

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

**Programme Evaluation
Leaving Certificate Applied
REPORT**

**Borrisokane Community College
Borrisokane, Tipperary
Roll number: 72370P**

Date of inspection: 9 April 2014



**A N R O I N N | D E P A R T M E N T O F
O I D E A C H A I S | E D U C A T I O N
A G U S S C I L E A N N A | A N D S K I L L S**

REPORT ON THE QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN LEAVING CERTIFICATE APPLIED (LCA)

INFORMATION ON THE PROGRAMME EVALUATION

Dates of inspection	8 th and 9 th April 2014
Inspection activities undertaken <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Review of relevant documents• Discussion with principal and key staff• Interaction with students	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Observation of teaching and learning during six class periods• Examination of students' work• Feedback to principal and relevant staff

MAIN FINDINGS

- Teaching and learning in the lessons observed was of a consistently high standard.
- School management supports the LCA programme in a variety of ways including allocating co-ordination time, scheduling team-teaching and supporting programme review.
- The amalgamation of both fifth and sixth-year LCA groups places a significant strain on the effective planning and delivery of the LCA programme in some subject areas.
- High levels of LCA student absenteeism, particularly among fifth year students, is a cause for concern.
- LCA is a very well co-ordinated and delivered programme with very effective subject planning and programme evaluation systems having been developed.
- Students expressed uncertainty in relation to the duration of their work experience programme.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

- Strategies to address the high level of student absenteeism, particularly among fifth-year students, should be developed and implemented in a co-ordinated manner to improve student attendance rates in LCA.
 - School management in collaboration with the LCA teaching team and co-ordinator, should review the curricular and scheduling aspects of the programme.
 - The number of days that students are required to attend their work-experience placements should be detailed and implemented by school management.
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INTRODUCTION

Borrisokane Community College is a co-educational school under the auspices of Tipperary Education and Training Board (ETB). The school has a current enrolment of 538 students. The LCA programme is a long standing component of the school's curriculum and is an optional programme for students who have completed junior cycle or Transition Year (TY).

TEACHING AND LEARNING

- The quality of teaching and learning in the lessons observed was of a consistently high standard. Teachers planning and preparation for lessons was very good. Information and communication technology (ICT) is used effectively to manage plans and facilitate regular review of subject plans.
- All lessons observed were guided by clear learning outcomes. Good practice was observed in a number of lessons when these identified outcomes were reviewed collaboratively with students.
- Appropriate methodologies were consistently employed by teachers. Active engagement was facilitated through the incorporation of informal pair work, team games, independent learning, experimentation, mind mapping and brainstorming.
- ICT was used effectively in lessons, for example, when students used applications to record their Irish oral skills and to generate 3D computer-aided design models and teachers utilised graphics rich presentations to generate discussion and dialogue. These methods enhanced students' learning and helped to create an often innovative teaching and learning environment.
- Classroom interactions were positive. Student behaviour was very good and teachers maintained a high level of student interest by maintaining a good balance between teacher input and student activity. Students received good levels of affirmation resulting in a positive teaching and learning environment.
- The initiate, respond and evaluate (IRE) questioning strategy was the key method employed to assess student learning. The LCA teaching team should consider implementing a more diverse approach to questioning through the further incorporation of higher-order questions in lessons, the facilitation of greater development of students' answers and through an increased emphasis on wait-time thereby enabling students to compose their answers fully.
- Student work and key assignments are regularly reviewed in class. Very good practice was observed when students received good levels of formative feedback in order to help them to identify areas for improvement and to offer advice on how to improve the quality of their work.
- Examination results are reviewed annually by the programme co-ordinator. Student achievement in certificate examinations over the last few years has been good. The challenge facing the school is to maintain and improve this trend in the context of the high levels of student absenteeism and the requirement of a minimum of ninety percent attendance to gain credits for modules.

- Teachers set appropriately high expectations of student achievement and students responded positively to this. Students reported that, in some instances, additional work could be set particularly in relation to the completion of key assignments. This would provide teachers with a very good opportunity to differentiate according to students' abilities, especially for more able students.
- Alternative classroom layouts were evident in a number of lessons. This facilitated good levels of dialogue and discourse in lessons where student attendance was poor. Teachers circulated classrooms effectively and provided students with good levels of advice, feedback and support.
- Student absenteeism rates are high, particularly in fifth year, and this presents a very serious issue to the management of the LCA programme in the school. The school should take a focused and systematic approach to improving LCA student attendance as a matter of priority.

PROGRAMME PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- The LCA programme is viewed by school management as an essential component of the school's senior cycle curriculum. Senior management supports the delivery and development of the programme through allocating co-ordination time, supporting the cyclical review of the programme and scheduling team-teaching in one of the vocational specialism subjects.
- Both fifth and sixth year LCA class groups are amalgamated for all but three subjects, this presents significant challenges for the planning and the delivery of the programme in some subject areas. The LCA curriculum is framed within a thirty-three period timetable. This timetable does not allow for the allocation of a period of personal reflection as is good practice. These factors present significant challenges for the planning and delivery of the programme. When resources permit or when viable solutions are identified, school management should review the decisions that underpin the existing LCA timetable with a view to addressing and improving the current arrangements.
- The vocational education aspect of the programme provides students with a good range of appropriate and relevant courses. The subjects of Agriculture and Horticulture and Hotel Catering and Tourism are useful for students entering the tourism, hospitality and agricultural sectors which are important locally.
- Work experience is scheduled for all LCA students one day a week, every Monday. Students require clarity in relation to the school's expectations surrounding work experience, as some students stated that they were only required to attend their placements for twenty days per year. This would result in a shortfall of up to thirteen days tuition time less than the required 167 days as per circular M29/95 Time in School. The number of days that students are required to attend their work-experience placements should be detailed and implemented by school management.
- Students are very positive about their work experience programme and the journals reviewed were maintained to a very good standard.

- Clear and systematic procedures are in place for the selection of students for LCA. Students are requested to apply for a place on the course having completed their Junior Certificate or the TY programme. Students whom the care team deem suitable are also approached and are asked to consider the programme. Information is made available to students and parents at open evenings and through direct contact to ensure that both students and parents are making fully informed decisions regarding the choice of this programme.
- Support for students with additional educational needs is good. Two qualified special educational needs teachers are deployed to teach the LCA programme. Specific learning support is accessed by some students during Irish when an exemption exists. Literacy and numeracy skill development is prioritised by teachers and was consistently implemented in the lessons observed.

PROGRAMME PLANNING, CO-ORDINATION AND EVALUATION

- The LCA programme is effectively planned and co-ordinated in the school. A high quality, comprehensive and well-structured LCA programme plan has been developed and this plan outlines key information and organisational structures of the programme in the school.
- The current programmes co-ordinator has served as LCA co-ordinator for the past three years. The role of co-ordinator is comprehensive and includes responsibility for three key aspects of the LCA programme: administration, planning and communication. Co-ordination time is allocated to the co-ordinator to carry out these tasks.
- Programme evaluation is highly effective in the school. The LCA programme has been reviewed at school level twice in the last four years with the most recent review starting in January 2014. Students, parents and staff have been surveyed and their opinions are to be included in the review team's findings. The 2010 review team identified a number of key areas for development and there is evidence that many of these goals have been realised with ongoing and further improvement required in the areas of student absenteeism and students' work experience.

The draft findings and recommendations arising out of this evaluation were discussed with the principal and programme co-ordinator 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.

Appendix

SCHOOL RESPONSE TO THE REPORT

Submitted by the Board of Management

Area 1 – Observations on the content of the inspection.

The Board of Management of Borrisokane Community College welcomes the LCA Programme Evaluation. The board would like to compliment the teaching staff for the positive report received and in particular it is noted the comment that Teaching and Learning observed was of a consistently high standard. The board of management acknowledges the commitment of staff in implementing the effective Leaving Certificate Applied Programme in the school.

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

As a follow on to the recommendations in the report the LCA Teaching team has put a rewards system in place to improve school attendance. Parents now receive regular reports on attendance levels. Work Experience is closely monitored and students are expected to attend work experience on Monday each week throughout the school year.