● To increase the number of students who always do their homework form 50% to 60%
<p>Required actions</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● A 5-minute reminder bell will ring before class ends to assign homework ● All teachers will write homework on the board. ● All teachers will suggest a time frame in which the homework should be completed in.
<p>Persons responsible</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Class teachers -2nd Year ● Class tutors -2nd Year ● Year Head-2nd Year ● Homework Committee ● SSE Co-ordinator
<p>Timeframe for action</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● September 2019-Christmas 2019 ● Review at mid-term break in October may be necessary
<p>Success Criteria</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● The above targets will be met
<p>Review dates</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● October 2019 ● January 2020 ● May 2020

APPENDICES

Appendix 1-Literacy Initiatives

Appendix 2- Numeracy Initiatives

Appendix 3-Attendance Initiatives

Appendix 4 -Reviews

Appendix 5-Staff SSE Survey

Appendix 6-Parent Homework Questionnaire

Appendix 7 Staff Homework Questionnaire

Appendix 8-Student Homework Questionnaire

Appendix 9-Focus Group First Year students

Appendix 10-Focus Group Student Council

Appendix 11-Homework Committee

Appendix 12-Dominican College Homework Policy

Appendix 13-Legislative & Regulatory check-lists