

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

**Programme Evaluation
Leaving Certificate Applied
REPORT**

**Kinsale Community School
County Cork
Roll Number: 91499E**

Date of inspection: 12 October 2010



EVALUATION OF THE LEAVING CERTIFICATE APPLIED

INTRODUCTION

This report has been written following an evaluation of the Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) programme in Kinsale 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 and the programme co-ordinator following the evaluation period. 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.

Kinsale Community School was opened in 1996, following the amalgamation of Our Lady of the Rosary Secondary School and Kinsale Vocational School. It is a co-educational institution and provides post-primary education for students in Kinsale and the surrounding hinterland. The school provides a very broad education and offers the Junior Certificate, the Transition Year (TY) programme, the established Leaving Certificate, the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP) and the LCA programme. The LCA programme is well established in the school and is on the curriculum since 2005. The school also provides adult education in the form of full-time day courses or part-time evening courses.

1 QUALITY OF PROGRAMME ORGANISATION

1.1 Whole school support

The provision of the LCA programme is a key element of the curriculum in Kinsale Community School. The principal displays effective leadership regarding the programme and its implementation.

There is a whole-school approach to publicising and implementing the programme. Staff, students and the community are made aware of the LCA programme and LCA activities through the school's website, the school's newsletter, the LCA staff notice board and the student notice board, which is in the LCA base room. Students participating in LCA are involved in outlining the programme to prospective first-year students and their parents on the open night. This is very good practice as the awareness of the programme is highlighted to parents from the time of their initial contact with the school.

Teachers of the LCA are encouraged and facilitated to avail of appropriate continuous professional development (CPD). The co-ordinator has a role in the induction of teachers, who are teaching LCA for the first time, and provides a good level of ongoing support. Matters pertaining to LCA are discussed at some subject department meetings. Building on this good practice, consideration should be given to placing LCA issues, including discussion on specific modules, on the agenda of all subject departments meetings. Effective teaching and learning methodologies could also form

part of these discussions. This inclusion of discussion of LCA issues at subject department meetings would enhance the understanding of all members of the department of various elements of the programme.

1.2 Resources

All elements of the programme are appropriately timetabled. Staff is appropriately assigned to teach the LCA. Extra teaching resources are assigned to assist in the teaching of some aspects of the programme. For example, the timetabling of two teachers for practical lessons is very positive as this approach provides very good assistance for students as they work independently. It also potentially maximises student achievement in these lessons.

Information and communication technology (ICT) is used effectively in both organising and implementing the LCA programme. Students have good access to ICT. The provision of computers in the LCA base room is very beneficial as it allows for an integrated approach to the use of ICT and this was observed during the evaluation.

1.3 Student selection and support

Effective procedures are in place for the identification of prospective students. These procedures involve consultation with relevant in-school personnel including the resource teachers, the year head of third year, the English and mathematics teachers, and senior management.

The guidance provided for students is appropriate. A whole-school approach is used to disseminate information to the third-year and TY students regarding the programmes on offer in senior cycle. Potential students and their parents are invited to attend an information meeting at which the senior cycle programmes are explained. Following this meeting, individual meetings are held with the parents and their son or daughter. Such support and guidance, in assisting students in choosing the programme that is most suitable to their needs, is very beneficial. The school is currently developing a parents' guide to LCA. This is very good.

The inclusion of LCA students as an integral part of their appropriate year group is very positive. The overall responsibility for pastoral and behavioural support is provided by the class tutors and year heads, as is the case for all students following a Leaving Certificate programme. LCA students are encouraged to become involved in events, such as the annual retreat, that are organised for their specific year group. Student achievement is celebrated by the presentation of an annual LCA academic award. This is very good practice.

There are appropriate supports in place for students with additional needs who are participating in the programme. In some instances, in-class support is provided by timetabling a resource teacher in addition to the subject teacher. This type of support is provided in lessons involving student practical work or lessons with a significant amount of individual written tasks or other independent learning activities. This is good practice. Some students are exempt from the study of Irish and these students are timetabled with the resource teacher at that time. While acknowledging that students are assisted in individual subjects when necessary, and that this is good practice, it is recommended that the special educational needs department devise and deliver a programme of work that would facilitate the enhancement of the literacy, numeracy, interpersonal and social skills of the LCA students who receive additional support.

1.4 Home-school links

Parents receive meaningful feedback on student progress. This is achieved through the annual parent-teacher meeting and twice-yearly written reports. In addition, parents are contacted as necessary when there are concerns regarding their son or daughter. Issues regarding, for example, unsatisfactory attendance, which would affect students' receipt of credits, are communicated to the parents in a timely manner. Parents also receive up-to-date information on matters generally pertaining to the LCA programme.

Appropriate contacts are fostered and maintained with outside agencies, employers and other members of the local community. The LCA co-ordinator monitors work-experience placements and employers are encouraged to contact the school. A teacher visits students when they are on their work placement. This is good practice.

2 QUALITY OF PROGRAMME PLANNING AND CO-ORDINATION

2.1 Planning

An appropriate current written plan is in place for LCA. The comprehensive folder, which assists effective planning and co-ordination, includes information on the programme, its aims and objectives, the LCA admissions policy, the organisation of the programme, teaching and learning methodologies and cross-curricular activities. The inclusion of sections on review procedures, and on the levels of student attainment in comparison to the national averages in the certificate examination results, is very good practice.

Planning for students with special educational needs is an integral part of the programme-planning process. Whole-team meetings facilitate the effective planning of tasks. It is good to note that records of these meetings are maintained.

Good work has been done in developing plans for each of the subject modules. Individual teachers have developed plans in many subject areas and, in some instances, this has resulted in the existence of two modular plans for the one subject. While acknowledging the work done in this regard, it is strongly recommended that an overall modular plan for the two years be collaboratively devised in all subjects, in accordance with best practice.

Many plans have timeframes indicated for each unit. This is good practice. In one instance, the learning outcomes are explicitly stated at the outset of the module. This is a very good approach. Building on this very good work, it is recommended that all subject plans use this format and include specific learning outcomes for each unit, the associated timeframes, and the specific resources that are to be employed to support teaching and learning.

2.2 Co-ordination

The co-ordination of the programme is very effective. The duties attached to the position of co-ordinator are wide-ranging and include administration, planning, communication with a large number of in-school personnel and external agencies, the provision of support in form of team building, and the ongoing monitoring of issues relating to the LCA in the school. Resources and facilities are available so that co-ordination duties can be carried out effectively.

Record keeping within the programme is of a high standard and is comprehensive. An extensive folder of documentation has been compiled which supports the effective co-ordination of LCA. The co-ordinator maintains very good communication with school management and students.

The LCA co-ordinator has timetabled contact with both LCA class groups. This is very good practice as regular timetabled-contact facilitates the development of a positive rapport with the students.

2.3 Curriculum

The school fully complies with Department of Education and Skills' guidelines and circulars regarding the LCA. A broad and balanced programme caters for the needs and interests of the students. The inclusion of the two vocational specialisms, Graphics and Construction Studies, and Hotel, Catering and Tourism, and elective modules from three different subject areas, namely Science, Religion, and Childcare and Community Care, facilitate the delivery of an all-encompassing curriculum. In addition, the timetabling of a modern European language, Italian, which is new to the students, broadens their curricular choices.

On completion of one cycle of the LCA in the school, a formal evaluation of the programme was undertaken and this involved both teachers and students. This is very good practice. It is clear that the outcomes of evaluation informed a review of the programme. As a result, the level of ICT resources within the LCA base classroom was increased and the students were more integrated into their specific year group. Building on this very good practice, a further formal evaluation should be undertaken. This evaluation should include parents, in addition to the teachers and students.

3 QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING

3.1 Planning and preparation

Planning and preparation for the lessons observed was very good, in almost all instances. Teachers had carefully planned for the delivery of their lessons within their overall plan for the module. Resources were used very effectively and included visual-stimulus materials, worksheets and PowerPoint presentations. Very good practice was observed when clear tasks had been planned, and in the majority of lessons, all students were engaged actively in the achievement of these tasks, for the duration of the lesson. A clear structure in relation to individual or group tasks should always be planned to ensure that all students engage and succeed in these tasks. Almost all students responded positively, as independent learners, in these well-planned lessons.

3.2 Learning and teaching

The quality of teaching and learning in the lessons observed was good, and in some instances, very good. Where observed, high-quality teaching was characterised by very good subject knowledge, lively and informative explanation and discussion, and active learning by students. All of these elements captured the students' interest for the duration of the lesson. Lessons were well structured and the pace was good, in almost all instances. In one lesson, an icebreaker was used to get the students to focus on the subject matter at the start of the lesson. This was very effective.

In some instances, teachers communicated the learning outcomes to the students at the outset. In a very small number of lessons, the planned learning outcomes were written on the board. This is

very good practice. It is recommended that the planned learning outcomes be communicated to students at the outset in all lessons, be referred to during the lesson and be used as a framework to check understanding, as necessary.

Time for recapitulation and consolidation was included in a number of lessons. In one lesson, which comprised a number of activities, a plenary session was used on completion of the separate tasks to ascertain and reinforce student learning. This is very good. It is recommended that all teachers factor in time for review of learning at appropriate times during the lesson, and particularly at the end.

Students were interested and engaged throughout in lessons where a short student activity was interspersed with whole-class discussion. Examples of active learning included pair work, student practical work and student use of ICT. Teachers supported students as they worked individually, in pairs or in groups. This is very good practice.

In two lessons, the subject teacher was assisted by another teacher. The individual support provided to the students was very effectively employed in developing lesson content, in promoting student learning, and developing student practical and writing skills. Student practical work, where observed, was very well organised. Handouts provided effective support for students as they worked through the practical activities.

In some instances, there were examples of the effective use of differentiation in terms of content and particularly in the use of questioning. This is a very good approach and teachers should use this to a greater extent.

There were some very good examples of linking the subject matter of the lesson with everyday life, thus making the topic relevant and tangible for students. In one lesson, the teacher's knowledge of a student's participation in a county final in Gaelic football, which had taken place the previous day, was used as a basis to illustrate and apply the concept of the 'perimeter'. In another lesson, an inquiry-based approach was used to ascertain if sugar was present in soft drinks. In advance of completing the scientific investigation, students discussed the relative sweetness of soft drink samples, and were asked to predict the results. This is very good practice.

In keeping with the key underlying principles of the LCA, attention was given to the development of students' literacy in many lessons. In a language lesson, the target language was very effectively used as a means of classroom communication and to develop the lesson content. This is very good practice. A range of strategies was effectively used to introduce students to new terms and the terminology of the subject. These included word searches and the use of work sheets. In one instance, a handout containing facial images of various emotions and the associated written terms was given to the students and they were encouraged to use these terms in their written tasks. This is good practice. There was also evidence of teachers providing written prompts or focused questions to assist students in their written work. It is recommended that opportunities for the development of oral and written literacy be provided in all lessons. Care should also be taken to ensure that students understand all terminology in advance of completing pair work or other independent learning. The identification and explanation of key words would assist in this regard. Consideration should also be given to making dictionaries available in all lessons, for use by students, to facilitate the development of their literacy in an independent manner.

Students' development of numeracy was facilitated in the mathematics lesson. It is good to note that, in another lesson, students' numeracy was exploited in developing the lesson content.

Opportunities to develop student's numeracy skills should be exploited in all subject areas as appropriate.

There was some evidence of cross-curricular linking, a practice that is encouraged. Personal and social development was facilitated in all lessons through various teaching and learning strategies including group, pair work, student-practical work and whole-class discussion. This is good practice.

Activities took place in a positive, stimulating and structured environment and teachers have high expectations of students. Classroom management was effective and discipline was sensitively maintained, when necessary. A good, and in some instances very good, student-teacher rapport was observed in the lessons. The use of humour contributed to the very good relationships that were observed in some lessons. Students were interested and co-operative in their work and were supported by teachers as they worked individually or in groups. Students were challenged by the teaching and learning activities and were affirmed and encouraged for their efforts and contributions.

The quality of students' learning was reflected in their ability to answer, and in some instances ask, questions. Overall, students demonstrated a good level of understanding, appropriate to their abilities, and their skills in practical subjects were well developed. Where observed, students were at ease in their use of computers and they showed a good level of ICT skills. LCA students also perform very well in the certificate examinations.

3.3 Assessment

Oral assessments were integrated into many of the lessons observed, with teachers mainly assessing students' understanding through questioning. These questions and answers were effective in developing further discussion and, in this way, acted as a formative assessment process. Writing exercises in class also assisted in gauging the level of students' understanding of the topic.

The custom of setting house and pre-certificate examinations for sixth-year students is good practice. It provides students with the opportunity to familiarise themselves with the format of the Leaving Certificate Applied examination papers, in addition to assessing their knowledge and understanding in a formal setting.

Students' progress is monitored through the completion of the key assignments associated with particular modules and tasks. Students' key assignments are of a good standard. Students carried out a range of activities including organising a coffee morning and a St Patrick's Day party for first-year students. They have also completed surveys. These activities facilitate the development of social and interpersonal skills among the student cohort. This is positive. Of particular note is the exploitation of the school's location in the completion of one key assignment which was based on the history of the local area. The *Siege of the Battle of Kinsale* was the research topic in this instance.

Tasks were either completed on an individual basis or in groups. Students created reports that incorporated aspects of planning, execution and evaluation of the tasks. Much of the work involved in these tasks was completed during class time under the direction and supervision of a teacher. Where appropriate, the learning support teachers gave support to students. The close monitoring of all tasks is good practice.

The tasks provided opportunities for cross-curricular work and this was used to good effect. For example, students' completed reports on different aspects of advertising and used ICT and Mathematics to illustrate data in the form of pie-charts and bar charts. For the general education task, students made Christmas cards in Art, some of which contained greetings in Irish. The appropriate price list was compiled in mathematics lessons and students learned the appropriate religious symbols in the religion class.

Currently, sixth-year students are completing the practical achievement tasks in a range of areas. These include Spanish, cookery, kickboxing, Art and on-line training. The encouragement of students in developing these skills and the support provided is positive.

The school conducts an analysis of students' level of attainment in the certificate examination and compares the achievement to the national average. This is good practice.

4 SUMMARY OF STRENGTHS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT

The following are the main strengths identified in the evaluation:

- Effective leadership by the principal facilitates whole-school support for, and successful implementation of the LCA.
- Resources are deployed effectively to support the programme
- A good level of planning assists the effective organisation and operation of LCA.
- Co-ordination of LCA is of a high standard.
- A broad and balanced curriculum is provided.
- The quality of teaching and learning was good and in some instances very good.
- Appropriate attention was given to the development of students' literacy and interpersonal skills in many lessons.
- Students demonstrated a good level of understanding, appropriate to their abilities, and their skills in practical subjects were well developed.

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

- It is recommended that the special educational needs department devise and deliver a programme of work that would facilitate the enhancement of literacy, numeracy, interpersonal and social skills of the LCA students who receive additional support.
- An overall modular plan for the two years of the programme should be collaboratively devised in all subject areas.
- Lesson objectives should be outlined in the form of intended learning outcomes and these should be revisited during the recapitulation stage of each lesson to ascertain students' learning.
- Opportunities for the enhancement of students' numeracy should be exploited in all subject areas.

Appendix

SCHOOL RESPONSE TO THE REPORT

Submitted by the Board of Management

Area 1 Observations on the content of the inspection report

The Board of Management of Kinsale Community School welcomes this report on the LCA programme in the school and in particular the affirmation of the commitment of management, co-ordinator and staff to the programme.

The Board notes that the inspector has commended practice in many areas including: publicising and implementing the programme, communication between home and school, the use of information and communication technology in both organising and implementing the programme, record keeping, policy statement, breadth of curriculum, links with the Special Needs Department, the quality of teaching and learning and students' attainment levels.

The staff is pleased that the report acknowledges the importance of the LCA programme in the school as a key element of the overall curriculum. The Board itself is very satisfied with the success of the programme in terms of retention and onwards educational placement of the pupils who opt for it.

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

Management in Kinsale Community School is committed to the development of teaching and learning in the school and view the recommendations as a means of building on the strengths of the programme as indicated in the report.

The key recommendations will be used constructively in prioritising and informing future programme development. A literacy programme has commenced with LCA5 for those students who are exempt from Irish.

Subject plans for LCA will be recognized on a two year modular basis.

Emphasis will be placed on the use of key terms and learning outcomes in class planning and on literacy and numeracy in line with the report recommendations.

The Board considers the report to be a significant resource in terms of the strategic development of our LCA programme.