Programme Evaluation
Leaving Certificate Applied
REPORT

Summerhill College
Sligo, County Sligo
Roll number: 65170Q

Date of inspection: 11 November 2015
REPORT ON THE QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN LEAVING CERTIFICATE APPLIED

INFORMATION ON THE PROGRAMME EVALUATION

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MAIN FINDINGS

- The quality of learning and teaching was good or very good during the evaluation.
- Differentiation to cater for the range of students’ abilities was evident, with due attention paid to the development of literacy and numeracy.
- Student-teacher rapport was exemplary and attendance in the Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) programme is very good.
- School management effectively supports the on-going development of the programme in the school.
- Teachers are assigned appropriately to teach the programme and a number of these teachers are examiners of LCA for the State Examinations Commission (SEC).
- The LCA programme is well co-ordinated with some effective planning and informal evaluations undertaken.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

- While the promotion of literacy and numeracy was evident in lessons, the core LCA team should devise strategies to ensure that a consistent approach to assessing students’ progression in literacy and numeracy is undertaken by all teachers.
- The teachers of LCA should review their questioning strategies to ensure that questions are distributed to all students, and that students are given time to respond and answer aloud.
- The schemes of work of the various subject modules should be consistent and ensure that specific teaching methodologies linked to learning outcomes, literacy and numeracy initiatives and teacher reviews are in place within these schemes in order to enhance their use as working documents.
- A more formal approach to the internal evaluation of the LCA, one which would seek the views of students, parents and staff involved in LCA, should be established.
INTRODUCTION
Summerhill College is a voluntary secondary school for boys in Sligo town. It operates under the patronage of the Catholic Bishop of Elphin and has an enrolment of 863 students. The school offers the Junior Certificate Schools Programme (JCSP), Transition Year (TY), the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP) and LCA in addition to the established Junior and Leaving Certificates. At the time of the evaluation, the school was only providing Year Two of the LCA programme for seven students.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

• Throughout the evaluation, the quality of learning and teaching was good or very good.

• The preparation for lessons was good. Teachers used effective resources, including information and communication technology (ICT), that were often centred on students’ interests and experiences. Learning outcomes were shared with students at the outset and teachers used them to recapitulate the lesson. Students should now be encouraged and supported to use these learning outcomes to reflect on their own learning.

• Engaging and active methodologies were used in lessons. These included pair work, demonstrations, and individual tasks and projects. Teachers provided clear instructions and many cross-curricular links were explored. All lessons generally had a very good balance between teacher input and student activity.

• Literacy and numeracy skills were developed in a variety of ways throughout lessons. Keywords were often used and students were required regularly to cost and budget for tasks and use percentages and measurements in surveys. The core LCA team should now devise strategies and targets in order to assess students’ progression in literacy and numeracy so that there is a consistent approach in all modules. The effectiveness of any initiatives should be reviewed regularly by the core team.

• Questioning was the main assessment methodology used across the lessons observed. However, in most lessons questions were global leading to chorus responses or where only a small number of students would reply. In order to build students’ confidence and oracy skills, the teachers of LCA need to ensure that questions are distributed to all students and that students are given time to formulate an answer and encouraged to project their voice.

• Differentiation was a feature of all lessons and was grounded in the fact that the teachers know their students well as individuals. Students’ behaviour was exemplary throughout the entire evaluation. Student-teacher rapport was very positive and students were affirmed for their contributions.

• Attendance is monitored appropriately and attendance levels are consistently very high for all students. Students have access to the LCA notice board and most classrooms visited had LCA-specific coursework on the walls. All classes should strive to include LCA related material where possible, in order to use them as recall aids and discussion points for teachers and students.

• A variety of types of homework was set regularly and key assignments and tasks are monitored and stored safely. Written formative feedback was used in some lessons to support assessment for learning. Written feedback was best when it was short and identified both commendable work and areas for improvement. A balance of written formative feedback and oral feedback should be provided by all LCA teachers.
PROGRAMME PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- The school has offered LCA to students since 2001 and the programme has evolved over the years through review and evaluation. Senior management provide effective support and have a vision for the positioning of the programme in the school.

- Teachers are assigned appropriately and inducted to teach the programme with effective continuity evident. A number of teachers are examiners of LCA for the SEC and have benefited from this experience. All teachers are facilitated to engage with continuing professional development (CPD) on a regular basis.

- The guidance counsellor, pastoral care members, special educational needs co-ordinator, home-school-community liaison (HSCL) co-ordinator, programme co-ordinator and the school completion programme (SCP) co-ordinator all have lead roles in informing both parents and students of their options, including further education, available to them. An interview process follows from student application forms and contracts of conduct are signed. Students should be offered a choice in modules where resources allow so that their opinions are heard early and that they have a sense of ownership of the programme. The selection and enrolment practices for LCA should be clearly outlined in the schools’ admissions policy.

- Good links with the wider community for work placements are established. Students reported that they experience a variety of placements but the school should strive to allow four different placements over the two years. The LCA team should also examine ways to include parents and students in a more structured manner at the induction stage, once their child has begun the programme.

- The scheduling and timetabling of the programme are very good. Current students took French as a modern language in Year One and have begun the Irish module in Year Two. The school might consider providing the two vocational specialisms with two double periods rather than the current arrangement of one double and two single periods, should resources allow.

PROGRAMME PLANNING, CO-ORDINATION AND EVALUATION

- The LCA programme is well co-ordinated and a good written plan is in place. Subject plans are in place. However, in order to enhance their use as working documents, there is a need for the schemes of work to be more consistent and to ensure that specific teaching methodologies are linked to learning outcomes, and that any literacy and numeracy initiatives, and a teacher review section are in place within these schemes.

- A core team is in place and minutes of meetings are maintained. They should be facilitated to meet more frequently, if possible, and from these meetings time-bound action plans for any teaching and learning initiatives should be devised and shared with all LCA teachers.

- Some informal evaluations of the LCA programme have been undertaken by the school. It is recommended that a more formal approach be adopted to these evaluations, one that would include the views of students, parents and staff involved in LCA.
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 of the school 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.

Published December 2015
Appendix

SCHOOL RESPONSE TO THE REPORT

Submitted by the Board of Management
Area 1  Observations on the content of the inspection report

The Board of Management welcomes the positive comments on the quality of learning and teaching; good practice in differentiation and exemplary student-teacher rapport. We also welcome the positive comments on the ongoing development of the programme and teacher participation in the LCA state exams.

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

In order to further the very good work being carried out in the LCA programme, the Board of Management has requested the LCA Programme Coordinator to furnish it with a plan of action designed to build on the recommendations of the inspection report. Work on this plan along with its implementation is already at an advanced stage. For example:

- The LCA core team will strive to better link in with the whole school strategies in literacy and numeracy as developed within the Schools Self-evaluation process.
- CPD has been organized to upskill teachers on their questioning strategies.
- The development of a formal internal evaluation method is currently being explored and will be implemented.
- The school will encourage more collaboration between subject departments in order to enhance schemes of work.