

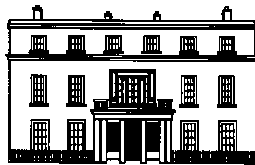
An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

**Programme Evaluation
Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA)
REPORT**

**St Paul's Community College
Browne's Road, Waterford
Roll number: 72241E**

Date of inspection: 12 September 2014



**AN ROINN | DEPARTMENT OF
OIDEACHAIS | EDUCATION
AGUS SCILEANNA | AND SKILLS**

REPORT ON THE QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN LEAVING CERTIFICATE APPLIED (LCA)

INFORMATION ON THE PROGRAMME EVALUATION

Dates of inspection	11 th and 12 th September 2014
Inspection activities undertaken <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Review of relevant documents• Discussion with principal and key staff• Interaction with students	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Observation of teaching and learning during eight class periods• Examination of students' work• Feedback to principal and relevant staff

MAIN FINDINGS

- The quality of teaching and learning varied considerably in the lessons observed and ranged from fair to excellent.
- Scope for improvement was identified in the following areas: the development students' literacy skills, the teaching of mixed ability class groups, and the incorporation of active learning techniques and assessment for learning (AfL) strategies into lessons.
- Lessons were characterised by positive interactions and very good student behaviour.
- Senior management views LCA as a central component of the school's curriculum that supports a specific cohort of students.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

- Programme appropriate methodologies should be used more extensively within the LCA programme.
 - Common strategies to support literacy should be implemented throughout the programme.
 - Greater use of differentiated approaches to teaching mixed ability LCA class groups should be adopted.
 - A programme of improvement in the teaching, learning and assessment of LCA curriculum should be led and implemented by the LCA co-ordinator and the core team.
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INTRODUCTION

St Paul's Community College is a co-educational school with a current enrolment of 435 students. The school participates in the Delivering Equality of Opportunity in School (DEIS) initiative and welcomes students from a diverse range of social and economic backgrounds. The LCA programme is a long standing element of the school's curriculum.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

- The quality of teaching and learning varied considerably ranging from fair to excellent in the lessons observed. To ensure greater consistency of student experience, good practice should be discussed, shared and implemented by the LCA teaching team.
- Planning was evident in all lessons observed. When planning was detailed, students' experiences and participation levels were greatly enhanced. Appropriate resources were prepared for the majority of lessons to aid student engagement and learning. Good examples included audio-visual clips and a variety of equipment and resources for student activities.
- Some teachers introduced new topics to students at the beginning of lessons and were explicit in relation to the learning expected. In one instance, these objectives were reviewed and assessed collaboratively during a lesson summation. This good practice should be extended across the programme. Lesson structure should also be developed in most subjects to include opportunities for students to observe the modelling of good practice and to provide time to practise new skills.
- A greater diversity of active methodologies was required in most lessons observed. While almost all lessons included programme appropriate methods, there is scope for improvement in their greater application across the programme. Increased levels of active learning and structured collaborative activities should be incorporated where possible.
- Scope for improvement was identified in the area of differentiated teaching methods. This is particularly relevant where the fifth and sixth-year class groups are amalgamated.
- Classroom layout was, in some instances, conducive to discussion, dialogue and engagement. Students in all lessons contributed to the topics being discussed and suggested ideas, solutions and opinions where possible. Consideration should be given to varying classroom layout to promote greater opportunity for meaningful student discussion and dialogue.
- Classroom interactions were both positive and respectful. Students received good levels of affirmation and a mutually respectful teaching and learning environment was evident throughout the evaluation.
- Student behaviour was very good. Students were purposeful and contributed in lessons to the best of their abilities. Attendance was monitored in all lessons. Additional strategies are also in place to maximise student attendance within the programme, which are operating effectively.
- A common approach to developing students' literacy skills was not evident. This deficit should be addressed by the programme co-ordinator and core team with suitable strategies being identified and implemented across the entire teaching team in line with the school's literacy policy.
- AfL strategies are currently not embedded in the LCA programme. Greater emphasis should be placed on employing techniques that enable students to report on, explain and apply their learning and knowledge. This could be developed by the LCA teaching team through greater use of success criteria and exemplars.

- Students' assessment results and certificate examination scores are collated and monitored periodically. The challenge facing the school is to implement a focused programme of improvement that will help raise student attainment across the programme. A more focussed approach to identifying the specific areas where students are underachieving and implementing strategies to improve their outcomes in these areas should be initiated as a matter of priority.

PROGRAMME PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- Senior management views the LCA as a central important component of the school's curriculum. To provide further leadership for the teaching team, senior management should provide training in the areas of AfL and active learning methods for teachers.
- Staff are assigned to the programme based primarily on their availability. In some instances, deploying teachers with a range of subject specialisations would be beneficial as it would help teachers to maximise their particular skill sets.
- During the evaluation, the organisation and management of information and communications resources (ICT) was problematic, particularly the use of laptop computers. These issues should be addressed and remedied in order to maximise the potential of these resources in the teaching and learning context.
- Effective student selection procedures have been developed. Students who would benefit from LCA are identified during their junior cycle or Transition Year (TY). A good system is in place to ensure that parents and students are fully informed before they apply for enrolment.
- The current LCA curriculum is appropriately scheduled with a good allocation of time for the various elements of the programme. There is some scope for improvement in the area of allocating personal reflection time for both class groups. This could be assigned to the co-ordinator in order to facilitate at least one period of class contact time per week with the LCA groups.
- The curriculum varies from year to year with changes in recent years in the vocational specialisms available to the programme. To further develop the school's LCA curriculum, consideration should be given to increasing the diversity of the elective modules offered within the programme in order to maximise students' exposure to as broad a curriculum as possible.
- The current work experience programme is completed throughout the school year and takes place every Wednesday. The organisation of this programme should be improved to ensure that all students are assigned work placements from the beginning of September in order to achieve the required number of instruction days per year as Circular M29/95.

PROGRAMME PLANNING, CO-ORDINATION AND EVALUATION

- A written plan has been developed for the LCA programme which encompasses individual subject plans for the various subjects offered. These plans vary in quality and range from satisfactory to good. Most plans reviewed require further development particularly in the area of planned formative assessment strategies.
- An example of very good practice in the area of planning formative assessments was evident in the plan for the Practical Achievement Task. This practice should be adopted by all teachers involved in anchoring student tasks in order to consistently maximise student outcomes.

- The school's programme coordinator is responsible for the co-ordination and planning of the LCA programme. The co-ordinator has had responsibility for the programme for the last two years. A core team has also been identified and this team meets regularly to discuss organisational issues.
 - The core team, led by the co-ordinator should lead and implement a programme of improvement in the teaching, learning and assessment of the LCA curriculum.
 - Some efforts have been made to evaluate the programme. Students have been surveyed and issues identified at core group level have been addressed resulting in the improvement of some aspects of the programme; one positive example includes an improved work experience diary for students.
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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 board of management was given an opportunity to comment in writing on the findings and recommendations of the report, and the response of the board will be found in the appendix of this report.

Appendix

SCHOOL RESPONSE TO THE REPORT

Submitted by the Board of Management

Area 1: Observations on the content of the inspection report

We welcome the report and management and staff are committed to implementing the recommendations and improving the LCA Programme. We are particularly pleased that the report acknowledged that “classroom interactions were both positive and respectful. Students received good levels of affirmation and a mutually respectful teaching and learning environment was evident throughout the evaluation”.

The LCA programme enjoys a high profile in the school and over the years students have contributed a lot to school life. They are involved in Catering for Retirement events and Board of Management meetings as well as prize night and graduation night and this is not reflected anywhere in the report. An award is presented to the LCA student who has engaged the most with the programme and made the most progress on Prize Night.

Area 2: Follow-up actions planned or undertaken since the completion of the inspection activity to implement the findings and recommendations of the inspection

- The LCA core team have discussed a common approach to literacy and are working on a strategy which will include the following:
Students in LCA1 will all be retested for literacy levels. Moving forward, at the end of September each year all LCA students will be tested using NGRT 111 A. This information will be supplied to all teachers to support differentiated teaching.
A common approach to literacy using key words and concepts for every subject in a variety of mediums will be implemented whole school.
- A base room will be provided that will enable facilitation of a greater diversity of active teaching methodologies. This will facilitate increased levels of active learning. It will also facilitate greater access to ICT. Availability of ICT has improved since the inspection, a timetable for booking the laptops has been provided.
- Whiteboards have been ordered so that teachers can check level of understanding among students.
- A whole staff inservice on differentiated approach to mixed ability teaching was provided by the SESS since the inspection.
- A review of the structure of the program will result in timetable changes with students attending 5 days per week and going on block work experience – work placement for the academic year 2015/2016.
- School Management and the LCA core team are currently having discussions in relation to reviewing the specialisms as well as the electives to ensure the best course possible is offered to students.

- Timetabling issues with regards to a reflection class will be addressed in next year's timetable.
- In relation to assessment of learning the Co-ordinator will evaluate student's learning mid-session with an improvement plan devised.
- Additional whole staff training is planned in the area of AFL staff.