



St. Columba's College

Transition Year Programme 2018-2019

Part One: General Introduction

The principles and rationale of Transition Year have been observed and practised in St Columba's College for many years. With the appointment of a Transition Year Coordinator in 1994, an official Transition Year Programme was adopted. Our Transition Year Programme is compulsory.

Our Transition Year Programme is strenuously academic because we believe this is the best way to prepare our pupils for their Leaving Certificate courses over the following two years. In academic terms the step-up from Junior Certificate to Leaving Certificate is considerable, as is the commensurate growth in personal maturity so vital for a competent and sensible approach to the final state examination.

The advancement and uplifting of youth are core tenets of this college's ethos and therefore we always seek to fulfil the Transition Year aspirations of having a pupil body in the process of maturing through educational experience. We seek to allow our pupils to become socially aware and competent, thus preparing them for their adult and working life. Independent critical thought and reasoned action in the future adult world should be the result of our school programme. We believe that our pupils gain the confidence and ability to make well-informed decisions regarding their choice of subjects for Leaving Certificate and this is one of the primary major results of Transition Year participation.

Through a process of consultation the wishes and needs of all stakeholders are taken into account when planning and later enacting the Transition Year programme. However, it is the needs of the pupils that will drive a successful programme.

A well-run Transition Year programme should bring about an improvement in pupils' time and self-management skills, while their age profile will be more conducive to sensible decision-making in the post-school era.

The beneficial research-proven results of undertaking a Transition Year programme (NCCA Longitudinal Study 1999) are cited to prospective parents and pupils in advance of their decision to opt in or out. The particular findings that are emphasised include:

- TY pupils less likely to drop out of third level courses
- TY pupils less likely to change third level courses
- TY pupils more likely to pass first year exams
- TY pupils achieve a higher points score in LC

We seek to offer pupils opportunities to engage in activities that are productive, positive, enjoyable, challenging and self-affirming. The formation of friendships outside of the pressured environment of an examination course is a most valuable part of the year. Pupils are constantly encouraged and at all times challenged to “make the year their own” and this is one of the benchmarks by which the success of a particular year is measured.

There is a delicate balance between achieving all our academic and extra-curricular aims. This is a balance to which we constantly aspire through observation and subsequent evaluation of each year.

Nothing of real or lasting value can happen during the year without huge commitment, co-operation and support from our Warden, Sub-Warden, teaching and ancillary staff. We are fortunate in this school that the staff body are enthusiastic about the Transition Year and give of their vast and varying expertise and interests, time and energy for the betterment of their pupils. In so many ways they provide the perfect example to our pupils. Our parents are also most supportive of what we do in our Transition Year. All of this is the bedrock of a successful programme.

Following a Whole School Evaluation (WSE) in 2012, the inspectors stated in their final report that:

‘Students and parents who were interviewed during the evaluation were particularly complimentary about the Transition Year Programme in the school. While school documentation describes the programme as being ‘strenuously academic’, lessons observed during the evaluation visit and the TY plan showed that the TY Programme is in keeping with the philosophy of Transition Year and Department circulars.’

In summary, the aims of Transition Year in St. Columba’s College are:

- Pupils are encouraged to become more rounded individuals: personally, academically and in terms of maturity.

- The academic momentum of pupils should be maintained (and indeed increased) to provide a suitable bridge between the Junior and Leaving Certificates.
- Pupils should be able to make their subject choices for Leaving Certificate on the basis of a realistic assessment of the nature of the subjects and their own ability and motivation.
- Pupils should experience the depth of subjects to a degree not normally allowed within the confines of the state exam courses.
- Pupils should experience a wider range of learning and assessment styles than normal and should gain the confidence and ability to make realistic self-assessments.
- Pupils should start to become responsible for their own learning.
- Self-awareness, social maturity and group interaction skills should be developed, particularly through the extra-curricular programme.
- There should be opportunities to develop an awareness and appreciation of the social, cultural, political and environmental aspects of the world in which we live.
- There should be opportunities to start contemplating possible career paths.
- Pupils should forge strong links within their form group which will help to see them through to their Leaving Certificate and beyond.

Part Two: Induction

- As part of our planning process, our Transition Year induction begins for Form III in the Michaelmas term. Parents and prospective pupils are invited to the Transition Year Information Evening. The Warden, TY Co-ordinator, subject department heads, extra-curricular heads and past and current TY pupils may address the audience formally. Afterwards there is the valuable opportunity for parents and pupils to ask questions and discuss the upcoming year in a relaxed and somewhat informal fashion. This two-pronged approach reflects both the serious and varied nature of Transition Year.

- A booklet containing information on individual academic courses and on the overall Transition Year structure is given to Form III pupils and parents in the Hilary term and this contains information and advice on making subject choices for Transition Year and Leaving Certificate.
- Pupils are invited to make their subject choices in the Hilary term, under the guidance of the Transition Year Coordinator, the Director of Studies and the Careers and Guidance Counsellor. Heads of subject departments are also consulted by pupils. Parents are invited to comment on the choices available and then they are requested formally to approve the pupil's choice through a signature
- On entry into Transition Year the entire form assembles at the start of term for a brief general introduction after which they are divided into their mentoring groups. They are then addressed and instructed by the group mentor. There are ten of these groups.
- College rules, Transition Year timetable, activities on offer, previous years' activities, Transition Year personal blogs, Transition Year ethos, arrangements for prep are all considered during these mentoring group meetings.
- The TY Co-ordinator compiles information regarding each pupil through the use of our *Transition Year Profile Sheet*. This information is used to help the co-ordinator devise suitable activities and also to guide the pupils in career-oriented courses during the year (e.g. The *CTY* pre-university courses offered by DCU, Geoscience at TCD and the *Mini-Med Course* in RCSI).
- Mentoring groups meet regularly during the year to assess progress and offer advice.
- Regular whole form meetings take place at which information is disseminated to pupils and suggestions elicited regarding future activities.
- Former Transition Year pupils speak to new pupils to advise them regarding the year. International pupils will be addressed by a native speaker where possible.
- We regard induction as an ongoing process throughout the year e.g. an underperforming pupil may receive extra formal encouragement where necessary.

Part Three: Individual Subjects

Each academic subject department devises its own programme in an innovative and stimulating fashion. The critical and sometimes difficult bridge between junior and senior types of learning informs our approach to subject teaching. We offer our pupils a broad and well rounded educational experience, away from the restrictive syllabus-driven and points-orientated struggle of the Leaving Certificate. We hope that pupils will learn to take responsibility for their own learning. At the same time, weaknesses can be identified and remediated at this juncture, while novel teaching, learning, assessment and evaluation will stimulate pupils and very often reinvigorate teachers.

Our timetabled academic subjects for Transition Year 2016-2017 are: Irish, English, Maths, History, Geography, Building, Art, Music, Latin, Classical Studies, Business, Spanish, French, RE, Physics, Chemistry, Biology, Computer Studies, SPHE.

A modular programme which changes every eight weeks includes Drama, Finance, Astronomy, P.E. and Academic Research Methods.

Assessment techniques vary from subject to subject, but will generally include the two end-of-term examinations, class tests, essays, projects, practical activities, experiments, presentations and a teacher's general assessment of the contribution made to the subject by the pupil. Teachers have autonomy in subject assessments methods.

At the end of the academic year all subjects award a single grade as follows:

Premier: 80% and above (with addition of *stars* for really outstanding results)

Higher: 65% to 79%

Standard: 50% to 64%

Lower: 40% to 49%

Ungraded: below 40%

Each subject will award a subject prize to the top pupil each year.

Part Four: General Assessment

Our assessment procedures for academic subjects are as outlined in each subject profile.

Our pupils receive certificates in various areas and an overall TY Certificate is awarded at the end of the year.

Our TY Personal Blog is the major method of recording extra-curricular activities. Introduced during the induction period this is intended to grow into a worthwhile keepsake for pupils. It also forms a major part of our overall TY Assessment. Under the guidance of their mentor, pupils will compile a personalised compendium of their year. They are left in no doubt that the responsibility for this record of the year is theirs alone.

Our *Columban Award Scheme (CAS)* is a graded award and it is awarded to those pupils who complete a series of physical and philanthropic tasks and most pupils will earn one of these. The prestigious *Spirit of Transition Year* is awarded to the outstanding member(s) of transition year. An assessment of individual and team membership contribution is the basis of this award.

A pupil's overall report is written after the analysis of information relating to his/her general involvement in the year's activities. Mentors write this report having consulted widely among the staff body and beyond.

Part Five: Organisational Details

The Transition Year Coordinator is Peter McCarthy and the core team members are Alison Maybury, Karen Hennessey, Ann Kilfeather, Suzanne McEaney, Humphrey Jones, Michael O'Shaughnessy, Lisa Lynch, Keith Ryan and Clotilde de Frein.

The team is comprised of members from different academic disciplines and pastoral areas. A variety of different ages, experiences, backgrounds and interests give the team a stimulating balance.

The main calendar events include:

Michaelmas Term

- Form Meeting
- Mentoring Group Meeting
- Junior certificate Results Celebration Evening
- Autumn Hikes
- Charity Collections
- Transition Year House Speeches
- Transition Year Information Evening
- Team Hope Christmas Shoebox Appeal
- Tuck Shop team
- Aptitude Tests
- Astronomy Nights
- Guest Speakers
- TY Yearbook Editorial Group
- TY Team Debates
- Maths Mentoring
- Mandarin Chinese courses

Hilary Term

- Careers' Seminar
- Music Trip to Sligo
- Parents' Lunch
- Mock Interviews
- TY Team Quiz
- Subject Choice Seminar

Trinity Term

- Transition Year Academic Prize
- Transition Year Music Concert
- Transition Year English Evening

- Transition Year Modern Languages Evening
- Transition Year Classical Studies Play
- Summer Night Hikes
- TY Yearbook Compilation
- Transition Year Emergency Aid Exam
- Transition Year Final Presentation and Prizes Evening (including Subject Prizes, the *Columban Award Scheme* and *Spirit of Transition Year* award)
- Transition Year Achill Expedition
- Transition Year Team Challenges Day
- *Actiontrack* Drama Showbuild and Performance

The formal Work Experience Programme should take place during the holiday periods. The timing of this activity is kept under review. Parents and pupils make their own arrangements. A record booklet and general insurance letter are provided for each pupil by our Careers and Guidance Counsellor. Feedback is gathered on their return.

The above are the core events and activities that occur each year. They may occur during terms other than those listed above. Many other activities also take place. In addition to specific TY activities, all pupils play a full part in all the other whole-school activities.

Part Six: Evaluation

Recognising that Transition Year is dynamic, we engage in evaluation in advance of subsequent year planning. We use numerous types of evaluation procedures:

- Pupils are encouraged to engage in self-evaluation and reflection after each activity. They are encouraged to commit their thoughts to writing and record these in their TY personal blogs.
- Subject teachers and those who organise and conduct activities will also reflect on the events that concern them.
- Pupils will be surveyed as to their thoughts on the year just past.

- Subject teachers and other staff will be surveyed as to their thoughts on the year just past and will be asked to evaluate pupils in a general and also a specific sense.
- Our general Conventions (staff meetings) offer an opportunity to elicit opinion as to the value of a given activity.
- Parents who give their opinions will have these recorded and discussed at TY Team meetings.
- Each activity is recorded and evaluated as to its individual merits in the programme.
- Opinions from the various constituent bodies in the college (Fellows, Board of Management and Parents' Association) will, from time to time be given and these will be recorded and discussed.

Our Transition Year Programme, year on year, remains a working document, subject to amendment and improvement as part of our ongoing self-evaluation.

Peter McCarthy

Transition Year Coordinator