

# Step<sup>Up</sup> Project

School Excellence Fund: Step Up Project

October 2018 - October 2021

School Report:

Borrisokane Community College  
Ballyhaden, Borrisokane, Co. Tipperary

Nine schools took part in the Step Up Project. Schools submitted a final report telling the story of their Step Up Project. The reports are descriptive accounts of what happened in school given their unique context and circumstances. The reports are not prescriptive of what should happen in all schools. Reports should be read in conjunction with reading the overall Step Up Project composite report.



## BECOMING A BETTER LEARNER

Borrisokane Community College  
Tipperary

- COMMUNITY COLLEGE
- RURAL AREA
- STAFF 55
- STUDENTS 600
- CO-EDUCATIONAL
- ENGLISH, BUSINESS STUDIES, SCIENCE involved in Step Up
- 3 CORE TEACHERS AND PRINCIPAL IN STEP UP TEAM

### Identifying a focus

At Borrisokane Community College, school improvement is an important and continuous process, focusing on a number of areas annually. All teachers are involved in at least one planning development committee, whose focus is based on the previous end of school year review.

In 2018, we applied for the Step Up project to help us achieve our aims in relation to school development. Feedback from surveys of three stakeholders (teachers, parents, and staff) in relation to effective teaching and learning, identified the potential to further develop staff collaboration on the new Junior Cycle programme. Our focus in Looking at Our School was Domain 4, Standard 3: Teachers collectively develop and implement consistent and dependable formative and summative assessment practices. Domain 3, Standard 2: The teacher selects and uses planning, preparation and assessment practices that progress students' learning.

The Step Up project aimed to improve teaching and learning by embedding learning intentions, co-creating success criteria and effective formative feedback into our classrooms using the Junior Cycle CBA process as a starting point. We wanted to embed reflective practice with teachers and students and build up resources across the school community that will aid teaching and learning.

The focus of our project



## KEY IMPLEMENTATION PRACTICES

**The Step Up team established group norms and met regularly.** Goals and targets were set, and timelines were clear.

**A learning log** was used by teachers to record their own reflections throughout the process.

**Resource Bank** was established to share valuable resources and methodologies for staff members.

**Advice was sought** from the Link Inspector and JCT Link Advisor.

**The Step Up team presented learning to all staff**, then organised workshops to share their strategies and methodologies across all subject departments.

*“Students co-created success criteria as a class before putting together their Oral Presentations for CBA 1 and written pieces for CBA 2. Oral feedback, which students wrote down, helped them to reflect on their own work.”*

- Marie D’Arcy, English

“ Since the start of the project, students have become much more engaged and invested in class. They have taken more responsibility for their own learning. ”

Louise Ryan, Business Studies Teacher

## IMPLEMENTATION STEPS

Implementation



1. **Established Step Up team** - this included a core group of three teachers from English, Science and the Business Studies departments as these subjects were engaged in the first phases of the newly introduced Junior Cycle. From a senior management perspective, the Principal, Matthew Carr was a member of the committee.
2. **Set objectives for the project**- using surveys from all stakeholders in our school as part of WSE, we identified areas to work on from our school improvement plan.
3. **Focus group and surveyed parents, teachers, and students** throughout process to gain an insight into on-going learning practices and the effectiveness of current strategies being used.
4. **Engaged with Inspectorate and JCT** to help teachers implement the chosen feedback and CBA strategies in selected English, Business Studies and Science classes.
5. **Implemented new feedback and CBA strategies** in selected classes. Recorded observations and results in learning logs/focus groups.
6. **Key learnings shared with all staff.** Teacher led CPD conducted with staff and new feedback and CBA practices established across all departments.

## ENABLING CONDITIONS

**Staff ownership was instilled** through collective decision making and support from senior management.

**Consistency in methodologies and strategies** across the three subject departments involved in the project.

**Collaboration with the Inspectorate and JCT** guided the Step Up team with regard to best practice.

**Time was allocated** to allow for administration, planning and discussion among the Step Up team.

**Parents were kept informed and involved** about the new practices.

## IMPLEMENTATION NARRATIVE

A number of objectives were set at the beginning of this project. Firstly, we wanted to make the CBA process as student friendly and accessible as possible. The Features of Quality used in the CBAs were introduced to students at an early stage in the process to ensure understanding and clarity. The students looked at each Feature of Quality and co-created success criteria in a language they could relate to, which was a valuable learning tool.

Students were shown exemplars of work and grading for this work. Student's peer assessed this work and discussed why certain grades were awarded, dissecting the features of quality and applying them to pieces of work. Using exemplars of students' work and having class discussions on the use of the criteria is important and can produce some interesting insights. For example, co-creating success criteria for a short story challenges the students to think deeply about what exactly a short story is and ask questions in class. The process encourages students to take more responsibility for their learning and become more active participants in the teaching and learning process.

We also reflected on the feedback strategies we used in class. We discussed the effectiveness of various feedback strategies with students and applied them in our classes. Students engaged with self-reflection feedback using the success criteria of a piece of work as a guide. Students used peer feedback again while using success criteria and finally teacher feedback was given.

Oral feedback provided by the teacher is considered very effective and students self-assessment of co-created success criteria based on the features of quality. Feedback was integrated into the class and discussed. Students were asked to suggest how they could improve their work, and this ensured that students got involved in their learning pathway. The brainstorming, drafting and redrafting process is integral to their written work and feedback at each stage of the process was highly effective.

Students were allowed to retake exams based on feedback, in their own time and this initiative allowed them to apply feedback and improve their grade. A student focus group was organised to discuss these strategies and their effectiveness.

A CBA Information Evening was organised where parents could see students present the various types of CBA projects they worked on and the types of support which are valuable both in school and at home. Parents were surveyed after the event to evaluate the effectiveness of the evening. Feedback learning logs were sent to parents with teacher feedback and parents were asked if they could support their son/daughter applying this piece of feedback.

3<sup>rd</sup> Year Business Studies students talk about the supports they received during their CBA.



As a department, we considered getting students to take more ownership of their own learning via the creation of success criteria and self-assessment of their own work was very worthy of the time invested into planning and execution of incorporated methodologies – Independent thinking and reflection skills improved. Ability to self-assess own work and analyse data improved critical thinking.

Science Department

*“Students were taught the language of Assessment and Features of Quality to ensure understanding.”*

*Marie D’Arcy, English teacher*



## KEY REFLECTION PRACTICES

### Breaking down Features of Quality in student

**friendly practices:** This involved engaging students in the process of dissecting the Features of Quality into language they understood and then using this as a guide for self-reflection and feedback.

**Co-creation of success criteria:** Students created their own success criteria with the guidance of a teacher and had a huge amount of buy in and involvement in the teaching and learning process.

### Teacher, student, and self-assessment strategies:

Students continuously engaged in self-reflection using co-created success criteria as a guide for improvement and feedback. Peer feedback allowed for deep discussions on pieces of work and teacher feedback was given at the end of this process.

**Whole school initiative:** Strategies and benefits of the approach was extended to other departments through use of a teacher mentor system.

**Parental Involvement:** This was done through a CBA evening, signed parental feedback logs and Eportal.

## FUTURE PLANNING

Principal Matthew Carr outlines the benefits of the project



- Positive structures in school for sharing and collaborating in the development and implementation of active teaching methodologies.
- Focus on embedding teaching strategies to promote improvement in teaching and learning.

Principal Matthew Carr outlines plans for moving forward with learning from Step Up



## IMPACT

- Strong Collaboration across departments has led to a shared understanding of language in regard to assessment practices.
- Focus is completely on teaching and learning strategies rather than subject content, increased sharing of ideas and resources.
- Successful internal CPD from teacher to teacher
- Increase in students' ability and confidence in the following areas: ability to self-reflect, co-creating success criteria which gives them confidence and focus on the assigned tasks generating and using formative feedback, students redrafting work, student reflection, peer and self-assessment, promotion of student voice in the classroom and students taking ownership of learning.
- Results of survey from parents in CBA. Increased levels of student and parental engagement - *"I feel confident supporting my child because she shows me her work and asks for comments and she herself has explained success criteria for the CBA"- parent who attended CBA evening.*
- 80% of parents now felt confident in supporting their son/daughter in their CBA journey (gathered from survey of parents on presentation night).
- Whole School bank of resources available to teachers, Mentor supports to teachers, Staff led CPD on assessment.

*"Students were empowered to ask questions on feedback and ensure that they knew exactly what to do to improve their work."*

*English Department*



Shared understanding of features of quality, co-created success criteria and regular feedback improved engagement across the board. Students became more involved in the learning process.

Mary Brady, Science Teacher

