

## **Senior Cycle Review Observations**

### **Coláiste Bríde, Clondalkin, Dublin 22**

#### Rationale

Stakeholders at Coláiste Bríde are aware of the current process of Senior Cycle review as outlined by the NCCA. The purpose of this document is to outline our own reflections as part of the review process. This has been carried out in consultation with whole staff, parents and students as well as the Senior Leadership Team.

#### Observations of the review to date

At Coláiste Bríde, we believe that it is important for all students to have the opportunity to engage in learning in both the traditional leaving certificate as well as other practical learning platforms that support a variety of learners. Programmes such as TY, LCA and LCVP make an enormous contribution to both students and society and are widely valued in our school community. Having said that, there is an understanding in our school that such programmes (in particular LCA) need to be reviewed in light of current educational and societal trends.

On this basis, it is important that Senior Cycle review will continue to provide a diverse choice of programmes that cater for a wide variety of courses such as higher education, further education, apprenticeships, traineeships and the world of work in line with future employment trends. With this in mind, it is also important that Senior Cycle continues to build on the key skills taught at Junior Cycle (being literate, being numerate, working with others, managing information and thinking, managing myself, communicating, being creative, staying well) enabling students to become engaged and active learners incrementally.

Many parents value the practical nature of certain subjects and courses (eg LCVP, LCA) as a valuable learning tool “for a world outside the classroom”. Parents also expressed the important practical nature of certain subjects, including those with a coursework component, as both practical in terms of suiting the educational needs of their children as well as being a way of encouraging their children to engage more with the learning as opposed to becoming stressed with the sole focus being on the final exam.

Students undertaking work experience find it to be very valuable and something that gives an “added dimension” to their learning and personal growth that is difficult to capture in the classroom alone. It allowed them to feel “mature” and understand “how to act as a proper adult in a work setting” because it “gave me practical tips for life”.

### Recommendations

It is important that Senior Cycle review builds on the impact of ‘wellbeing’ at Junior Cycle. ‘Wellbeing’ is particularly important at Senior Cycle given the stress experienced by students at senior cycle. When we spoke to senior cycle students about the current review process, stress was a feature of almost every response. Our student body spoke about welcoming wellbeing formally into their timetable at senior cycle.

With this in mind, it is also important that any changes to Senior Cycle will support the holistic – and not just the academic – development of every student. Senior Cycle should aim to promote many aspects of student development, including intellectual, personal and social. Senior Cycle should also equip students with the soft skills necessary for the future world of study and work.

Teachers, parents and students at Coláiste Bríde in turn value the integral role of project work in certain subjects at Senior Cycle. The inclusion of project work across all subjects could help to combat the negative impact of stresses in students’ lives. Building on important Junior Cycle themes such as ‘wellbeing’ and ‘formative assessment’ could make a worthwhile contribution at Senior Cycle level in the hopes that it does not continue to be so summative in its nature.

It is important to carefully examine alternative modes of assessment when reviewing Senior Cycle. Students at Coláiste Bríde continually referred to the problems with the summative nature of the current model. “It doesn’t work for me as I find it hard to store everything in my head for an exam”, “sometimes I go blank under the pressure of an exam and it’s very frustrating when I can’t remember the information that I know I have learned” and “I’m always disappointed with my end of year exam even though my work throughout the year is always good” were some of the comments that came from our student body. Senior Cycle review should encourage choice and flexibility. It should equally cater for those students who have good recall memory for knowledge as well as those students who prefer to focus on key skills.

21<sup>st</sup> century learners can 'google' any information in seconds. It is what learners do with this information that is most important. In Coláiste Bríde, we believe that learners making the learning their own should be an important feature of senior cycle review. Assessment practices, therefore, should have the potential to showcase student talents not only in the summative pen and paper exam but in other forms such as portfolios, e-portfolios and group projects etc.

Students, teachers and parents at Coláiste Bríde believe in the importance of linking classroom experiences to the outside world outside. The importance of using digital technologies at Senior Cycle as a follow on from Junior Cycle should continue to be an area of development for students & staff.

### Conclusion

In conclusion, staff at Coláiste Bríde believe in the value of the traditional Leaving Certificate as well as other programmes such as TY, LCVP and LCA. The LCA programme in particular is in need of updating in line with new skills required for apprenticeships and the world of work.