Programme Evaluation in Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA)

REPORT

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<th>Ainm na scoile / School name</th>
<th>Saint Michael’s Secondary School</th>
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| Seoladh na scoile / School address | Wellmount Road  
Finglas  
Dublin 11 |
| Uimhir rolla / Roll number | 60741 |

Date of Evaluation: 09-03-2017
WHAT IS A PROGRAMME EVALUATION?
The programme evaluation model of inspection is used to evaluate the quality and effectiveness of the following programmes and to provide advice and support to teachers, principals and school management in post-primary schools and centres for education:

- Junior Certificate School Programme (JCSP)
- Transition Year (TY) programme
- Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) programme
- Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP)

HOW TO READ THIS REPORT
During this inspection, the inspector evaluated learning and teaching in LCA under the following headings:

1. Teaching and learning
2. Programme provision and whole-school support
3. Programme planning, co-ordination and evaluation

Inspectors describe the quality of each of these areas using the Inspectorate’s quality continuum which is shown on the final page of this report. The quality continuum provides examples of the language used by inspectors when evaluating and describing the quality of the school’s provision in each area.

The board of management was given an opportunity to comment in writing on the findings and recommendations of the report; a response was not received from the board.
Leaving Certificate Applied

INSPECTION ACTIVITIES DURING THIS INSPECTION

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<th>Dates of inspection</th>
<th>09-03-2017</th>
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| Inspection activities undertaken | • Observation of teaching and learning during six class periods  
• Interaction with students  
• Feedback to principal and teachers |
• Discussion with principal, deputy principal and teachers  
• Review of relevant documents  
• Examination of students’ work |

SCHOOL CONTEXT
Saint Michael’s Secondary School is a voluntary secondary school under the trusteeship of the Le Chéile Trust. The school has a current enrolment of 624 girls and participates in DEIS (Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools), the action plan of the Department of Education and Skills for educational inclusion. Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) is a well-established and vibrant programme in the school.

SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

FINDINGS
• The overall quality of teaching and in the lessons observed was good.
• A very good range of learning activities is undertaken by students.
• The quality of learner experiences and outcomes can be further enhanced through extending the range of formative assessment strategies used in LCA.
• Programme provision and whole-school support is very good; though not all students participate in the work experience component of LCA.
• Programme planning and evaluation is of a good standard; additional mechanisms that facilitate teachers’ collaborative practice would prove beneficial.
• The programme is well co-ordinated; staff members provide a very high level of care and individualised support to students.

RECOMMENDATIONS
• Strategies that facilitate students to actively articulate, reflect on and assess their learning should be incorporated further into all lessons.
• An agreed system that enables students to take responsibility for building up and storing work from lessons should be developed.
• Arrangements for work experience should be reviewed to maximise student engagement with this key component of the programme.
• A core team should be established to lead collaborative planning for and evaluation of teaching and learning in LCA.
DETAILED FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. TEACHING AND LEARNING

- The overall quality of teaching and learning in the lessons observed was good, with some exemplary practice noted. At times, there was scope to deepen students’ learning through the integration of additional student-led activities and enhanced formative assessment practice.

- All lessons were well planned with some very good use of additional resources to scaffold learning. Highly effective learning was facilitated in lessons where the learning intentions and teaching approaches chosen enabled students to actively link content to prior learning or experiences. On occasion, there was scope to adjust the pace and pitch of lesson content to a level more commensurate with students’ needs, and support an incremental approach to learning.

- Lessons were conducted in an affirming and supportive atmosphere. A very good rapport was apparent between students and teachers. Students were well able to work in groups, when challenged to do so.

- A deliberate emphasis was placed on supporting students’ literacy. Practice proved particularly successful when conscious efforts were made to ensure that students understood and used relevant key terminology in purposeful classroom discussions and tasks. There is scope for the LCA teaching team to agree approaches to support additional literacy skills in areas such as oracy and writing.

- Some good use was made of active teaching strategies. Very good learning was noted when these activities concluded with a well-processed plenary session. In some lessons, there was too much teacher input which resulted in a lack of active student engagement. Strategies that facilitate students to actively reflect on and articulate their learning should be incorporated into all lessons.

- The range and effectiveness of formative assessment strategies used in lessons varied significantly. Additional strategies that enable students to assess and reflect on their progress need to be developed. Questioning was the dominant assessment strategy used in most lessons. However, questions tended to be lower-order, requiring very brief answers, with teachers then expanding on the answer themselves. Further use of higher-order questions, with increased wait time, is recommended to foster deeper understanding. Additional use of peer and self-assessment strategies would also be beneficial.

- There is a need to review how LCA students record their learning from lessons. While some very good practice was apparent, observation of student notebooks indicated that practice varies significantly. Due to the integrated nature of learning in LCA, students need to reflect on their learning throughout the programme. An agreed system that enables students to take responsibility for building up and storing a body of work from all lessons should be introduced.

- A very good range of activities is undertaken by students in completing key assignments and tasks. Very good links have been established with the local community to ensure that the learning experiences provided are relevant to students’ lives. There is scope to improve the learning potential of key assignments in some subject areas by raising expectations for the standard of the completed work and through the provision of additional constructive feedback.
• In accordance with good practice, LCA students sit formal in-house examinations and reports are issued in line with whole-school procedures. While school reports provide some very good feedback on students’ learning, the template used should be revised to align with LCA assessment procedures and report on students’ overall attainment in the programme to date.

2. PROGRAMME PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

• The quality of programme provision and whole-school support is very good.

• Procedures for the selection and induction of LCA students are of very high quality. The plans in place to further develop the induction and mentoring programmes are indicative of very good practice.

• Teachers are very committed to the on-going development of LCA and a good level of engagement with relevant continuing professional development (CPD) is evident. Given that a number of teachers are new to LCA, some training needs are apparent. Senior management should carry out an analysis of CPD needs to address identified gaps systematically.

• The LCA programme is broad and balanced; subjects offered meet students’ needs, interests, and intended progression routes. Attendance and punctuacity are well tracked. Baseline data on LCA attendance rates should continue to be reviewed carefully by the LCA team in order to inform on-going programme planning.

• The arrangements for students’ work experience merit review. LCA students go on work placement one day per week for the full academic year. At the time of the evaluation, a small number of students were not participating in work placement. Consideration should be given to organising work experience using a block-release model, with a view to maximising the engagement of all students and optimising overall attainment.

• A very high level of care and individualised support is provided to LCA students. There is a very good level of collaboration among relevant staff to ensure that there is an integrated approach to addressing individual student’s needs.

3. PROGRAMME PLANNING, CO-ORDINATION AND EVALUATION

• The overall quality of programme planning, co-ordination and evaluation of LCA is good.

• The programme is co-ordinated in a committed and enthusiastic manner. Robust systems have been established to track students’ completion of key assignments and the allocation of credits. Formal programme reviews have informed on-going programme developments.

• The full team of LCA teachers meets at the start of each year and a good level of informal collaboration takes place during the year. However, the absence of a core LCA team is limiting the potential effectiveness of collaborative planning for teaching and learning. It is recommended that a core team be established to lead planning for and evaluation of teaching and learning in LCA. The core team should use the outcomes of an analysis of trends in student attainment to agree and implement a set of targeted strategies that will further support student learning across the programme.

• The module plans reviewed were at varying stages of development. To facilitate high-quality learner experiences and outcomes, a planning template that supports incremental,
differentiated and cross-curricular learning should be used by all subject teams to develop module plans for LCA.

The draft findings and recommendations arising out of this evaluation were discussed with the principal, deputy principal and programme co-ordinator at the conclusion of the evaluation.
THE INSPECTORATE’S QUALITY CONTINUUM

Inspectors describe the quality of provision in the school using the Inspectorate’s quality continuum which is shown below. The quality continuum provides examples of the language used by inspectors when evaluating and describing the quality the school’s provision of each area.

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<th>Level</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Example of descriptive terms</th>
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<td>Very Good</td>
<td><strong>Very good</strong> applies where the quality of the areas evaluated is of a very high standard. The very few areas for improvement that exist do not significantly impact on the overall quality of provision. For some schools in this category the quality of what is evaluated is <strong>outstanding</strong> and provides an example for other schools of exceptionally high standards of provision.</td>
<td>Very good; of a very high quality; very effective practice; highly commendable; very successful; few areas for improvement; notable; of a very high standard. Excellent; outstanding; exceptionally high standard, with very significant strengths; exemplary</td>
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<td>Good</td>
<td><strong>Good</strong> applies where the strengths in the areas evaluated clearly outweigh the areas in need of improvement. The areas requiring improvement impact on the quality of pupils’ learning. The school needs to build on its strengths and take action to address the areas identified as requiring improvement in order to achieve a very good standard.</td>
<td>Good; good quality; valuable; effective practice; competent; useful; commendable; good standard; some areas for improvement</td>
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<td>Satisfactory</td>
<td><strong>Satisfactory</strong> applies where the quality of provision is adequate. The strengths in what is being evaluated just outweigh the shortcomings. While the shortcomings do not have a significant negative impact they constrain the quality of the learning experiences and should be addressed in order to achieve a better standard.</td>
<td>Satisfactory; adequate; appropriate provision although some possibilities for improvement exist; acceptable level of quality; improvement needed in some areas</td>
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<td>Fair</td>
<td><strong>Fair</strong> applies where, although there are some strengths in the areas evaluated, deficiencies or shortcomings that outweigh those strengths also exist. The school will have to address certain deficiencies without delay in order to ensure that provision is satisfactory or better.</td>
<td>Fair; evident weaknesses that are impacting on pupils’ learning; less than satisfactory; experiencing difficulty; must improve in specified areas; action required to improve</td>
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<td>Weak</td>
<td><strong>Weak</strong> applies where there are serious deficiencies in the areas evaluated. Immediate and coordinated whole-school action is required to address the areas of concern. In some cases, the intervention of other agencies may be required to support improvements.</td>
<td>Weak; unsatisfactory; insufficient; ineffective; poor; requiring significant change, development or improvement; experiencing significant difficulties;</td>
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