

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

**Programme Evaluation
Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme
REPORT**

**Borris Vocational School
Borris, County Carlow
Roll number: 70400L**

Date of inspection: 17 April 2015



**A N R O I N N | D E P A R T M E N T O F
O I D E A C H A I S | E D U C A T I O N
A G U S S C I L E A N N A | A N D S K I L L S**

REPORT ON THE QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN THE LEAVING CERTIFICATE VOCATIONAL PROGRAMME (LCVP)

INFORMATION ON THE PROGRAMME EVALUATION

Dates of inspection	13 and 17 April 2015
Inspection activities undertaken <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Review of relevant documents• Discussion with principal and key staff• Interaction with students• Discussion with focus group of students	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Observation of teaching and learning during three class periods• Examination of students' work• Feedback to principal and relevant staff

MAIN FINDINGS

- The quality of teaching and learning was good overall.
- In some link module lessons, teachers' expertise was maximised through team teaching.
- The students interviewed were very positive about their experiences in LCVP.
- Work placement as a student learning experience is managed and evaluated very effectively.
- LCVP is well supported by senior management.
- The core team's planning practices and the co-ordination of LCVP are very good but evaluation and review procedures need to be strengthened.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

- To further enhance students' learning, teachers should integrate a greater range of co-operative learning activities and higher-order questioning and tasks into lessons.
 - Students should receive regular homework that builds on the learning in lessons.
 - Evaluation of the LCVP should be further developed and expanded to include the views of students, their parents, teachers and work experience providers.
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INTRODUCTION

Borris Vocational School is a co-educational school with a current enrolment of 488 students. The school is under the trusteeship of Kilkenny and Carlow Education and Training Board. The LCVP was introduced into the school in 1997 and is a firmly established part of the curriculum.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

- The quality of teaching and learning as observed was good overall. However, there was potential to create more opportunities for students to take responsibility for their own learning.
- All lessons were well structured and followed a logical sequence of activities, and good reference were made to the specific learning outcomes of the unit being delivered. Team teaching is deployed in some link module lessons. The well planned learning activities ensured that the skills of both teachers were maximised for the benefit of students.
- In all lessons, students were given the opportunity to work in pairs. The potential to further develop co-operative learning activities in lessons, such as task-based group and team work, should be realised.
- Questioning strategies were used to assess student knowledge and to encourage student interaction. Student participation and sharing of knowledge were enhanced when teachers asked a good differentiated mix of directed rather than global questions. The use of higher-order questioning should be extended to provide opportunities for students to develop higher-order thinking skills.
- In all lessons very good links were made with previous learning. Students' experience and knowledge of local businesses were used effectively to clarify and explain concepts. This facilitated the integration of LCVP activities into lesson theory. It is advisable that students compile a résumé of their learning and skill development from each activity as an aide memoire.
- Students have access to an electronic folder of good quality support materials to assist them in the preparation of portfolio items. This is good practice. The very good student access to the computer room enables portfolio work to be completed under the direct supervision of teachers.
- A sample of students' homework journals and folders of coursework was reviewed as part of the evaluation. There is scope to regularly assign more homework so as to reinforce and apply the learning that has taken place in lessons. The use of past Leaving Certificate questions after the completion of portfolio items will also further integrate and embed student learning.
- The good formative feedback and guiding comments provided by teachers on draft editions of portfolio items gives students responsibility for improving the quality of their work.
- The students interviewed were very positive about their experiences in LCVP. In particular, students valued the importance of the research and communication skills gained, the assistance in choosing a career and the possibility of acquiring additional points for entry to colleges.

- Students are encouraged to aim for high academic standards. Student attainment levels are generally good. However, the reasons why some students do not fully complete their portfolio items which leads to an unsuccessful grade in certificate examinations should be investigated by the core team.

PROGRAMME PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- The LCVP has been an optional component of the school's curriculum since 1997. Access to the programme is open to all students who fulfil the necessary vocational subject grouping (VSG) requirements. There has been a consistently good uptake of the programme over the years. The programme attracts the full range of student abilities.
- Teachers with specialisms in Business, language and information technology are represented on the LCVP teaching team. Teachers wisely engage in appropriate continuing professional development.
- Appropriate guidance support is available to prospective students and their parents to assist them in making informed choices and guidance input and support are also provided in timetabled lessons for relevant elements of the course. It is advisable to include the guidance counsellor as part of the formal core team for planning purposes.
- Each year group participates in experiential learning activities such as an out-of-school visit to an enterprise, guest speakers' visits, work experience and an enterprise activity. The potential to further develop cross curricular links between the VSG and school activities such as trips and charitable events should be fully exploited. Work experience is managed very effectively with very good preparation and follow-up procedures by teachers and students on completion of the four-day work placement.
- Timetable provision is good. In line with the requirements of the programme a weekly ab-initio German lesson is provided for LCVP students who are not already studying a modern European language. The timetabling of study periods for non-LCVP students during link module lessons needs to be reviewed to ensure compliance with Circular M29/95, *Time in School*.
- LCVP students have a single period of Career Guidance and Computer Studies in fifth and sixth year. Good links are made between the LCVP programme and these lessons as link module topics being studied are often supported by subject-related work.
- Senior management's commitment to the successful implementation of the LCVP is reflected in the good provision of resources in terms of class period allocation, access to ICT facilities, the deployment of teachers with appropriate subject specialisms and the facilitation of team teaching.
- Very good links have been established and maintained with local businesses and community enterprises. It is evident that the local community is very supportive of the school and the LCVP initiatives.

PROGRAMME PLANNING, CO-ORDINATION AND EVALUATION

- The LCVP co-ordinator successfully organises administrative aspects of the programme and is part of the core teaching team. This regular contact with LCVP students effectively supports their progress.

- There is a good level of collaboration within the LCVP teaching team. Formal meetings of the team are facilitated and weekly informal meetings take place between link module teachers so as to plan weekly activities.
- A comprehensive and guiding subject plan for the LCVP is in place. The planning folder is a repository of LCVP support materials and source documents for communication with employers and parents. Of particular merit is the paper file of good resources and templates for each portfolio item and the scheme of work for each year group.
- The quality of the programme's provision is evaluated within the school by a comparison of students' attainment in certificate examinations with national norms, a SWOT analysis by link module teachers and the employers' performance reports. It is recommended that the views of students, parents and employers also inform evaluation of the programme.

The draft findings and recommendations arising out of this evaluation were discussed with the principal, deputy principal and relevant key staff 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 are satisfied that it is a fair and true reflection of the work carried out in our school.

We are delighted to have received such positive feedback in this report and look forward to further developing this programme in the future.

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 core team has implemented the first two recommendations by adapting schemes of work.

The third recommendation will be implemented over the course of the 2015/2016 academic year.