

Step^{Up} Project

School Excellence Fund: Step Up Project

October 2018 - October 2021

School Report:
Stratford College
1 Zion Road, Rathgar, Dublin 6

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.



- VOLUNTARY SECONDARY
- URBAN AREA
- 20 TEACHERS
- 150 STUDENTS
- CO-EDUCATIONAL
- ENGLISH, BUSINESS STUDIES, SCIENCE
- 3 TEACHERS IN STEP UP TEAM

Identifying a focus

After the first year of classroom-based assessments (CBAs) for second years in three subjects (2017/18), our students spoke to us about the challenges they were experiencing with CBAs. Those challenges included making connections between CBA tasks across subjects and time management difficulties. We then surveyed our students' experience of CBAs in English, Business, and Science to gather more information on their learning experience.

We could see the potential for deeper learning opportunities, if we were to collaborate by following similar instruction around the teaching of key skills. We also decided to trial an approach of collaborating thematically across the CBAs in different subjects, to see if that would further support students.

In terms of positioning our focus within the context of *Looking at our School* (LAOS), we saw our project as helping us to move towards an improved learner experience, as described by Domain 2, Standard 4 "experience opportunities to develop the skills and attitudes necessary for lifelong learning." We also aimed toward realising deeper "Teachers' collective /collaborative practice," as articulated in Domain 4, Standard 2 "work together to devise learning opportunities for students across and beyond the curriculum." *The School Excellence Fund – Step Up Project* provided the perfect opportunity to address these dual aims.



KEY IMPLEMENTATION PRACTICES

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

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

The Step Up team presented learnings to all staff.

[Teachers discussing the 10 Steps to CBA Success](#)



IMPLEMENTATION STEPS

1. **Established a Step Up team.**
2. **Examined** the Features of Quality of second-year CBAs in English, Business and Science to identify commonalities.
3. **Identified** key elements of the junior cycle skills that were common across the three CBAs: planning, researching, evaluating sources, using digital technology, communicating, working with others, and reflecting.
4. **Decided** to adopt consistent language, template supports, and instructions to support students in utilising key skills to complete their CBAs.
5. **Created** a booklet for second years, compiling the key skill supports we had agreed.
6. **Students designed** a class-based noticeboard to support the CBA booklets. Each had a visual image to support each step. These are now in the English, Science and Business rooms.
7. **Researched** and **utilised** new methodologies to support students in their learning, including inquiry-based learning, collaborative learning, and peer assessment.
8. **Shared** ways of activating formative feedback in classrooms, and added relevant NCCA resources to our booklet.
9. **Identified** a common theme for the CBAs across the subjects for the second year group of 2019/20 (Intimacy) and the second year group of 2020/21 (Life in Space). Under those themes, we prescribed the focus of the CBA for each subject and student.

ENABLING CONDITIONS

Support from senior management.

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

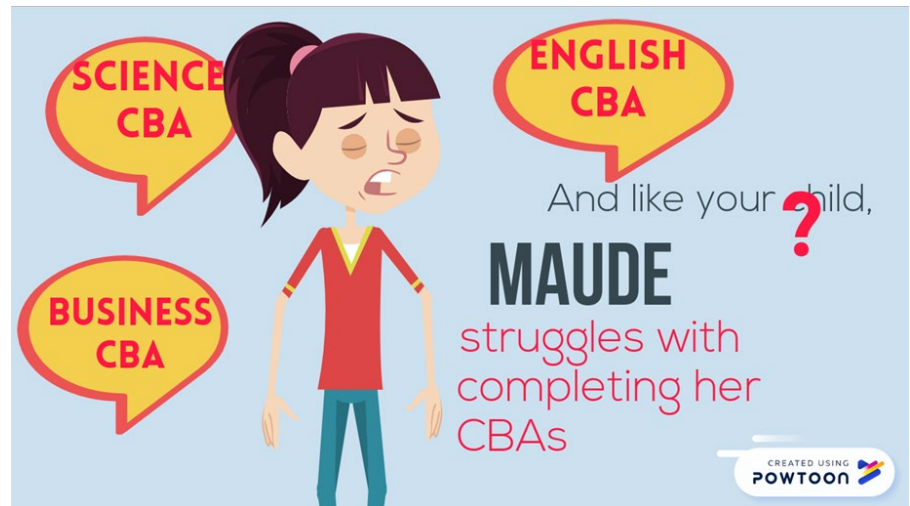
Collaboration with the Inspectorate and JCT.

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

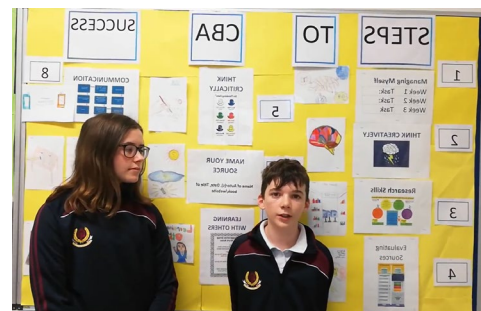
Parents were kept informed about the new practices.

IMPLEMENTATION NARRATIVE

[Watch our Powtoon video explaining our JC Step Up Project](#)



A clear step by step guide to completing CBAs offers the students a reassuring scaffold to approach these tasks



[Second Year students discuss the benefits of using the 10 Steps to Successful CBAs](#)

IMPACT on staff

Teachers are collaborating more across subjects.

Staff-led CPD has been delivered on the need for teachers to use common language and instructions in relation to the key skills

Teachers have a deeper understanding of the key skills, of NCCA resources available to support them, and of a broader range of methodologies.

Our attention to student voice in planning and adapting our teaching has been further strengthened.

“ Bouncing my ideas around with other students gave me nearly the whole plan from a few random facts.

”

Kate O’Neill ,
English student

IMPACT on students

- Students are now managing their CBAs in a more ordered, calm manner. 61% decrease in the number of students who find the CBA stressful.
- Students’ skills of managing myself, of managing information and thinking, of communicating, and of working with others have been strengthened.
- Students are applying skills from one context to another. 84% increase in students’ abilities to identify similar skills required across the CBA process.

REVIEW and FUTURE PLANNING

As with all initiatives, one of the most difficult aspects is to consider how to sustain the good practice and all that has been learned when the ‘project’ has been completed. To this end, sharing learning with the whole staff was set as a priority. The Step Up team were invited to present their work to the whole staff. The successes and challenges of the project were shared. Student voice videos were shown, along with the thoughts of two parents. Through activities, teachers investigated the quality of reflection in their own classes. Strategies were demonstrated by the Step Up team. It was agreed by all staff to implement at least one of these strategies over the next term and to use a reflective journal to keep track of their progress.

- Encouraging the use of the 10 steps booklet is now a key role for the Year head and form tutors in 3rd year.
- We would like to create a teacher booklet that would synthesise the teaching methods necessary for teaching the CBA skills and to add a page to the student booklet for reflection on the development of students’ CBA skills.
- While the thematic approach was valuable for the project and the small number of CBAs involved, it would be difficult to sustain this approach in the context of full implementation of JC across all subjects.