An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

Programme Evaluation
Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme
REPORT

St. Patrick’s College
Lacken Cross, Co. Mayo
Roll Number: 72130S

Date of inspection: 11 October 2010
EVALUATION OF THE LCVP

INTRODUCTION

This report has been written following an evaluation of the LCVP in St. Patrick’s College, Lacken Cross. 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, the coordinator and with a small group of students. The evaluation was conducted over one day during which the inspector liaised extensively with the programme coordinator and visited classrooms to observe teaching and learning. The inspector provided oral feedback to the teacher on the lesson observed. The inspector also examined students’ work and reviewed relevant documentation pertaining to the programme. The outcomes of the evaluation were discussed with the school principal and the programme coordinator following 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.

St. Patrick’s College is a co-educational school with an enrolment of 196 students. The school is within the responsibility of Co. Mayo Education Committee. Students are offered the Junior Certificate programme at junior cycle, the Transition Year (TY), Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP) and Leaving Certificate (LC) programme at senior cycle.

1 QUALITY OF PROGRAMME ORGANISATION

1.1 Whole school support

In St. Patrick’s College the LCVP has been on the senior cycle curriculum since 1997. In the current academic year there is no Leaving Certificate Year One class group as the Transition Year programme was introduced into the school in September 2010 and all fourth year students are taking the programme. There is one class group in sixth year following the LCVP and they form a distinct group for link module lessons and all other subjects.

Responsibility for implementing the LCVP is assigned to a member of staff as part of the school’s programme co-ordinator post duties. The LCVP is well coordinated and this has contributed significantly to its success despite a number of factors that have limited the implementation of the programme as envisaged in the syllabus. However, the recently appointed school principal has expressed a strong commitment to promote and support the programme further and to strengthen its position in the school’s curriculum.

The LCVP co-ordinator, who holds a degree qualification in English, teaches the link modules and is assisted by the guidance counsellor in the delivery of the careers investigation, in the preparation of the recorded interview and in the completion of portfolio items. To build on this collaboration it is recommended that a formal LCVP core team is put in place to advance the further development and implementation of the programme in the school and to provide a consolidated team approach to planning. It is also recommended that a Business teacher is included on the LCVP teaching team so that students have access to specialist expertise in the area of business which is central to all areas of the LCVP curriculum. School management is supportive of teachers’ professional development and the co-ordinators’ engagement with LCVP in-service is commended. In the future members of the core team should be extended the
Participation in the programme is restricted to those students who meet with the Vocational Subject Groupings (VSGs) requirements and who study French to Leaving Certificate level. These criteria preclude access to the LCVP for some students. It is recommended that the programme’s admissions criteria be reviewed so that there is open access to LCVP for all students who have the appropriate VSGs.

The current sixth-year LCVP class group is assigned one class period for the Link Modules. It is strongly recommended that the time allocation to the link module lessons are increased and brought into line with syllabus guidelines. The provision of double class periods should also be examined to facilitate in-school visits and other enterprise activities.

A whole-school cross-curricular approach is important to the success of the LCVP. There was no evidence of the involvement of other staff members in LCVP activities. The modules are designed to be combined flexibly and should be implemented in an integrated way with the vocational subjects taken by the student. In this regard the LCVP has a low profile among VSG teachers and cross-curricular inputs are limited to the guidance counselor and religious education (RE) teacher. It is recommended that structures are put in place to increase whole-staff awareness of the programme and to develop cross-curricular links between the VSGs and the Link Modules. An LCVP notice board in the staffroom and announcements on planned activities and events should be considered to provide information to staff on the programme. It is strongly encouraged that the LCVP co-ordinator provides an information session to staff on the aims and objectives of the LCVP and that potential cross-curricular links between the VSGs and the Link Modules are identified and discussed.

### 1.2 Resources

The LCVP co-ordinator expressed satisfaction with the range of LCVP-specific resource materials built up to support teaching and learning in the programme. In the context of an enlarged link module teaching team these resources should be catalogued in the LCVP plan and for ease of access be stored in a central location.

Link modules classes are held in the co-ordinator’s base classroom. The room is bright and spacious and is equipped with a TV and information and communication technology (ICT) including a data projector and laptop to facilitate the integration of web-based materials in teaching and learning. There are also six computers for students use but this number is insufficient and students are required to type up and complete portfolio items at home. This arrangement is not satisfactory for all students and should be reviewed. To overcome these difficulties it is recommended that the school’s IT room be made available to the LCVP class group during timetabled lessons for the Link Modules.

### 1.3 Student selection and support

Criteria for the selection of students to the LCVP are not inclusive and are in need of immediate review. School management acknowledged that there are a number of students who would benefit from the programme that are not currently participating in it. It is recommended that access to the LCVP is made available to all students and that appropriate arrangements are put in place so that students not taking a Leaving Certificate language are provided with a vocational language module. This module should be timetabled for one class period per week over the two years of the opportunity to avail of training in the programme provided by the Second Level Support Service (SLSS).
programme or its equivalent. The school should also develop its own assessment criteria and certification for this module.

All teachers are made aware of students with additional educational needs. While there are no LCVP-specific supports available within the school’s learning support provision additional support is provided by the link module teacher to any student who may be experiencing difficulties.

1.4 Home-school links

In third year, students are advised on subject and programme choices by teachers and the guidance counsellor. The students then discuss the options on offer with their parents following which a subject choice form is signed by parents and returned to the school. Given the significant implications that these choices have on students’ future educational and career pathways, it is recommended that a formal information evening is held for parents prior to the selection of subjects and programmes to assist them in making more informed decisions. The LCVP co-ordinator should provide input on the details and benefits of the LCVP at this meeting. Parents are informed of students’ progress at annual parent-teacher meetings and school reports are sent home twice a year.

2 QUALITY OF PROGRAMME PLANNING AND COORDINATION

2.1 Planning

All planning activities in relation to the LCVP are undertaken by the co-ordinator. In the future formal meetings should be facilitated on a regular basis for the core team so that a cohesive forum for the co-ordination and planning of all aspects of the programme is in place. The core team should also meet with the VSG teachers at the start of the school year so that opportunities for cross-curricular links can be discussed and planned.

A subject department plan for the LCVP and link modules were made available during the evaluation. Schemes of work outlining course content delivered within weekly schedules are contained in the plan. Teaching methodologies, resources, learning outcomes and cross-curricular links should be addressed in these schemes of work. The schemes also indicate the portfolio items that are prepared at different stages in the school year. It is good practice that course theory is appropriately integrated throughout the programme.

The LCVP planning folder maintained by the co-ordinator contains resource materials provided by the Second Level Support Service (SLSS), relevant Department circular letters, an LCVP information sheet and a list of the VSGs selected by individual students. It is recommended that a more detailed and comprehensive plan be developed for the LCVP. The plan should include the aims and objectives of the programme, organisational details, information on relevant cross-curricular links, current copies of letters and other correspondence sent to parents and employers, the enterprise activities undertaken by the students, homework and assessment procedures, records of recent examination outcomes and the results of programme evaluation. The post of LCVP co-ordinator is given a weekly forty-five minute time allocation. The provision of additional time is encouraged to support the co-ordinator in implementing the recommendations outlined in this report.
It is evident from records of meetings that an annual review of the programme is carried out. However, there is no evidence that this evaluation process has had an impact on the implementation of the programme as the key areas repeatedly identified for improvement, including an increased time allocation for link module lessons and the inclusion of additional members of staff on the LCVP teaching team have not been addressed. It was reported that the newly established in-school curriculum review body will carry out a review of the LCVP this year. It is recommended that specific procedures and success criteria be developed to conduct this review and to inform future planning and provision for the programme. Student achievement in state examinations, the number of students using the programme for additional Central Application Office (CAO) points and tracking the career destination of former LCVP students are among the criteria that should be considered when conducting the LCVP review. The students should also be formally included in the review and their feedback obtained through questionnaires. In the long term the views of parents should also be included in the evaluation process. The outcomes of the review and the resulting planned actions should be documented in the evaluation section of the LCVP plan.

2.2 Coordination

The LCVP co-ordinator has served in this role since 2005 and has a good knowledge of the programme. Considerable demands are placed on the co-ordinator who has sole responsibility for a range of administrational, organisational and educational duties associated with the programme. The duties of the co-ordinator include liaising with management, establishing links with outside agencies and businesses, communicating with parents, keeping records and student files and attending in-service.

The benefits of establishing a LCVP core team to support and enhance the further development of the programme within the school were acknowledged during the course of the evaluation. This core team should play a key part in organizing and participating in LCVP activities, planning cross-curricular and inter-disciplinary links within the vocational subject groupings and promoting the programme among students and staff. The specific responsibilities of a co-ordinator should also be documented in leading the implementation and further development of the programme within the school. Formal core team meetings should be facilitated on a regular basis and minutes of meetings should be recorded to provide a record of planning activities.

Students organise their own work placements for work experience. Support is provided to students who may have difficulty in securing a placement. Structures should be put in place to formalise contact between the school and prospective employers in relation to work experience. The school should issue a letter to employers outlining information on the work experience programme and details of the insurance cover provided for students. Employers should also be provided with a report form to be returned to the school on completion of the work experience so that the students’ performance can be evaluated. During the work experience, contact should be made with the workplace as a support to both employers and students. These contacts will forge strong links with employers and will also be of benefit to the TY work experience programme.

2.3 Curriculum

Students qualify to follow the LCVP through a variety of VSG combinations. In fifth year LCVP students have one class period per week in career guidance and obtain guidance input on specific elements of the programme such as the career investigation and preparation for work experience. In sixth year LCVP students have no timetabled classes in guidance and contact with the guidance
counsellor occurs through individual interviews. An arrangement should be put in place to facilitate some class contact with the guidance counsellor during sixth year.

All students participate in work experience for at least three to five days. Students are well prepared in advance. To build on this support it is recommended that the career investigation is carried out in advance of the work experience so that students can make more informed decisions in relation to an appropriate work placement. It is commended that a debriefing session is held after the work experience period.

Cross-curricular links have been established with the Religious Education (RE) department as part of the enterprise activity involving fund raising for charity. The students commented very favourably on the benefits of engaging in active learning and participating in team work activities. Conducting school visits to businesses, community and voluntary enterprises and organising in-school visits are integral elements of the programme. In this regard links have been established with some local businesses and the Saint Vincent de Paul. The co-ordinator and core team should plan for a greater number and variety of these activities as they provide rich opportunity for teamwork and active experiential learning both inside and outside of the classroom. As a minimum, one out-of-school visit and two visits by guest speakers should be facilitated for each class group over the two years of the programme.

3 QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING

3.1 Planning and preparation

One lesson was observed during the evaluation. The lesson had a clear structure and content was delivered in a sequential manner. At the outset of the lesson the learning objective was shared with students. In the context of the limited class period provision for the link modules it is recommended that a greater number of objectives are planned to allow for more substantial coverage of material and a more purposeful lesson pace.

3.2 Learning and teaching

The content of the lesson was appropriate and involved an analysis of a case study. The use of past examination questions for this task is appropriate and it was evident from classroom observation and copybooks that students have undertaken considerable work and have been well prepared for this task. The main methodologies used included teacher instruction, questioning, several readings of the case study and group work. There was a focus on unfamiliar business and enterprise terminology and these were well explained. It is recommended as a means of actively engaging and challenging students, that they be required to offer explanations for the terms prior to teacher input. New terms should also be highlighted on the board and the students should maintain a glossary of these which would be particularly useful for those students who are not studying business related subjects to Leaving Certificate level. The classroom should be developed into a supportive learning environment through the display of terms and their definitions and other programme materials.

Group work was employed to conduct a SWOT analysis of the case study. This was well managed with an appropriate time set for the activity and a specific task assigned to each group. In some groups there was a very good level of interaction between the students; however this was not the case with all groups. It is recommended for this co-operative learning methodology that the seats are arranged to facilitate collaboration and discussion among assigned groups. There was good
consolidation of learning in the end-of-task plenary session where the outcomes were discussed and feedback recorded on the board. It was evident from students’ contributions that they were competent in completing the task and that learning was taking place. The use of such active learning opportunities is commended and it is recommended that further strategies be developed to enhance the active participation of all students.

Classroom management was effective and a positive atmosphere prevailed with students appropriately affirmed for their contributions.

3.3 Assessment

Summative assessment of students’ progress takes place at Christmas and at the end of the school year. The outcomes of these assessments are included in school reports to parents. There is ongoing informal assessment of students’ progress by questioning in class and through the correction of homework and portfolio work. A sample of portfolio course work was viewed during the course of the evaluation. Good practices are in place to support students in completing this work. They are provided with clear guidelines on how to structure their reports and are given the portfolio marking schemes. Students work is monitored by the teacher and they are provided with feedback as the tasks are in progress.

Some students had final drafts of a number of portfolio items completed to a high standard and these were carefully compiled in a folder, while in other cases students’ items were at different stages of completion and the quality varied. It is recommended deadlines are set for the completion of a number of portfolio items in each year of the LCVP. This will ensure that the workload is distributed in a more even manner and will avoid undue demands on students in sixth year when other subjects have coursework components to be submitted as part of their Leaving Certificate examination. It is suggested, as a means of motivating students, that final drafts of portfolio items are acknowledged in formal end-of-term and end-of-year assessments.

The students interviewed referred to the many benefits the LCVP programme had afforded them and place a high value on the vocational aspects of the LCVP curriculum including work experience and preparation for the world of work. They also view very positively the opportunity to achieve more points in the Leaving Certificate and to engage in a wide range of new learning experiences and team activities.

4 SUMMARY OF STRENGTHS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT

The following are the main strengths identified in the evaluation:

- Senior management is now committed to supporting the further implementation and development of the LCVP in the school.
- The LCVP is well coordinated.
- School management is supportive of teachers’ professional development and the co-ordinator has availed of LCVP in-service.
- A good range of resource materials have been built up to support teaching and learning in the programme.
- Links have been established with employers, businesses and community enterprises.
In the lesson observed group work was conducted effectively, a good level of learning was evident and students were able to complete the assigned task.

Good practices, including the monitoring and correction of work are in place to support students in completing their portfolio items.

Students place a high value on the LCVP and commented very favourably on the many benefits gained from their participation in the programme.

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

- A formal LCVP core team should be put in place to plan for the further development of the programme in the school
- The Business department should be deployed in the programme so that students have access to specialist expertise in the area of Business.
- The school’s admission criteria to the LCVP should be reviewed so that all students have open access to the programme.
- Class period allocation to the Link Modules should be reviewed and brought in line with syllabus guidelines.
- Structures should be put in place to increase whole-staff awareness of the programme and to develop cross-curricular links between the VSGs and the Link Modules.
- LCVP students should have greater access to the school’s information and communication technology (ICT) facilities.
- A more detailed and comprehensive plan should be developed for the implementation of the LCVP.
- Specific procedures and success criteria should be developed to facilitate the annual review of the programme. The outcomes of the review should be addressed in programme planning and provision.
- More formal contacts should be established between the school and prospective employers in relation to the work experience programme.
- A greater range and variety of enterprise activities should be facilitated within the programme.

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Appendix

SCHOOL RESPONSE TO THE REPORT

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

1. A formal LCVP team has been set up to plan further development of the programme in the school.
2. The Business department is now deployed in the programme so that students have access to specialist expertise in the area of Business.
3. The school’s admission criteria have been reviewed and all students have open access to the programme.
4. Class period allocation to the Link Modules has been reviewed and brought in line with syllabus guidelines.
5. LCVP students now have greater access to the school’s ICT facilities.
6. More formal contacts have been established between the school and prospective employers in relation to the work experience programme.
7. A greater range and variety of enterprise activities will be facilitated within the programme (visit ins and visits out).