

**An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna**

**Department of Education and Skills**

**Programme Evaluation  
Leaving Certificate Applied  
REPORT**

**Beara Community School  
Castletownbere, County Cork  
Roll Number: 91387Q**

**Date of inspection: 21 April 2010**



**AN ROINN OIDEACHAIS  
AGUS SCILEANNA | DEPARTMENT  
OF EDUCATION  
AND SKILLS**

# **EVALUATION OF THE LEAVING CERTIFICATE APPLIED**

## **INTRODUCTION**

This report has been written following an evaluation of the Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) programme in Beara Community School. 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. 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 deputy principal and the programme co-ordinator at the end of the evaluation period. 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.

Beara Community School is the sole provider of post-primary education in the Beara peninsula in West Cork. The school offers the full range of programmes and in this manner strives to meet the needs of its students. The Junior Certificate and the Junior Certificate School Programme (JCSP) are offered in junior cycle. The Transition Year (TY) programme, the established Leaving Certificate, the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP) and the LCA are offered at senior cycle.

LCA has been a component of the optional curricular programmes in Beara Community School since 2001. The school offers an open choice of programmes at senior cycle. This is good practice. Currently there is no sixth-year LCA class group because the students entering fifth year in 2008 did not opt to participate in the programme.

## **1 QUALITY OF PROGRAMME ORGANISATION**

### **1.1 Whole school support**

The LCA programme receives significant support from school management in Beara Community School. School management is committed to the programme and actively supports its organisation and delivery. Both the principal and deputy-principal are aware of the value of LCA in terms of the educational, social and personal development of the students. An LCA co-ordinator plans and manages the day-to-day running of the programme and there is significant cohesion and communication between the co-ordinator and school management. Whole-staff understanding of the operation of the LCA in the school is facilitated through discussion at staff meetings, as necessary.

It is very beneficial that there is a structured induction process in place for teachers who are new to the LCA programme. These teachers meet with the co-ordinator to discuss the organisation of the programme in the school. Administration procedures, including those relating to the recording of assessment credits are clarified and teachers receive the appropriate module descriptor and resources. In addition, the teaching team attends a planning meeting at the beginning of each year. Personnel, who are teaching particular modules for the first time, are encouraged to liaise with teachers who are experienced in teaching those modules.

## **1.2 Resources**

Staff is appropriately assigned to teach LCA. Only teachers who have first expressed an interest in being involved are allocated to the teaching of LCA modules. The various elements of the programme, and the time allocation for their delivery, are appropriate in almost all instances. However, the time allocation for Irish is slightly below that recommended for the completion of the two modules in one year. It is recommended that this is addressed in future timetabling. Lessons in all courses are well spread across the teaching week. The instruction time provided for students is in excess of the required twenty-eight hours per week.

Information and communication technology (ICT) is used effectively in both organising and implementing the programme. Teachers and students also have access to a number of laptop computers, including those situated in one specific classroom. Data projectors and laptop computers are also available in subject-based rooms. The provision of a dedicated LCA classroom would facilitate the enhanced integration of ICT into teaching and learning in addition to providing a dedicated space for displaying students' work. It is recommended that the school management examines the feasibility of providing an LCA classroom within available resources.

The principal and deputy-principal are aware of the benefits to LCA teachers of participating in appropriate continuing professional development (CPD) and teachers are encouraged and facilitated to engage in such training. Management has planned in-service training on a whole-school approach to developing a literacy and numeracy policy. This will take place at the beginning of the 2010-2011 academic year. This is positive.

## **1.3 Student selection and support**

The school has devised specific criteria for selecting students for participation in LCA. This is positive as these criteria are in line with the objectives of the programme. Students who would benefit from completing the LCA are targeted and generally avail of the programme. Comprehensive advice is given to parents. The school has developed written documentation to assist in the dissemination of information concerning LCA. Parents receive the school's LCA brochure and are given accurate and appropriate information regarding LCA at the school's meeting for the parents of third-year and fourth-year students. In addition, the co-ordinator and other school personnel are available for consultation. Parents of students, for whom participation in the programme is deemed to be beneficial, and parents of students who have elected to participate in LCA, are invited to meet the principal and guidance counselor on an individual basis. This is beneficial as it helps parents and students make informed decisions with regard to programme selection for senior cycle. It is a pre-requisite of transfer into any senior cycle programme that the parents of the students sign the curricular option form.

Students are given precise information regarding LCA. The guidance provided for students is appropriate. On entering LCA, the students have an induction morning in which all issues pertaining to complete participation in LCA, including the attendance requirement, are clarified. The school is encouraged to follow-up on its stated intention of further developing the school's LCA induction programme. The use of team-building exercises might be considered, as these activities help to develop and consolidate good relationships among the students and initiate the development of a common understanding and commitment to LCA.

There are good supports in place for students with additional needs who are completing the LCA programme. Links with the special educational needs department are very strong. Significant involvement of the teaching personnel from the special educational needs department facilitates the delivery of the curriculum in a manner which meets the needs of individual students. The LCA co-ordinator is also a learning-support teacher and a resource teacher is also timetabled for English and Communications. These teachers therefore have an understanding of the needs of the students with additional needs and facilitate the sharing of pertinent information regarding individual students with the teaching team. This is positive. A special-needs assistant is available to assist the students when appropriate. A member of the special educational needs department liaises with the teachers at the LCA team meeting. This is very good practice.

#### **1.4 Home-school links**

There are regular and effective lines of communication in place between the school and the parents of LCA students. The co-ordinator sends frequent letters home regarding the range of activities involving LCA students and maintains telephone contact as necessary. Parents receive meaningful feedback on students' progress through attendance at the annual parent-teacher meeting and by means of reports, which are sent home at mid-term, Christmas, Easter and at the end of the summer term. As previously mentioned, parents are made aware of the nature and purpose of LCA in advance of their son's or daughter's entry into the programme. Building on this good practice, it is recommended that, following students' entry into LCA, an information evening is held in early September to clarify any issues that parents might have and to consolidate their understanding of the various aspects and requirements of the programme. The LCA programme is an important vehicle in fostering and maintaining strong links between the school and the local community. Work experience has a significant role in this regard.

## **2 QUALITY OF PROGRAMME PLANNING AND CO-ORDINATION**

### **2.1 Planning**

A good level of planning takes place in Beara Community School. Collaborative planning facilitates the successful implementation of the LCA programme. The LCA planning team, comprising the principal, deputy principal, LCA co-ordinator and the guidance counselor, meet at the end of each academic year to plan for the implementation of the programme for the next year. Input from the teaching team is provided by the co-ordinator. This approach ensures that a whole-team approach to planning for LCA takes place. Minutes of the annual planning meetings for the full team of LCA teachers are kept, as are minutes of other meetings with focus groups of teachers. This collaborative approach to planning is good practice. However, during this academic year it was not possible to organise regular meetings of the core team due to staffing constraints. The school is strongly encouraged to re-instate these meetings as soon as it is practicable.

A current written programme plan has been devised in accordance with good practice. The plan includes a section highlighting the areas of integration with other subjects and this is fundamental to ensuring effective cross-curricular integration. Building on the good work done in identifying the topics which are common to a number of subject areas, a joint approach to the teaching of these areas should be devised among the teachers. This would ensure consistency and would more easily facilitate students in consolidating their learning. Plans for each of the modules have also been developed. However, the written plan outlines the work for one year of the programme only. Building on the good work already done, it is recommended that the written plan

encompasses the programme of work for the two years. This is important for the successful implementation of the programme. The two-year written plan would assist each member of the teaching team in further developing a complete understanding of the work undertaken in each course, and of the overall programme.

There is clear evidence that cross-curricular planning takes place in the completion of students' tasks. For example, the general education task was a group task and involved the organisation and implementation of a sports day for first-year students. To obtain funding for the prizes, the students organised a teacher versus student five-a-side football match. Preparation for this task took place in a number of different lessons. In mathematics lessons, the students learned how to measure sprint lengths and then completed pie charts and bar charts illustrating students' participation in the sports activities. In English and Communications lessons, students prepared their written accounts of this task. In art lessons, students designed posters to advertise the sports day and in leisure and recreation lessons, students discussed and made decisions regarding the activities that would take place, and prepared the record sheets. This co-ordinated, cross-curricular approach to task completion is very good practice and is in line with the underlying philosophy of the programme.

## **2.2 Co-ordination**

The co-ordination of the programme is very good. There is clear evidence that the energy, enthusiasm and organisation of the co-ordination personnel clearly contributes to the delivery of a successful programme. A very well-organised planning folder has been developed to assist in the co-ordination of LCA. Resources and facilities are available so that co-ordination duties can be carried out effectively. The programme co-ordinator has timetabled contact with the programme class group and this facilitates on-going communication and a good rapport with the students. This is good practice.

Communication between the co-ordination personnel, the teaching team and the principal is effective. Formal communication is complemented by on-going informal contact. A specific notice board is maintained to disseminate programme information to teachers. It also contains the calendar and templates for key assignments, module and course planners, and the form for assigning credits.

## **2.3 Curriculum**

The programme curriculum is broad and offers students a diverse range of learning situations. The school complies with Department of Education and Skills' guidelines and circulars regarding the programme. The needs, interests and abilities of students are prioritised in the curricular design and implementation. Students' desires, with regard to the selection of the vocational specialisms and elective modules, are taken into account when the curriculum is being devised. This is good practice.

Students undertake work experience for one day each week and thus complete four modules of work experience over the two years of the programme. There is a good level of communication with employers prior to, during and after students' work experience. Students themselves arrange their own work placements with support from the co-ordinator, who has developed links with a range of employers in the area and organises the work placements for the students who are unable to find their own work experience. It is positive that students arrange their own work experience, as it helps students prepare for their working lives after school. Debriefing sessions occur at intervals throughout the work placements. Each week, students complete their work experience

diaries, and reports are completed at the end of each month. This is good practice as such a review of students' experiences ensures that maximum benefits are obtained from their work placements.

Good opportunities are provided to students to develop ICT skills. Students' use of ICT in LCA takes place in the computer room. Access to the computer room for four periods per week in fifth year provides for the completion of the *introduction to the information and communication technology* course. In addition to the learning undertaken during this course, students have also developed skills in using digital cameras and in the making video clips.

Students expressed satisfaction with their choice of LCA in the school and stated that they were enjoying the experience. Students articulated particular satisfaction with their learning experiences in engineering, graphics and construction studies, and leisure and recreation modules, and with activities such as the trip to a local farm.

### **3 QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING**

#### **3.1 Planning and preparation**

The taught programme reflects the school's plan for LCA. Planning and preparation for the lessons observed was very good. Teachers had carefully planned for the delivery of their lessons within their overall plan for the module. Resources were used very effectively and included PowerPoint presentations, a short video clip, handouts and equipment. In the lessons observed, very good practice was observed as clear tasks had been planned and the students were engaged actively in their achievement.

#### **3.2 Learning and teaching**

The quality of teaching and learning was good, and in some instances it was very good. Lessons were well structured and the pace was appropriate to students' abilities. Students were appropriately challenged. These challenges included learning new practical skills, enhancing literacy through, for example the learning of subject-specific terminology, further developing numeracy skills, and understanding of social issues. In all instances, lesson aims were outlined at the outset of the lesson. However, it is recommended that objectives be outlined in the form of intended learning outcomes. These learning outcomes could then be revisited during the recapitulation stage of the lesson to ascertain students' learning. This strategy would also assist students in independently reviewing their own learning during the lesson.

A range of teaching methodologies was used effectively. These included whole-class discussion, questioning, student practical work and written activities. In some lessons, very good use of ICT was observed at the outset to set the scene for the lesson, to provide visual images and to set down the main points. Good linkage was employed with previous lessons thus providing continuity for students. In most lessons, questioning was used effectively, with some questions being directed to individual students to involve them in the lessons and to ascertain their level of understanding of the material.

A number of strategies concentrating on enhancing students' literacy was observed in the majority of lessons. Word banks had been devised in some lessons. This is positive. The opportunity to reinforce and further develop students' literacy, including oral communication which was observed in some instances, should be undertaken in all lessons. Consideration should

be given to the use of strategies such as role play, as an addition to further developing students' oral communication skills. These strategies also provide opportunities to enhance the personal and social skills of the students. To further support the enhancement of literacy skills, it is recommended that students have access to a class set of dictionaries in all lessons. They should be strongly encouraged to use them individually, as needed.

There was less emphasis placed on the development of students' numeracy skills in lessons. Teaching methodologies that assisted in promoting students' numeracy skills and enhancing their understanding were observed in just one lesson. The development and use of initiatives that would place an emphasis on the development of students' numeracy is recommended. Resources developed by the Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST), formerly the Second Level Support Service (SLSS), and which are available on the website, [www.pdst.ie](http://www.pdst.ie), might prove useful in this regard. Resources developed by the *Project Maths* team might also be beneficial.

Learning took place in a pleasant and positive atmosphere. Classroom management was effective and a very good teacher-student rapport pertained. Students were engaged throughout the lessons observed. Students were affirmed and encouraged for their efforts and contributions, and when necessary teachers supported students as they developed their answers.

Practical lessons observed were very well organised. In one lesson, ICT was very effectively used to demonstrate the various pieces of soldering equipment and a short video clip was very helpful in clearly showing the process of soldering to the students. The development of students' understanding of the subject terminology was seamlessly linked into this practical lesson through completion of a work sheet and through questioning. This is very good practice.

In another lesson observed there was clear evidence of learning which supported the personal and social development of the students. Students were encouraged to share their opinions and discuss aspects of alcohol abuse. In other lessons, for example in the practical lessons observed, students' ability to work together was facilitated and enhanced.

The quality of students' learning and understanding was reflected in their responses to questions. In general, it was clear from the students' answering and from their readiness to ask pertinent questions, that a good level of learning was taking place. The students demonstrated good practical skills and an ability to work independently and together with the support of the teacher and in some instances with the assistance of the special-needs assistant. The application by students' of their learning, to the completion of key assignments and tasks, gave further indications of successful learning.

### **3.3 Assessment**

A range of assessment modes is regularly used to assess students' competence and progress. These include key assignments and tasks, which are pre-requisites of the LCA, in addition to written work, practical work, artwork and questioning in class. Overall, the standard of work in students' key assignments was good. Students' interests were used in many instances to provide a focus for their tasks, thus facilitating engagement in the work.

There is systematic recording of students' attendance. Procedures have been developed to help reduce non-attendance and students are made aware of the implications of non-attendance on the achievement of module credits. This is positive. The school compares students' level of attainment in the LCA certificate examination against national averages. This monitoring of

students' attainment is very positive. The students from Beara Community School have performed very well in the certificate examinations.

#### **4 SUMMARY OF STRENGTHS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT**

The following are the main strengths identified in the evaluation:

- Whole-school support for the programme is very good.
- Students are selected for entry into LCA based on appropriate criteria.
- ICT is used effectively in both organising and implementing the programme.
- Students' work illustrates a good level of ICT skills.
- The curriculum is appropriately delivered and decisions regarding the optional elements of the courses take account of students' interests.
- The co-ordinated, cross-curricular approach to task completion is very good practice and is in line with the underlying philosophy of the programme.
- The co-ordination of the programme is very good.
- The teaching and learning was good, and in some instances very good.
- Very good use of ICT was observed in some lessons.
- The monitoring of students' attainment in certificate examinations is good practice.

As a means of building on these strengths the following key recommendations are made:

- It is recommended that an information evening should be held in early September to clarify any issues parents might have and consolidate their understanding of the various aspects and requirements of the programme.
- It is recommended that the written LCA plan should encompass the programme of work for the full duration of the programme.
- Lesson objectives should be outlined in the form of intended learning outcomes and these should be revisited during the recapitulation stage of each lesson to ascertain students' learning.