

**An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna**

**Department of Education and Skills**

**Programme Evaluation  
Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme  
REPORT**

**St Peter's Community School  
Passage West, Co Cork  
Roll Number: 91391H**

**Date of inspection: 14 April 2011**



**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**

# **EVALUATION OF THE LCVP**

## **INTRODUCTION**

This report has been written following an evaluation of the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP) in St Peter's 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 three days during which the inspector liaised extensively with the programme coordinator 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, the programme coordinator and the core team following the evaluation.

St Peter's Community School is a co-educational school. The LCVP was introduced in 1994 and is firmly established as part of the school curriculum. It is a popular choice among students and LCVP students have achieved well in the certificate examinations. The LCVP team highlights the fact that students' achievements in the programme are often a significant addition to their overall performance in the Leaving Certificate examination.

## **1 QUALITY OF PROGRAMME ORGANISATION**

### **1.1 Whole school support**

The LCVP is ably managed by an effective core team which includes a business studies teacher and a teacher of modern languages, both of whom are involved in teaching the link modules. In addition, the guidance counselor takes guidance lessons in fifth year for all members of the year group and these lessons are often informed and supported by elements of the link modules syllabus. It is suggested that this good practice should be noted in the current programme plan. There is very good collaboration within the team and an induction policy for teachers new to the LCVP has been developed. It is suggested that the addition of an introduction to the team's programme plan is worthy of consideration for inclusion as an element in the policy in the future. Beyond this, and in the context of the current size of the core team, along with the significant professional expertise in evidence, it is recommended that some expansion in the number of teachers involved in delivering the programme should be considered. Such an approach would ensure that good practice is communicated and maintained for the future and would increase the available pool of subject and programme expertise.

The teaching staff displays an awareness of the LCVP and of the different Vocational Subject Groupings (VSGs). Students also noted links between VSGs and the link modules. A noticeboard in the staffroom is used to highlight upcoming LCVP events for all teachers. It is suggested that a specific LCVP noticeboard could be developed which would differentiate the programme from other areas of school life and inform teachers regarding various stages of portfolio development which are underway. In addition, material connected to the programme is displayed in a classroom around which much of the activity connected to the LCVP is centred. Links have been pursued by the LCVP core team with VSG teachers in connection with programme activities and VSG teachers have supported these activities. External speakers have also informed staff regarding the programme in the past. All teachers receive a list of LCVP students and this aspect of

communication is positive. As a further development of these very worthwhile approaches, it is suggested that the team could inform teachers of relevant events which are upcoming as part of staff meetings, with a particular emphasis on the role of VSG teachers in this context. A further possibility to be explored is the noting by different subject departments of the links between the subject and the LCVP as a part of their subject plans. Identified cross-curricular links with Specific Learning Outcomes (SLOs) could then be highlighted by subject teachers at appropriate points in the year. This would be a strong support to student learning, not only in the link modules, but also in the VSGs and, potentially, in other subjects.

## **1.2 Resources**

Senior management is very supportive of the programme, ensuring appropriate staffing and resource arrangements are in place. Fifth-year students are provided with two lessons per week for link modules and one lesson per week for Guidance. Sixth-year students are provided with two lessons per week for the link modules. In addition, a modern language module is provided once per week through the two years of the programme.

There is very good access to the information and communication technology (ICT) room for students in the LCVP and this should be maintained. In the context of the significant time spent by students participating in the LCVP in the ICT room, it is recommended that consideration should be given to the development of the learning environment in the room. This could be used to enhance students' awareness of the key concepts and learning goals relevant to the programme and would extend the very good practice already evident in the department's development of the LCVP room.

## **1.3 Student selection and support**

Students and parents are provided with information regarding subject and programme choice prior to students' participation in the Transition Year (TY) programme and are further informed through a number of presentations. The school is currently examining the subject-choice system and the feasibility of delaying this process until the end of TY. This move is encouraged, particularly in the context of current plans to ensure students are fully informed regarding the specific implications of the programme for their subject choices prior to the subject-choice process.

It is evident from records of meetings of the LCVP core team that the needs of students with special educational needs are considered and planned for. Formal and informal links with the special educational needs team are in place. In the area of students with English as an additional language (EAL), the core team is aware of the needs of these students and the school is encouraged to further support teachers' awareness through links with the Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST) and resources available on the ACTION website of the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA).

When interviewed, students displayed a good understanding of the programme, along with the particular benefits it offered. In particular, they highlighted that the programme prepared them well for their future careers and provided a good insight into the world of business.

## **1.4 Home-school links**

Parent-teacher meetings and regular reports as well as a range of other media are used to communicate with parents regarding students' progress and events taking place in the programme.

Valuable links have been developed by the LCVP team with local businesses and voluntary organisations. These have been very useful in organising visits out and visits in. In particular, ongoing links have been pursued with the Junior Achievement Initiative. These are appropriately used to support particular elements of the programme.

## **2 QUALITY OF PROGRAMME PLANNING AND COORDINATION**

### **2.1 Planning**

Planning for the LCVP programme is good. A good written plan has been prepared by the LCVP team. This includes policies regarding the storage of portfolio work, details of teachers' professional development, links to parents, processes for students' and teachers' induction and details of cross-curricular links. Schemes of work are also maintained in the programme plan. All of this is positive. As a further extension of this good work, it is recommended that explicit links to SLOs should be included in common schemes of work, particularly where activities are planned. These links could then be highlighted for students and would enhance students' awareness of connections to other areas of the course, thus further supporting their learning. A high level of collaboration was displayed by the team during the evaluation and in the delivery of the programme. The team, in collaboration with senior management, has begun to consider the implementation of a formal evaluation of the programme on a regular basis which would involve parents, students and teachers. It is recommended that this move should be advanced, with a particular focus on accessing the views of VSG teachers. Clear and objective success criteria for the programme could be included as an element in this evaluation. A range of tools including meetings with focus groups, questionnaires and reviews of students' portfolio work could inform this evaluation.

Regular meetings of the core team are held and these often include the guidance counsellor. Informal meetings are organised where necessary. Minutes of formal meetings are recorded and it is suggested that the use of ICT should now be explored in this context to support ease of storage of and accessibility to meeting records. A high level of collaboration was displayed by the team during the evaluation and in the delivery of the programme.

### **2.2 Coordination**

The LCVP co-ordinator has significant experience in co-ordinating the programme and has been involved in its delivery since its inception in the school. The co-ordinator has also been involved in delivering CPD to other teachers in the context of the LCVP. The quality of programme co-ordination is very good. There is very good communication between the LCVP team and senior management. The co-ordinator is appropriately supported in his work through a time allocation provided by senior management.

### **2.3 Curriculum**

Theory and practice are well integrated in the programme and appropriate core and optional items are undertaken in students' portfolios. The former approach to the programme should be further supported in the future through the incorporation of SLOs in the programme plan, as highlighted earlier in this report. An appropriate process approach is undertaken by students in the writing of their portfolios, and this is supportive of the aims of the programme.

The school has undertaken appropriate arrangements for the provision of a modern foreign language module for those students who do not study a modern foreign language as part of their senior cycle programme.

All students participate in work experience during the summer holidays following their fifth year. They are directed to choose work experience which is relevant to their choice of VSG and career interests as much as possible. The school reports increasing difficulties in garnering work experience placements for students due to the economic downturn. The good practice of making contact with employers in advance of students' work placement and of seeking a report on students' performance is included as part of the school's approach to this area. Reports are also sought from employers on students' performance during their work experience placement. While acknowledging the good work which is currently underway, a number of adjustments in this area of the LCVP curriculum are recommended. Work experience should be moved to a point during the school year, for example, during the early spring mid-term or the Easter break. As far as is possible, workplaces should be visited by school staff or, at a minimum, telephone contact should be made with students' employers during students' placements. The possibility of scheduling work experience partly or entirely during school time, for example when the mock examinations are being organised, could also be considered.

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

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

The classwork undertaken in lessons visited reflected the objectives of the programme and was in keeping with planning documents. Evidence of good short-term planning was presented and a good level of teacher preparedness was evident in lessons. Very good practice was observed where learning goals were outlined clearly at the outset of lessons and it is suggested that this practice could be expanded across the department. Resources were prepared and used effectively and these included the use of ICT. The department is encouraged to continue to explore the use of technology to support students' learning in the programme.

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

A very good standard of learning and teaching was observed in lessons visited during the evaluation. Teachers frequently made reference to students' previous knowledge to support their understanding of new concepts and, again, this is good practice. Very good practice was observed in one instance where students engaged in self-evaluation at the end of a lesson regarding their own preparedness for the upcoming certificate examination.

A very impressive element of the LCVP team's practice was the use of co-operative learning strategies. These were supportive of students' literacy skills, with roles being assigned to promote clear communication of ideas between students. In addition, clear timelines were set out for these activities, thus focusing students on the work in hand. Equally, this allowed for students to engage in semi-independent learning and was in keeping with the overall aims of the programme. Students displayed a good understanding of the approaches being utilized and readily engaged with them. Teachers have also developed writing frames as a support for students in developing their portfolio work, alongside graphic organisers which serve as an aid to the development of key ideas and written work.

There was a very good relationship between students and teachers. Lessons were conducted in well-ordered and secure environments and teachers consistently displayed good classroom management skills. As previously outlined, a print-rich environment has been developed in the LCVP base room which includes LCVP materials and keywords connected to the programme.

### **3.3 Assessment**

Students' portfolios were well maintained and demonstrated the use of a process approach to their development, as is appropriate. Very good practice, incorporating the principles of assessment for learning, was observed through the distribution of the criteria for assessment of portfolios to students, thus guiding their work and encouraging them to take responsibility for their own learning. Students' portfolios are stored carefully by the LCVP team.

Reports regarding students' progress are sent to parents twice each year. For fifth-year students, a formal report is sent at Christmas and there is also a parent-teacher meeting, while for students in sixth year, two formal reports are sent at Christmas and at the time of the mock examinations in early spring, as well as a parent-teacher meeting during the course of the year. Assessment practices in fifth year are largely centred on students' portfolio items. In sixth year assessment is again focused on students' portfolio items while a full written examination is undertaken at the time of the mock examinations in early spring. Midterm assessments of students' effort and behaviour are also undertaken.

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

The following are the main strengths identified in the evaluation:

- The LCVP is firmly established as part of the school's curriculum and is a popular choice among students.
- The programme is ably managed by an effective core team.
- Senior management is supportive of the programme.
- Students and parents are provided with information to support and inform students' choices with regard to the programme.
- Planning for the LCVP is well-organised and includes a comprehensive written plan which incorporates schemes of work.
- The programme co-ordinator has good experience of the programme and the quality of programme co-ordination is very good.
- All students participate in work experience in the summer holidays following their fifth year.
- A very good quality of learning and teaching was observed in lessons visited during the evaluation.

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

- Some expansion in the size of the team involved in delivering the programme should be considered.
- The learning environment in the ICT room should be further developed to reflect elements of the LCVP.

- Explicit links to specific learning outcomes (SLOs) should be included in common schemes of work, particularly where activities are planned.
- Current practice in the organisation of work experience should be adjusted in a number of areas, including timing during the school year and communication with employers during students' placements.

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.

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