Programme Evaluation
Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme
REPORT

Tullamore College
Riverside, Tullamore, Co. Offaly
Roll number: 72560U

Date of inspection: 23 March 2015
REPORT ON THE QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN THE LEAVING CERTIFICATE VOCATIONAL PROGRAMME

INFORMATION ON THE PROGRAMME EVALUATION

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MAIN FINDINGS

- Teachers were well prepared for their lessons, were working to detailed plans and made use of appropriate teaching strategies.
- Students were well challenged by their teachers, their response was very positive and it was evident that good quality learning was taking place.
- The curriculum implemented is broad and well balanced, work experience is well planned and the school maintains excellent links with the local business community.
- A very thorough and high quality syllabus-based plan has been prepared which covers all of the specific learning outcomes of the programme.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

- It is recommended that students are provided with a copy of the portfolio marking scheme and that ways to improve students’ performance on the written examination paper are addressed.
- It is recommended that the LCVP team raises awareness of the LCVP as an integrated cross-curricular programme and engages the support of teachers in general in implementing the programme.
INTRODUCTION

Tullamore College is a co-educational school operating under the auspices of the Laois and Offaly Education and Training Board. It currently caters for 555 students from a wide range of socio-economic backgrounds. The school participates in the Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) initiative, the action plan of the Department of Education and Skills for educational inclusion. The school offers the Transition Year and Leaving Certificate Applied programmes in addition to the Leaving Certificate (Established) at senior cycle.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

- Teachers were well prepared for their lessons and were working to detailed plans. Relevant resources, including ICT and worksheets, were prepared in advance.
- The teaching strategies used were in keeping with the aims and objectives of the LCVP and were appropriate to the topics being taught and to the needs of the students. Lessons were well structured and the learning intention was clear.
- These teaching strategies made good provision for a differentiated approach and individual students were supported as necessary.
- There was a high level of teacher-student interaction during lessons, there was a good rapport between teachers and students, and students were affirmed for their efforts.
- Students’ work is assessed on an ongoing basis and they receive appropriate feedback. It is commendable that an online system is used for processing drafts of work prepared for their portfolios. These items are assessed appropriately and returned to the students for further improvement as necessary.
- Students were well challenged by their teachers and their response was very positive. They worked well and engaged well in the learning process. The students expressed their appreciation of the active learning approach taken by teachers and of their enjoyment of many of the activities they engaged in.
- It was evident that good quality learning was taking place in the classroom and that students were benefitting significantly from participating in the programme. However, there is a need to focus on improving the outcomes for students in the link module examination. It is recommended that students are provided with a copy of the portfolio marking scheme at an early date and assisted in using this to evaluate and improve their portfolio work. The teaching team should also consider ways to improve outcomes for students on the written examination paper by analysing students’ performance and using the information gained to implement targeted improvements.

PROGRAMME PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- Teaching staff are appropriately assigned to the programme. The co-ordinator and the link module teachers have all attended LCVP in-service courses.
- Currently, a small and specific cohort of students follows the programme. This facilitates implementation of the programme in a manner that provides specific support for these students. It is recommended that this approach be monitored to ensure that these students gain the maximum benefit from following the LCVP and that the programme continues to meet their needs. Consideration should also be given to whether the benefits of the LCVP could be extended to the wider cohort of students.
• The LCVP curriculum, as implemented, is broad and well balanced, and it provides students with a variety of learning experiences which, in turn, leads to a very good level of choice of activities for students to include in their portfolios. Assessment procedures are in line with the aims and objectives of the programme.

• Work experience is well planned and students are well prepared in advance. As placements occur out of term time, it is recommended that procedures for seeking support, should the need arise, by both students and employers are documented and shared.

• An appropriate level of contact is maintained with parents and they are kept informed of upcoming activities and events.

• The school maintains excellent links with the local business community and these contacts are used to provide high quality learning experiences for students. These experiences include work experience provision, mentoring, curriculum vitae preparation, teamwork, motivation, and interview training and preparation.

PROGRAMME PLANNING, CO-ORDINATION AND EVALUATION

• A very thorough and high quality detailed plan has been prepared for implementing the LCVP. This plan is syllabus based and covers all of the specific learning outcomes of the programme. The plan also includes a schedule for the delivery of the various topics over the two years of senior cycle. It is recommended that, as topics are covered, the date of completion is recorded in the schedule.

• Implementation of the programme is ably managed by the LCVP co-ordinator, with support from a core team of link module teachers, all of whom are teachers of business subjects, along with language teachers, the school’s programme co-ordinator and the guidance counsellor. The core team meets twice a year to review developments and plan for upcoming events.

• It is suggested that the role of the guidance counsellor in supporting students following the programme be enhanced through a greater level of direct input to the career investigation, work experience and curriculum vitae preparation.

• In order to promote the programme, it is recommended that the LCVP team raises awareness, at whole-school level, of the LCVP as an integrated cross-curricular programme. This can be achieved through briefing teachers regarding the aims and objectives of the LCVP and the centrality of a cross-curricular approach to the success of students. The LCVP team should explore and document, with all subject departments, the links between their subjects and the link modules curriculum. Planning for the programme can then be extended to include concrete steps to implement the identified cross-curricular links, for example by selecting appropriate enterprise and other activities. Subject teachers can be encouraged to highlight these elements of their subjects for the benefit of the LCVP students in their lessons.

• It is commendable that the programme is reviewed annually. It is recommended that the review process be extended to include students and their parents, along with work experience providers, in order to get a better understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the programme as implemented in the school.
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; a response was not received from the board.