An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Programme Evaluation
Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) REPORT

St Tiernan’s Community School
Balally, County Dublin
Roll number: 91343T

Date of inspection: 12th December 2014
REPORT ON THE QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN LEAVING CERTIFICATE APPLIED (LCA)

INFORMATION ON THE PROGRAMME EVALUATION

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Dates of inspection</th>
<th>11th and 12th December 2014</th>
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<tr>
<td>Inspection activities undertaken</td>
<td>Observation of teaching and learning during nine class periods</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Review of relevant documents         • Examination of students’ work</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Discussion with principal and key staff • Feedback to principal and relevant staff</td>
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<td>• Interaction with students</td>
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MAIN FINDINGS

• Teaching and learning was of a consistently high standard in the lessons observed.
• The teaching, learning and assessment strategies chosen for the lessons observed were active, collaborative and engaging in almost all instances.
• Teachers demonstrated a good awareness of students’ literacy and numeracy skills and made good efforts to develop and improve them through consistent and focussed interventions.
• LCA is an essential component of the school’s curriculum and is managed and implemented effectively.
• Planning and co-ordination of the LCA programme in St Tiernan’s Community School is very good.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

• The integration of innovative and effective information and communication technology (ICT) resources should be increased by the teaching team.
• All opportunities for differentiated learning should be explored in order to maximise all students’ learning and achievement.
• An informal interview should form part of the application procedures for the LCA programme in order to increase the status of a place on the course.
INTRODUCTION

St Tiernan’s Community School is a co-educational school with a current enrolment of 347 second-level students. The school participates in the Delivering Equality of Opportunity in School (DEIS) initiative and welcomes students from a diverse range of social and economic backgrounds. The LCA programme is a long standing and essential element of the school’s curriculum.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

• Teaching and learning was of a consistently high standard in the lessons observed.

• Preparation for the lessons observed was generally good and in some cases, extensive. This included the effective planning for resources and the preparation of carefully chosen student tasks, activities and assessments. ICT was used to prepare lesson resources but was generally underutilised as a teaching and learning tool. More effective use and greater integration of ICT should be considered by the LCA teaching team.

• The teaching, learning and assessment strategies chosen for the lessons observed were active, collaborative and engaging of students in almost all instances. Pair work, independent work, practical task-based learning and guided discussions were all incorporated effectively into the lessons observed.

• The structure of lessons in almost all instances was very good with clear introductions, development and conclusions of required learning. Appropriate connections were established in a number of lessons that helped students to relate their learning to their experiences or to their personal interests. Additional links were formed with other subject areas and good curricular integration was evident in a few lessons.

• There was very good awareness and development of students’ literacy and numeracy skills. Very good work has been undertaken in the areas of developing a cohesive approach to teaching common mathematical operations and in the expansion of key subject specific terminology using students’ knowledge of synonyms. These practices should be extended and developed where appropriate.

• Classroom interactions were respectful in almost all instances. Students were appropriately affirmed and encouraged for their efforts and contributions during lessons. A number of strategies that reward students for their positive behaviour have been developed with a particularly good example observed in a Hotel, Catering and Tourism (HCT) lesson.

• Formal assessments take place at Christmas and at the end of the summer term. Key assignments are used as a mode of assessment, with students completing intermediary and additional assignments as the need arises. Students are encouraged to re-submit key assignments following formative assessment. This good practice should be further developed throughout the programme.

• Students’ work is monitored effectively. Students voiced a desire for increased levels of formative assessment to help them to improve. This request should be examined and addressed where appropriate. With this in mind, the positive plans to introduce a formative feedback cover sheet on key assignments should be progressed and implemented as a priority.

• The organisation, layout and overall classroom environment is positive with some classrooms designed to facilitate collaboration and discussion. In all lessons, LCA students’ work and records of their achievement were displayed prominently.
In general, students were challenged by the learning activities that they took part in. These tasks provided students with the opportunity to engage actively in their learning and to work purposefully throughout all lessons. Opportunities to differentiate according to students’ abilities were missed in some instances and this should be explored further by the LCA teaching team in order to maximise all students’ learning and achievement.

There is a focused approach to the analysis of examination and assessment information. Yearly trends have been identified and in general, students achieve well in certificate examinations.

PROGRAMME PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

LCA is viewed by school management and staff as a key curricular programme that is an essential requirement for a sizeable cohort of the school’s students. School management are fully supportive of the programme and encourage and facilitate the on-going development of the programme in the school.

A very inclusive approach to integration is maintained in the school with LCA students taking a full and active role in many mainstream events and activities. Currently LCA students are not represented as a distinct group on the school’s student council. All possibilities should be explored to maximise their potential involvement and empower them to take a more active role in the council.

Clear guidance is provided to students and their parents regarding their choice of senior cycle programme and smooth their transition into the programme. This occurs mainly during the school’s senior cycle options evening. LCA students have the option to progress to three post-leaving certificate (PLC) courses offered on the school’s campus. These provide the school’s LCA students with an identifiable pathway to further education.

In general, while students self-select for the LCA, some students are also identified and encouraged to apply for a place as is good practice. As part of the school’s admission procedures for LCA, consideration should be given to an application process where students are encouraged to apply formally and take part in an interview to outline their reasons for their application and the personal qualities that they could bring to the programme similar to the schools current procedures in relation to Transition Year.

Effective systems have been put in place to monitor students’ attendance. Student absences are followed up by a text message and if unanswered, through a follow-up phone call from the school’s attendance secretary. High attendance rates are rewarded and recognised at whole school assemblies. However, student absenteeism is a cause for concern. Efforts to address this issue are ongoing and the provision of increased lunchtime privileges for sixth-year students has had a positive effect on students’ attendance and punctuality.

The scheduling and timetabling of the programme’s courses and modules is good. The range of subjects offered is appropriate and provides students with a good balance of experiences.

Work experience is planned and provided as an integral component of the programme. Fifth-year students attend their placements during two two-week blocks in October and March, while sixth-year students attend their placement one day per week for the entire year.
PROGRAMME PLANNING, CO-ORDINATION AND EVALUATION

• A high quality and comprehensively documented plan has been developed for the programme. This plan includes analysis of assessment trends, student and parent surveys, records of LCA team meetings and subject plans for all courses.

• A programme co-ordinator has been appointed to plan, develop and manage the LCA. These co-ordination and planning tasks are carried out efficiently and very effectively. The LCA teaching team meet formally at the beginning of the school year to plan, monitor and evaluate the programme. Additional formal meetings, especially for the core members of this team, would be beneficial in this regard.

The draft findings and recommendations arising out of this evaluation were discussed with the principal, deputy 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.

Published September 2015
Appendix

SCHOOL RESPONSE TO THE REPORT

Submitted by the Board of Management
Area 1  Observations on the content of the inspection report

The Board wishes to acknowledge the positive findings of the inspectorate who affirmed very good practice and teaching in the lessons observed. The Board particularly acknowledged the following findings

- Teaching and learning was of a consistently high standard
- Teaching, learning and assessment strategies observed were active collaborative and engaging
- Teachers demonstrated a good awareness of students literacy and numeracy skills and have put in place consistent and focussed interventions
- LCA is an essential component of the school’s curriculum and is managed and implemented effectively
- Planning and co-ordination of the LCA Program in St Tiernan’s Community School is very good.

St Tiernan’s has introduced and developed a range of programmes which include LCA as we endeavour to cultivate the multiple intelligences and actively seek to meet the individual needs of each and every student. The Board is pleased that The LCA Programme Inspection has recognised that School Management and Co-ordinator have implemented, supported and continue to facilitate the on-going development of a high quality programme in the school.

The Board would like to thank the entire staff for their professionalism and commitment to all students of St. Tiernan’s and congratulates them on an excellent inspection.

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

While ICT is used by many teachers it is acknowledged there is scope to ensure that all teachers incorporate a digital component to their teaching. Management have realised and acted on this by including ICT training for staff as part of Croke Park 2014/15 and will continue to do so.

The LCA programme comprises students of various abilities and backgrounds. Teachers are aware of this and differentiate their lesson plans accordingly. We will investigate and avail of CPD in this area. Differentiation strategies and resources will be further developed at subject and programme meetings.

As recommended in the report an application form and informal interview for a place on the LCA programme in order to increase the status will be in place for the academic year 2015/16 and subsequent years.