Programme Evaluation
Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme

REPORT

Loreto College,
Crumlin Road, Crumlin,
Dublin 12.
Roll Number: 60800V

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INTRODUCTION

This report has been written following an evaluation of the LCVP in Loreto College, Crumlin. It presents the findings of the evaluation and makes recommendations for the further development of the programme in the school. During the evaluation, the inspector held meetings with the school principal, a core group of teachers and with a small group of students, including past students who had recently completed the programme. The evaluation was conducted over two days during which the inspector liaised extensively with the programme co-ordinator and visited classrooms to observe teaching and learning. The inspector provided oral feedback to teachers on lessons observed. The inspector also examined students’ work and reviewed relevant documentation pertaining to the programme, as well as teachers’ written preparation. The outcomes of the evaluation were discussed with the school principal, the programme co-ordinator and the core team at the end of the evaluation.

At the time of the evaluation, Loreto College, Crumlin, had a student enrolment of 473 girls. The school offers a range of subjects and programmes to meet the needs of its cohort of students: the Junior Certificate, the Junior Certificate School Programme (JCSP), the Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA), the established Leaving Certificate and the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP). The inclusion of the LCVP, a programme designed to enhance the vocational dimension of the established Leaving Certificate, on the curriculum helps to achieve the school’s objectives. The school has offered the LCVP since 1995, so the programme has a long established tradition in its senior cycle curriculum with a participation of approximately forty percent of the total senior cycle student cohort every year. The board of management was given an opportunity to comment in writing on the findings and recommendations of the evaluation, and the response of the board will be found in the appendix to this report.

1 QUALITY OF PROGRAMME ORGANISATION

1.1 Whole school support

Very effective delivery of all aspects of the programme was evident in Loreto College, Crumlin. The programme enjoys great support and recognition in the school and there is whole-school acknowledgement of student achievement at school prize giving, where participating sixth-year students receive a LCVP Certificate of Completion. The LCVP class groups are recognised for the many worthy initiatives and activities in which students engage. The profile of school is raised in the local area due to positive coverage of LCVP activities in local media and in the community.

The LCVP, as implemented in the school, is an extremely successful programme and contributes greatly to the education of students. Students are very positive about the programme which offers them a range of educational experiences, and students develop skills and competencies which prepare them well for further studies and for the work place. The programme is tailored to the needs of the particular cohort of students in any given year and presents a truly enhanced Leaving Certificate for students. There was considerable evidence to support the view that participation in the programme has been outstandingly effective in enhancing students’ skills and competence, in
contributing to their personal development and self-confidence and in encouraging student participation in further education.

1.2 Resources

The most important resource for the success of the LCVP is the team of teachers made available to implement the programme. A wealth of knowledge and expertise has been developed in the LCVP team over the many years of the school’s participation in delivery of the programme. Members of the LCVP core team have a complementary range of skills and are from different subject backgrounds, with expertise in Business, Guidance, modern languages and information and communication technologies (ICT). Team members have participated in continuing professional development (CPD), have had involvement in the delivery of CPD and been involved in the correction of the Link Modules assessment in certificate examinations. The enthusiasm of the LCVP co-ordinators and the Link Modules’ teachers engenders a reciprocal commitment and enthusiasm on the part of the students.

Senior management also encourages new teachers to get involved in the implementation of subjects and programmes, as appropriate. A template is circulated by school management to individual teachers to allow them to express interest and to indicate the skills and qualities they could bring to subjects and programmes. This is a praiseworthy approach, and at the time of the evaluation, teachers new to the school and to the profession were benefiting from working closely with experienced teachers in the area.

Time allocation to the programme is very good. Currently, three periods are assigned to the Link Modules in fifth year, one double period and one single period. The allocation of a double period at the end of a day serves to accommodate visits out, guest speakers and activities that may continue after the class has finished. This is very good practice. In sixth year, one double period is allocated. However, the periods for the Link Modules are currently aligned on the timetable with a double lesson for Physical Education (PE), denying LCVP students access to PE. This should be avoided, and senior management should review this arrangement for coming years.

The integration of ICT into programme implementation is exemplary. The LCVP team of teachers has considerable expertise in ICT. Both a computer room and standard classroom are timetabled simultaneously for the class groups to allow for the variety of activities and for ready access to computers. The additional allocation received for the implementation of the programme is deployed to optimise subject range and choice at senior cycle and to provide co-ordination time. The programme co-ordinator for the school liaises closely with the LCVP co-ordinator and also has responsibility for the other programmes available; JCSP, TY and LCA.

Both co-ordinators are timetabled for both double periods, either to teach the Link Modules or for co-ordination time. This allows for team teaching and sharing of expertise. It also means that one co-ordinator can be engaged with LCVP activities outside of the school while the other teaches.

1.3 Student selection and support

Access to the programme is open to those students who fulfill the programme requirements of having the appropriate subjects for the vocational subject groupings (VSGs) and of pursuing the study of a modern language for Leaving Certificate. Most students pursue French as a modern European language to Leaving Certificate, which fulfils the language requirement for the LCVP.

All third-year and TY students engage in subject seminars which helps students make informed subject choices. When students have made their subject choices for fifth year, all those eligible for
the LCVP, i.e. studying French and relevant subjects from the VSG groupings, receive an application form and a letter informing them of their eligibility and of the criteria for selection. The student application form is self-evaluative in nature and begins the process of learning in line with programme direction thereby ensuring commitment to the achievement of programme objectives from the start. The use of the student evaluation form on completion of the programme closes the self-evaluation circle. These are examples of very good practice.

When the number of applicants exceeds the number of places available, successful applicants are selected on the basis of behaviour and co-operation, commitment to studies, ability to work as part of a team, ability to work independently, attendance and punctuality.

In relation to student support, the LCVP team has developed templates and checklists to guide students through their portfolio items. When building groups for enterprise activities, teachers paid attention to creating groups which encompassed diversity of ability, culture and language. The pairing of Business and non-Business students was also factored in. These are very good practices which support students in their learning.

Not all students opt for TY and some students continue directly on to fifth year. The LCVP allows students to access learning and skills they may have acquired through TY. Students who have completed the TY programme view the LCVP as an extension of that programme.

1.4 Home-school links

Recently, presentations on subjects and programmes at incoming fifth year parents’ evenings have been replaced with subject seminars for students. Students are given written information and encouraged to discuss the LCVP option with their parents. The annual Open Day includes a display on the LCVP. Programme co-ordinators and the home-school-community liaison (HSCL) co-ordinator are available to meet with parents, if required. Parents must sign the student application form and permission form before students can participate in the programme.

Reporting on student progress throughout the school year is thorough, regular and based on formative ongoing assessment of students.

2 Quality of Programme Planning and Co-ordination

2.1 Planning

The quality of the programme documentation developed is very high. The LCVP plan opens with the school’s mission statement which is then explicitly linked to the aims and objectives of the programme. This is commendable. The plan also includes detailed schemes of work in terms of themes and topics to be covered each term for each year group. The range of resources to be deployed is also listed and the LCVP materials, such as review documents and checklists, are included. A range of templates and forms has been developed by the co-ordinators. These include a programme application form, student profile form and a student evaluation form. A checklist of all relevant policy documents is also referenced in the LCVP plan.

Based on models of best practice, team meetings are facilitated on a weekly basis. The core LCVP team liaises on an ongoing basis. There are minutes of meetings, with an agenda for action arising out of each meeting and a member of the team designated to pursue that action. In this way, it is clear that planning is action-oriented and focuses on concrete outcomes following deliberations.
and discussions. The availability of an office for co-ordination has led to the development of systematic recording and storing of resources and careful maintenance of student files and profiles.

When the programme was first introduced, a staff working group examined the programme and reported to staff on its merits. Since its introduction, staff receive regular inputs and updates at staff meetings, keeping them informed of student progress within the programme and LCVP related activities.

2.2 Co-ordination

The implementation of the programme in Loreto Crumlin is characterised by efficient organisation. The co-ordination time made available by school management ensures optimal delivery of the programme. The very valuable time is effectively used for reflection and therefore promotes self-review. Senior management is very aware of this and recognises that this time is well utilised. For example, the LCVP teachers use the recorded interview, one of the optional portfolio items chosen by students, to listen to students’ views and to evaluate student experience of the programme.

Programme delivery is also characterised by innovation and a developmental approach is adopted by the LCVP team. Teachers, in their approach, facilitate student learning and the development of students’ innate qualities and skills. Students expressed great satisfaction with the programme and demonstrate full participation and commitment. Students’ reasons for choosing LCVP include building on their self-confidence, the acquisition of skills, the positive, fun learning experiences, insights into the world of work, as well as the possibility of acquiring additional points for entry to courses and colleges.

The co-ordination of the LCVP involves an extensive number of activities. These include a range of administrational, educational and organisational duties, including setting up and carrying out recorded interviews for student portfolios, finding suitable and meaningful work placements and evaluating the programme within the school. Examination of co-ordination records and planning documentation shows the efficiency and effectiveness with which the LCVP is co-ordinated.

2.3 Curriculum

The LCVP curriculum in Loreto College, Crumlin promotes initiative and innovation. The focus on self-directed learning is commendable and each year, students make their own choice of entrepreneurs; for example, this year students were examining case studies of women in business. The focus and nature of the enterprise activity is also determined by the students from year to year. The enterprise activities which students have engaged in have been highly successful, innovative and have proven to be a life-changing experience for some students. This is highly commendable. Successful activities have raised school morale and pride. In interaction with the inspector, students emphasised the extent of personal development through their participation in enterprise activities and how they learn to identify the qualities and skills they bring to an enterprise.

The school’s links with trans-national and international enterprise initiatives is also impressive. The school has links with the Northern Ireland (NI) enterprise initiative, Dissolving Boundaries and the Asia Europe Classroom, all of which promote social awareness and personal development among students. The range of enterprise activities and the variety of active learning account for this, as well as the links created with other subjects. Cross-curricular links are created through such enterprise activities which is an integral part of the school’s LCVP programme. Teachers assist students in completion of their enterprise activity as required, for example, in relation to the
activity Build a Bridge to Haiti, the teachers of Art helped students with materials and construction of the bridge, while the teachers of Geography supplied information and maps for the student teams. As well as providing students with opportunities for teamwork, these activities provide the basis for preparing reports, diaries and other material for their personal portfolios. On conclusion of each activity, a debriefing takes place whereby the students evaluate their own and their group performance and give feedback to their teachers. During the course of the evaluation, students highlighted aspects of their activities which they liked; the active learning, working in pairs and groups, conducting research, writing-up reports, arranging visits-in from entrepreneurs and participating in the video links with their partner school in NI.

Work experience is a component of the programme which students find particularly useful. Preparation of the work placement helps students develop their skills and confidence in writing and communicating. Workplace skills and responsibilities of employers and employees as well as safety in the workplace and statutory regulations are examined in lessons as part of student preparation. This is appropriate and effective. The role and contribution of the guidance counsellor are pivotal in completion of students’ preparation for work and career investigation.

3 QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN THE LINK MODULES

3.1 Planning and preparation

Thorough preparation in advance of lessons ensured that there was good structure and pace to lessons observed. Lessons opened with an introduction to the topic by the teacher which ensured clarity of understanding and direction. The content of the sixth-year lesson was appropriate to the time of the year, focusing on the preparation of the case study, which was further helped by advance preparation of worksheets and guidance to students. The provision of teacher-based rooms facilitates the integration of a range of resources, including ICT. Students also have access to the computer room and the high quality of student portfolio preparation reflects this. Where there was not ready access to ICT in a pre-fabricated classroom used, good preparation on the part of the teacher replaced the need for such access. The good lesson structure ensured a balance between teacher input and student activity.

3.2 Learning and teaching

Lessons were characterised by clarity of direction and by sharing of lesson objectives. Teachers drew on previous knowledge of students, sought definitions and clarifications from students and provided clear explanation, when required. Student responses were affirmed, refined and questions were two-way, both from teachers and from students. In response to student questioning in relation to Business terminology, clear definitions were provided by the teachers, as well as very concrete explanations of specialist vocabulary. The teachers in drawing responses together focused on aspects which the students found most challenging.

A good work ethic prevailed and a purposeful learning environment was effectively created and sustained both by teacher actions and by the attractive use of displays and posters to engage students. Teacher presentation stimulated interest, through interrogating visuals, through the use of cards and charts and through ICT. When assigned tasks, the students applied themselves and were active in their participation. Classroom lay-out was conducive to group work and discussion. Teachers’ approaches were systematic and interactive. The calm manner in which lessons were managed served to help students and resulted in effective learning.
In interaction with the inspector, students demonstrated a thorough knowledge and understanding of concepts. In addition, students could apply their knowledge and analyse correctly. Group work was effectively used in some lessons and the learning activity provided opportunities for individual student development as well as co-operative learning skills. In lessons, active learning methodologies were deployed and students engaged with a range of tasks. Such active participation enabled students to gain knowledge and skills that will help them effectively address examination tasks and questions. Students demonstrated a thorough knowledge and understanding of concepts and obtain consistent excellent attainment in certificate examinations.

3.3 Assessment

Homework was assigned at the end of each lesson. Homework assignments tested retention of what was covered in lesson, allowed for independent research and ensured each learner recapitulates on lesson content. A useful revision worksheet was provided at the end of topics. Students indicated their appreciation of the system of continuous assessment which forms part of the way LCVP works. Reports are sent home regularly to parents. Students demonstrated good organisational and time-management skills, as well as the skills of reporting and communicating. The fact that each student has a memory key for portfolio items and receives reminder texts regarding deadlines for completion of work is effective and motivating.

LCVP students of Loreto College, Crumlin have been recipients of the Student Enterprise Awards of the Dublin City Enterprise Board in 2008 and received a Special Merit Award in the national Student Awards of the City and County Enterprise Boards in the same year. The Loreto College Crumlin website project Moving to Crumlin featured in a short educational video shown at LCVP conferences and at international education conferences. This further illustrates the quality of the developmental and educational provision.

4 SUMMARY OF STRENGTHS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT

The following are the main strengths identified in the evaluation:

- The LCVP as implemented in Loreto College, Crumlin is an extremely successful programme and contributes greatly to the education of students.
- Time allocation to the programme is very good.
- The integration of ICT into programme implementation is exemplary.
- The quality of the programme documentation developed is very high.
- The implementation of the programme in Loreto Crumlin is characterised by efficient organisation and self review.
- The enterprise activities in which students have engaged have been highly successful and innovative.
- Thorough preparation in advance of lessons ensured that there was good structure and pace to lessons observed.
- Teachers’ approaches were systematic, interactive and the calm manner in which lessons were managed served to help students and resulted in effective learning.
- In lessons, active learning methodologies were deployed and students engaged with a range of tasks and applied themselves with diligence to tasks assigned.
- The system of continuous assessment which forms part of the way LCVP works is motivating for students and is effective.
• Students demonstrated a thorough knowledge and understanding of concepts and obtain consistent excellent attainment in certificate examinations.

As a means of building on these strengths the following key recommendation is made:

• The timetabling of the periods for the Link Modules which are currently aligned on the timetable with a double lesson for Physical Education (PE) should be reviewed.

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Appendix

School response to the report

Submitted by the Board of Management

Area 1: Observations on the content of the inspection report

We found the Report very positive and affirming.

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 time-table issue will be reviewed when arrangements are being made for 2011/12.