Department of Education and Skills

Programme Evaluation
Leaving Certificate Applied
REPORT

Colaiste na Toirbhirte
Bandon, County Cork
Roll number: 62061T

Date of inspection: 19 March 2015
REPORT ON THE QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN LEAVING CERTIFICATE APPLIED

INFORMATION ON THE PROGRAMME EVALUATION

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MAIN FINDINGS

- Overall, the quality of teaching and learning is very good, with many examples of exemplary practice.

- Individual teacher planning and preparation for lessons is very good, with a significant emphasis on the generation of resources such as models and student handouts.

- There is a clear vision for the positioning of the Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) in the school. Management and staff are fully committed to the programme.

- Care of the students is central to the work of the teaching team and of the school.

- Co-ordination of the programme is very good and departmental planning is very comprehensive and well organised.

- The very good practice of evaluation over many years creates a focus on continuing to improving the programme in order to meet students’ changing needs.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

- Students would benefit from more use of structured group work, peer learning and peer assessment in lessons.

- The interests of students are prioritised in the planning and implementation of the programme, which is broad and balanced. However, it is recommended that the timetable is amended to ensure that students receive the minimum number of hours of instruction as outlined in circular M29/95.
INTRODUCTION

Coláiste na Toirbhirte is a voluntary secondary school for girls located in Bandon, County Cork. Junior Certificate, an optional Transition Year (TY) programme, the established Leaving Certificate and the Leaving Certificate Applied Programme (LCA) are offered to students. Current enrolment is 519 students.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

- Overall, the quality of teaching and learning is very good, with many examples of exemplary practice. Lessons were very well structured, with an introduction, development and recapitulation as a regular feature. Planning and preparation for lessons was thorough.

- Lessons were student centred. Cognisance was taken of students’ prior learning, interests and experiences during lessons, thus engendering active engagement among the students in the lesson activities.

- Teachers gave very clear, purposeful instructions and explanations were simple and reasoned. Teachers also supported the individual needs of students in lessons and opportunities to differentiate were well exploited at these times.

- Good opportunities to develop students’ oral and written skills were provided. Students should be encouraged to use dictionaries as required.

- Exploiting opportunities to enhance students’ numeracy skills was observed in a minority of lessons. In one lesson, very effective teaching methodologies were used to promote students’ numeracy skills and enhance their understanding.

- Good questioning strategies were used overall. In some instances questioning might have been enhanced using approaches such as think/pair/share, redirection of student questions to other students and or encouraging students to be accountable for their answers.

- In all lessons, students were actively engaged in lesson tasks. While opportunities for students to work independently were used well, possibilities for the use of structured group work could be explored further.

- Students’ contributions were encouraged and affirmed. In one lesson students were encouraged to check each other’s answers. There is scope for this very good practice of peer learning and assessment to be extended across all lessons.

- Information and communication technology (ICT) was used effectively by both teachers and students. Particularly noteworthy in one lesson was the use of a short video clip to set the scene for whole-class discussion and individual student tasks.

- Classroom interactions between teachers and students, and among the students, were respectful in a warm atmosphere which was conducive to teaching and learning. It is good to note that the school and classroom environments support, encourage and celebrate students’ learning and achievements in LCA.

- In lessons observed, students demonstrated good knowledge, understanding and skills. The school analyses students’ performance in certificate examinations and this performance compares very favourably with national norms.
PROGRAMME PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- There is a clear vision for the positioning of LCA in the school. Management and staff are fully committed to the programme and are aware of the value of LCA in terms of the educational, social and personal development of the students. There is very effective support for its on-going development.

- The interests, abilities and future requirements of students are prioritised in the planning and implementation of LCA, which is broad and balanced. However, it is recommended that the timetable is amended to ensure that students receive the minimum number of hours of instruction as outlined in circular M29/95.

- The learning experiences provided for the students facilitate the development of a broad range of knowledge and skills, in line with programme objectives. Work experience is planned and provided as an integral component of the programme, as are a range of co-curricular and extracurricular activities.

- Care of the students is central to the work of the teaching team and of the school. Students clearly indicated that they are valued and respected in their interactions with teachers. Timetabling of a tutorial session is consistent with this philosophy.

- Very good support is given to students and their parents when choosing senior cycle options. In advance of decisions being made, students and their parents are given advice and precise information regarding LCA.

- Students who would benefit from completing LCA are identified and generally avail of the programme. There are good supports in place for students with additional needs who are completing the LCA programme.

- Strategies to promote LCA students’ work among the whole student body include the general education task where students organised gymnastics and dance workshops for their peers. This is very good.

- Staff is appropriately assigned to teach LCA. ICT is used effectively in both organising and implementing the programme. However, the school should explore the possibility of obtaining mobile net-books so there is more access for LCA students. A rota should be devised for the science laboratories to ensure LCA students have regular access.

- There are regular and effective lines of communication in place between the school and the parents of LCA students. Given the nature of the LCA programme, consideration could be given to organising a further information session for parents early in session one.

PROGRAMME PLANNING, CO-ORDINATION AND EVALUATION

- A very comprehensive LCA folder has been developed. The folder includes plans for each module, samples of credit work sheets and student reports and minutes of meetings. Commendably, plans have been adapted to include the current focus of school self-evaluation.

- There is clear evidence that cross-curricular planning takes place in the completion of students’ tasks.

- Co-ordination and administration of the programme is very good. There is clear evidence that the enthusiasm and organisational skills of the co-ordinator clearly contribute to the delivery
of a successful programme. A very high quality of both formal and informal communication exists among the LCA teachers and with management. It is clear that a collaborative approach among all teachers involved facilitates the delivery of very effective learning experiences for students.

- Commendably, evaluation of the programme by staff and students has been part of the school’s practice since the school implemented the programme. Strengths and areas for development have been identified and strategies to address these areas have been put in place. This is excellent practice.

The draft findings and recommendations arising out of this evaluation were discussed with the deputy principal and co-ordinator at the conclusion of the evaluation. The board of management of the school was given an opportunity to comment on the findings and recommendations of the report; the board chose to accept the report without response.

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