Programme Evaluation
Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme
REPORT

Glenamaddy Community School
Glenamaddy, Co. Galway
Roll Number: 91514U

Date of inspection: 20 October 2010
EVALUATION OF THE LCVP

INTRODUCTION

This report has been written following an evaluation of the LCVP in Glenamaddy 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 programme co-ordinator and the core team 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.

Glenamaddy Community School was formed in 2002 from the amalgamation of Coláiste Sheosaimh a voluntary secondary school and St. Bennin’s Vocational School. LCVP is a well-established and popular programme on the school’s curriculum with a very high uptake of senior-cycle students choosing to follow the programme.

1 QUALITY OF PROGRAMME ORGANISATION

1.1 Whole school support

The LCVP was introduced to the school’s curriculum in 2002. Currently there are three class groups in both fifth year and sixth year following the programme. LCVP students are integrated with their peers for all subjects including the link modules as the vast majority of students have opted to follow the programme.

School management is very supportive of the LCVP and is keenly aware of the many benefits gained by students from their participation in the programme. In acknowledgement of the students’ co-operation with and achievement in the programme an LCVP Student of the Year award is included in the end of year school awards ceremony. This is commended and is reflective of the value placed by staff and students on the LCVP. The implementation of the programme is overseen by a core team consisting of the two link modules teachers and is strongly supported by other key personnel including the guidance counsellor, the learning support teacher and a language teacher. A high level of collegiality and co-operation characterises the work of the LCVP team members.

There is good whole-school support and awareness of the programme. A calendar of LCVP events is posted on the notice board in the staff room and upcoming LCVP activities are displayed on the electronic notice board in the school assembly area. It was reported that members of staff provide support to the LCVP team by volunteering to visit work placements as part of work experience monitoring and assist with supervision during in-school visits by external speakers. The guidance counsellor work in close association with the link module teachers and students receive appropriate guidance information and support throughout the programme. Other measures should now be put in place to enhance awareness of the LCVP as an integrated programme and cross-curricular links should be established and developed between the vocational subject groupings
(VSGs) and the link modules. Currently the core team is planning to carry out an enterprise activity that will facilitate the participation of all VSG teachers. This is commended. School management should facilitate a meeting between the co-ordinator and VSG teachers at the start of the year so that cross-curricular linkages can be identified, planned and discussed. These links will serve to enhance student learning in an integrated manner across the programme.

1.2 Resources

LCVP teachers are appropriately deployed to support the optimal delivery of the programme. The link modules are delivered by teachers of business subjects and computer studies classes are also assigned to one of the link module teachers who holds an ECDL qualification. This brings very important expertise to the programme.

The co-ordinator has built up a wide range of resources for the programme and these are shared among team members. While there is no specific budget allocated to LCVP school management is very supportive of any resource acquisition requests. The students pay a standard €10 contribution towards the cost of examination papers and visiting speakers.

Teachers of the link modules have base classrooms with plenty of storage space for resources and students’ work. These rooms had appropriate learning environments created through the display of subject-related materials. In addition to weekly access to the school’s computer rooms the use of ICT is also facilitated in the classroom. The co-ordinator’s room has a laptop and data projector. The base classroom of the second link module teacher has a number of computers for students’ use and will be equipped presently with a data projector. This provision is commended.

Timetabled allocation for the link modules consists of two single class periods per week in both fifth year and sixth year. This provision is slightly below syllabus guidelines for fifth-year students and a means of increasing the time allocation should be found. However, a single period of computer studies is made available to students in fifth and sixth year. It is commended that part of this provision is assigned for the preparation and completion of LCVP portfolio items.

A significant number of students do not study a modern European language to Leaving Certificate level. These students take an ab-initio language module in Spanish in order to meet the requirements of the LCVP. This module is timetabled against computers. However, the number of periods assigned to class groups falls short of the recommended syllabus provision of one class period per week, or its equivalent, over the two years of the programme. Arrangements for this module should be reviewed and the time provision should be extended in line with the LCVP syllabus recommendation. School management is aware of this shortfall and expressed a commitment to address the issue.

1.3 Student selection and support

There is open access to LCVP for all students and the full range of student abilities is accommodated within the programme. Students who have the relevant VSG requirements are encouraged to participate in the programme. Students that teachers consider would benefit from the programme are actively encouraged to choose it and the advantages of LCVP are highlighted. Uptake of the LCVP is very high with over ninety per cent of students in both fifth year and sixth year opting to follow the programme. The students interviewed by the inspector commented very favourably on the LCVP and cited a number of reasons for their participation in the programme. They place a high value on the practical vocational skills development aspects of the programme including the opportunity to carry out a career investigation, to engage in work experience and in a
variety of team activities. They view the LCVP as a back-up subject for additional Central Application Office (CAO) points and refer to the advantages associated with the high percentage of marks awarded for portfolio items and with the timing of the terminal state examination in May.

Students with additional educational needs are well supported within the programme. Very good links have been established with the learning-support department and interventions are put in place to assist students with identified needs. Additional LCVP-specific tuition is provided to students by the learning-support co-ordinator who has experience in teaching the LCVP programme. The guidance counsellor is also involved in supporting individual students with particular difficulties.

1.4 Home-school links

There are good structures in place which ensure that students and their parents are given timely information on senior cycle subjects and programme options. In March an information evening is held for parents at which the co-ordinator gives a presentation on the advantages and requirements of the LCVP programme. At this meeting the co-ordinator is also available to meet parents on an individual basis. The guidance counsellor also plays a key role in providing advice and information to parents and students on the various subject and programme choices.

Links have been established with local employers, voluntary enterprises and third-level institutions. A number of students have been facilitated to complete the Safe Pass Course and guest speakers have been invited to the school. The core team should now plan to establish further links with businesses to facilitate an increased focus on enterprise activities within the LCVP. The guidance counsellor organises visits to third-level colleges and speakers to the school on career opportunities. During the time of the evaluation students were preparing for a trip to the Options West careers seminar. These provisions are commended.

2 QUALITY OF PROGRAMME PLANNING AND COORDINATION

2.1 Planning

Team planning for the LCVP is well advanced. The link module teachers meet on a formal basis three times a year and have frequent informal contact to plan for course elements and to co-ordinate the delivery and completion of the portfolio items. The co-ordinator maintains regular contact with the larger LCVP team which is facilitated to meet once per year. An agenda is prepared in advance of formal meetings and it is good practice that the minutes of these meetings are recorded.

The written plan which has been developed for LCVP shows evidence of good work. The content of the plans includes the aims and objectives of the programme, information on the implementation team, student access to the programme, timetabling provision, health and safety arrangements, homework and assessment practices, information on LCVP activities and in-career development. While some links have been made with other subject department, in the future, planning should provide for common themes to be highlighted and reinforced within the various VSGs and thus enhance student learning in a more cohesive and integrated manner as is envisaged in the LCVP syllabus document.

Schemes of work are in place for each year group which outline the topics covered and the portfolio items that are prepared in each year. These schemes should be further developed to include the methodologies, resources and assessment procedures employed across the various areas of the syllabus. The specific activities undertaken by students for writing up portfolio items
such as the summary report and enterprise action plan should also be documented in these schemes. A copy of the specific learning outcomes is given to students on each area of the syllabus. This is good practice as it provides students with a clear framework and focus for their learning.

The implementation of the LCVP programme is reviewed through an annual analysis of state examination results. This is good practice. Further procedures and success criteria should be developed to conduct a more comprehensive annual review of the programme and the outcomes of this review should then be used to inform future planning and provision for the programme. The number of students using the LCVP as a back-up subject for additional CAO points and tracking the career destination of former LCVP students are some of the criteria that should be considered when undertaking a review of the programme. Students and parents should also be included in the evaluation process and their views obtained through questionnaire surveys. The outcomes of the review should be recorded in the evaluation section of the LCVP plan.

2.2 Coordination

The LCVP co-ordinator is in place for nine years and has a thorough knowledge of the programme. Key to the successful implementation of the programme is the co-ordination structures in place which facilitate a high level of liaison between the LCVP team members. There is also appropriate communication with and support from management. This team approach is highly commended and reflects the commitment and dedication of its members to the continued development of the programme in the school.

The co-ordination of the programme is linked to a post of responsibility. In line with best practice the co-ordinator is timetabled to teach the link module lessons, which ensures ongoing contact with students. An extensive range of duties including leading team planning, communication with parents, attending in-service, the co-ordination and monitoring of work placements, developing links with employers and outside agencies and briefing colleagues are carried out by the co-ordinator. Office facilities and access to a phone and computer have been provided by management to support the co-ordinator in the fulfilment of these duties.

New teachers to the programme are very well supported and briefed by the co-ordinator. The link module teachers work in close co-operation and procedures are in place to facilitate the sharing of expertise and resources. This collaborative approach to the delivery of the link modules and portfolio course work is commended.

2.3 Curriculum

To be eligible for the LCVP students must choose to follow specific combinations of VSGs. The most popular VSG combinations selected by the current cohort of LCVP students include Home Economics, Biology, Agricultural Science, Construction Studies and Design and Communication Graphics.

Students have very good access to ICT facilities for preparing and completing their portfolio items. Each student has a folder on the school’s server to file their work which is carried out under the supervision of the link module teachers during computer lessons. Appropriate procedures are in place for the correction of this work and its subsequent amendment by students. It is appropriate that deadlines are set for the completion of individual portfolio items in each year of the programme.
All class groups have one timetabled lesson per week in guidance and are very well supported by the guidance counsellor with various aspects of the programme including the career investigation, preparation for work experience and organising visits to third level institutions and career seminars. Work experience is undertaken by students at the end of fifth year to limit disruption and this is well managed. Students generally organize their own placements in consultation with the co-ordinator and are supported in procuring placements if necessary. The preparation of students for work experience is very thorough. In advance of the placement students complete a career investigation and lessons provide a focus on job-seeking skills, employment legislation and contracts and the preparation of a curriculum vitae. The students are also well informed on health and safety in the workplace by a guest speaker presentation on the subject. The Safe Pass Course is also organised by the co-ordinator for interested students. It is good practice in developing and sustaining relationship that appropriate contact is made with employers prior to and during the work experience. Following the work experience the employers submit a report to the school on the student. This is commended as it enables the placement to be evaluated. The students are requested to maintain a log of their experience during the work placement. As this record is used as the basis for writing up one of the portfolio items it is suggested that students be required to submit it to the school on completion of the work experience placement.

The programme in its current provision provides an emphasis on Preparation for the World of Work. In the future it is recommended that programme planning should facilitate a greater focus on Enterprise Education. In this regard the LCVP core team should plan for a broader range and variety of enterprise activities as discussed during the evaluation. These activities will provide rich opportunities for teamwork, active experiential learning and will give greater choice to students when selecting material for their portfolios. As a minimum, one out-of-school visit and two visits-in-school should be facilitated for each class group over the two years of the programme.

The plan for the module in Spanish was made available during the evaluation. The plan provides for a focus on basic grammar and vocabulary to enable students to communicate in everyday situations. This is good practice. It is recommended that the school should develop its own assessment criteria and certification for this module.

3 QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING

3.1 Planning and preparation

There was careful individual planning for the lessons observed. Resource materials, including a letter template, handout and PowerPoint presentation had been prepared in advance of the lessons and these made an effective contribution to students’ learning. Lesson content was appropriate to the syllabus and the integration of ICT provided a good focus on the key learning points.

3.2 Learning and teaching

Good quality teaching and learning was evident in the classrooms visited. Learning objectives were communicated to students at the outset and lessons were well structured in line with the expected learning outcomes. Many lessons incorporated a review of previous learning and this strategy served to focus students’ attention and consolidate their learning prior to the introduction of new material.

A variety of methodologies was used to deliver lesson content and to engage students. These methodologies included questioning, teacher presentation, brainstorming, pair and groups work, feedback from students and discussion. Teacher instruction was clear and key concepts were very
well explained. There was a good level of student interaction and questioning was well integrated to test students’ knowledge and to generate discussion on the main points. However, to ensure the participation of all students it is recommended that global questions are balanced by the use of a greater number of directed questions.

Active learning methodologies appropriate to the LCVP were used to engage students. Pair and group work activities were conducted effectively and followed by a plenary session with feedback from students recorded on the board. There was a good focus on LCVP terminology and business and enterprise terms were clarified and reinforced throughout the lessons. In some lessons very good links were made between the topic under study and the students’ local environment and other experiences of interest to them. Throughout lessons teachers showed a good awareness of, and responded appropriately to, the range of students’ ability levels. There was evidence of differentiation in the types of questions asked and in the support provided to individual students.

In all classes visited there was an ordered and warm atmosphere conducive to learning. A positive rapport was evident between students and teachers which facilitated, encouraged and affirmed student input. The students demonstrated a clear understanding of the topics being taught, they engaged well in class and were competent in completing assigned tasks. It was also evident from their responses to questions and their contributions to discussions that they had achieved a good level of learning.

3.3 Assessment

Assessment procedures in LCVP reflect whole-school assessment procedures. Fifth-year students sit formal examinations at Christmas and at the end of the summer term. Sixth-year students are assessed by means of Christmas examinations and a mock examination in the second term. The outcomes of all formal assessments are communicated to parents through school reports and at parent-teacher meetings organised during the school year. It is good practice that formal assessments given to students reflect the style and format of questions in state examinations.

Each year the results obtained in certificate examinations are analysed and compared with national norms. This analysis is used to identify trends in performance and to inform programme planning. Students achieve well in certificate examinations in the LCVP. Following discussions held during the evaluation targets should now be set to ensure that attainment of distinctions is maintained at a good level.

Formative assessment of students is carried out on a continuous basis in lessons. Homework is regularly assigned and monitored and draft portfolio materials are provided with developmental feedback. In line with good practice the quality of record keeping by teachers is good.

4 SUMMARY OF STRENGTHS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT

The following are the main strengths identified in the evaluation:

- Senior management is very supportive of the LCVP and the provision of resources to the programme is very good
- The LCVP is implemented in a collaborative manner by a diligent and dedicated team of teachers.
- Teachers are appropriately deployed to support the optimal delivery of the programme.
• There is very good access to information and communication technologies (ICT) and classrooms had appropriately developed learning environments.
• Students place a high value on the LCVP programme and the benefits they have gained.
• Students with additional educational needs are very well supported within the programme.
• There was evidence of good long-term and short-term planning for the programme.
• The co-ordinator has a thorough knowledge of the programme and has facilitated a high level of co-operation and sharing of expertise and resources among team members, factors key to the success of the LCVP.
• LCVP students are very well supported by the guidance department.
• Work experience is well managed and students are appropriately prepared in advance of the work placement.
• Good quality teaching and learning was evident in the classrooms visited.
• Appropriate assessment and reporting procedures are in place for the programme.

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

• Greater emphasis should be placed on the LCVP as an integrated programme and cross-curricular links should be developed between the vocational subject groupings and the link modules.
• Consideration should be given to providing an additional class period each week in fifth year for link module lessons.
• The time provision for the ab-initio Spanish language module should be extended to comply with the LCVP syllabus.
• A greater range of criteria, including the views of parents and students should be used to conduct an annual review of the LCVP. The outcomes of the review should be documented and should guide future planning for the programme.
• Programme planning should facilitate a greater focus on Enterprise Education and a broader range of enterprise activities should be carried out.

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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

The Board is pleased to accept this very positive Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme Report which recognises the strengths of the delivery of the programme by the programme coordinator, LCVP team and the support of senior management for the programme. The Board is pleased that the report acknowledges the good quality of teaching and learning in the classrooms, the very good access to ICT and the high value placed by students on the LCVP programme. The Board is also happy to note that the report records the good management of work experience, support from the guidance department, and support for students with additional educational needs.

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 Board accepts the recommendations of the Report.

The recommendation on student evaluation of the programme has already been implemented since the inspection and it is also intended to involve parents in an annual review of the programme. It is intended to facilitate a greater focus on Enterprise Education as part of the programme with the involvement of the County Enterprise Board.