

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

**Programme Evaluation
Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme
REPORT**

**Presentation College
Terenure Park, Terenure
Dublin 6W
Roll Number: 76092K**

Date of inspection: 11 November 2009



**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 LEAVING CERTIFICATE VOCATIONAL PROGRAMME (LCVP)

INTRODUCTION

This report has been written following an evaluation of the LCVP in Presentation College, Terenure. 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 a small group of students. The evaluation was conducted over two 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 and the programme coordinator at the end of the evaluation period.

Presentation College, Terenure, was first established in 1968 by the Presentation congregation to provide, together with the Presentation primary school, education to girls in Terenure and the surrounding area. The trusteeship of the college transferred to City of Dublin Vocational Educational Committee (CDVEC) in 2004. For the school year 2009/2010, the college has an enrolment of 267 girls. The college offers the following programmes: the Junior Certificate, the Transition Year (TY), the Leaving Certificate and the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP).

Approximately one third of the total student cohort in senior cycle participates in the LCVP every year. The college has offered the LCVP since 1996, so the programme has a long established tradition in the college's senior cycle curriculum. 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.

1 QUALITY OF PROGRAMME ORGANISATION

1.1 Whole school support

The present senior management team of principal and deputy-principal had just recently taken up their positions in the school at the time of the evaluation. As senior management was beginning the process of reviewing many aspects of the educational provision of the college, this evaluation of the LCVP will therefore provide an external perspective to the college's own internal review. Effective implementation of the LCVP requires the active on-going support of senior management and the LCVP team articulated their appreciation of the support they receive from the new management appointed. An LCVP core team has been established, comprising the key personnel involved in delivery of the LCVP, and it is good that there is an identifiable team that works closely together. School management facilitates regular meetings of the core team to evaluate, review and assess the programme. The bi-annual meeting for review and evaluation is a very good example of how the LCVP team and senior management work together effectively for the good of their students. A strength of the programme in the college is the awareness and appreciation demonstrated by senior management, teachers and students of the value of the LCVP in developing students' learning and skills.

Senior management has deployed teachers to the LCVP teaching team that have a complementary set of skills and expertise to ensure the successful implementation of all aspects of the programme in the college. The specialisms of Business, Guidance and ICT are represented within the team. This is very good practice. The LCVP team identified the cross-curricular links created for students as among the most positive aspects of the programme; such cross-curricular planning requires liaison with a number of subject teachers and departments. Its presence as an integral part of the school's LCVP programme is evidence of whole-school involvement in the quality of the programme provision.

Senior management also facilitates attendance at relevant continuing professional development (CPD) for the LCVP co-ordinator and Link Modules teachers, the benefit of which was evident in the high quality of the planning documentation and in the suitability of the materials used and the methodologies deployed in teaching the Link Modules courses. The benefits to teachers of participating in CPD, as articulated by the teachers themselves, has been the opportunity to develop themselves as teachers, to examine different approaches to teaching material, to share ideas with other teachers and to reflect on their own teaching practices. As a result, the strengths of the programme identified in the course of the evaluation include the high quality of teaching, the commitment of the teachers to the programme and the engagement of students who clearly derive enjoyment from learning within the programme.

In their meeting with the inspector, students articulated their enthusiasm for the programme. They were interested in what the programme offered and they recognised its value to them in developing skills and preparing them for further study, work and life. It is recommended that senior management conduct a destination-tracking exercise to identify the extent to which former students who have completed the LCVP drew on the points acquired to access their course of choice and the extent to which the skills they developed through participation in the LCVP have indeed helped them to cope with the demands of further study and work. The commitment of senior management and the LCVP team to the programme is praised.

1.2 Resources

The time allocation to the programme is good and in line with programme guidelines. The Link Modules lessons are assigned eighty minutes in year one, two forty minute periods per week, and seventy-five minutes in year two, one forty minute and one thirty-five minute period. In addition, all students receive forty minutes Computer Studies and forty minutes timetabled Guidance in fifth and sixth year. The LCVP students are not viewed as a distinct group and are not viewed any differently from the rest of the students in their year group.

Senior management tries to ensure that the LCVP is assigned a double period either in fifth or sixth year, which is in keeping with best practice guidelines for the programme. Currently the periods allocated are single. Nevertheless, the value of a double period in fifth or sixth year is recognised and senior management tries to achieve this, if possible, within timetabling constraints. The Link Modules lessons are currently timetabled at the same time as periods for physical education (PE) and religious education (RE). Senior management should review this arrangement for coming years. The possibility of placing the Link Modules for LCVP students concurrent with Computer Studies for non-LCVP students should be considered.

Access to ICT is very good. Teachers of the Link Modules and students have regular access to the computer room. The installation of ICT into base classrooms with the recent acquisition of whiteboards and data projectors facilitate the integration of ICT into teaching and learning, a

necessary pre-requisite to effective delivery of all aspects of the programme. The acquisition of audio-visual and recording equipment for the recorded interview is planned. The LCVP notice board is a useful resource for dissemination of information for both students and teachers. School management also facilitates the provision of buses to and from venues, when necessary, for students engaged in external activities.

1.3 Student selection and support

Students with the appropriate vocational subject groupings (VSGs) are encouraged to apply for participation in LCVP. The defining factor for students is having the appropriate subject combinations to make them eligible for participation in the programme and the majority of eligible students in the college opt to partake in the programme. The main VSGs chosen by students are Home Economics or Art and Design with Business, or a combination of Biology and Chemistry. Students fulfil the modern language requirement, as all students of Presentation College are offered a choice of three languages, French, German or Italian, on entry to the college and most students continue the study of a modern language into Leaving Certificate. Generally, LCVP students form part of the mainstream established Leaving Certificate groups and come together as a distinct group for Links Modules lessons and associated activities only.

Students recognise that skills such as planning, researching, report-writing, and making presentations are key to their success when pursuing third-level courses. The reasons given by the students for choosing LCVP were the possibility of gaining additional Central Applications Office (CAO) points, the practical nature of the course content and, in some cases, the overlap with Business for those who already had a business subject. Currently, two thirds of the junior cycle cohort opts to study Business for Junior Certificate. Business has been introduced as a TY module which helps to lay the foundation for LCVP and the positive experiences of students in running TY mini-companies instils interest and motivation in students. The benefit of TY to student development overall is a factor which teachers mentioned in discussion with inspectors.

School management ensures that students are well informed about the LCVP programme and students are given opportunities on three occasions, in third year, in fourth year and once again at the beginning of fifth year, to inform themselves about the LCVP. Senior management acknowledged that the small size of the LCVP group at present is a constraint to running the programme in the college. Senior management hopes to expand uptake by providing information earlier on in third year for parents and students which will allow students to bear the combination of subjects for VSGs in mind when making a choice in relation to their subject options. All of these factors should help to increase potential uptake.

Students with additional educational needs are fully integrated in all lessons but are given support where necessary, for example, students may be given more time to complete portfolio items.

At the beginning of fifth year, LCVP students receive an induction resource pack. This is a worthwhile endeavour, as it ensures that all students are aware of the programme structure and objectives from the outset and that learning can start immediately. School management together with the LCVP team should consider the introduction of an induction outing or team-building exercise, involving students from LCVP year one and two, to consolidate this process. The students make a personal choice and commitment to programme completion. The success of this is evident in the good attainment in certificate examinations and in the fact that all student complete the programme and that there is no trend of drop off from the programme in year two.

1.4 Home-school links

Communication and provision of information about the LCVP to parents is thorough and systematic. Parents are fully briefed on senior cycle options for students and to this extent are involved in the process of subject and programme selection. It is praiseworthy that the college involves parents directly in delivery of aspects of the programme, such as at the careers evening and in the conduct of mock interviews. The student journal is regularly used as a means of communication between parents and teachers in relation to students and student application and progress. Parent-teacher meetings are also held in the usual manner to inform parents of students' progress and reports are sent after in-school assessments of spring and summer.

2 QUALITY OF PROGRAMME PLANNING AND COORDINATION

2.1 Planning

The planning documentation examined was thorough, attractively presented and included the main elements of good planning for programme implementation. There is good quality planning, from aims to programme structure to schemes of work, for each year group. The aims and objectives for the programme are carefully thought-out and outlined in relation to the college's own student cohort. It is recommended that in the introduction to the LCVP plan a reference to the school's mission statement be included, outlining where and how the LCVP fits in to the overall curriculum of the college and in the achievement of its objectives. The content of the two Links Modules subjects is outlined in terms of content, methodologies, resources and cross-curricular links and the timeframe for delivery of course components. This is very good practice.

The plan also includes a list of the links the LCVP co-ordinator has established with local businesses and enterprises, which are central to the quality of the experiences provided for students, career investigations and preparing students for the analysis of case studies of enterprise in certificate examinations. The range is commendable. This list could be augmented with a school year planner to record planning for visits-in and visits-out to enterprises and businesses. Over time, the planning documentation could also include a database for work-shadowing or work-experience placements.

Senior management, together with LCVP co-ordinator, has introduced its own quality assurance system to evaluate the programme. This is very good and in line with the recommended approach to programme development and review. The ongoing development of the school's LCVP and curriculum is in the first place the responsibility of LCVP teaching team. Records of monthly meetings show the range of matters discussed at these meetings, including student work ethic and commitment, student progress in relation to completion of portfolio items, an audit of student ICT skills on entry to the programme, timetabling and organisational arrangements for enterprise activities. The focus of review is appropriately student-centred.

Every six months the outcomes of the monthly LCVP meetings are reviewed and reported back to senior management, so that the LCVP core team and senior management are involved in review and evaluation. Solutions have been found and refinements have been introduced as a result of review to both planning and delivery of the programme. Particularly innovative and useful is the portfolio preparation receipt devised by the LCVP team to ensure student adherence to deadlines. Students were conscious of their responsibility in relation to meeting deadlines for completion of portfolio items, which indicates the effectiveness of the measures introduced. The time afforded to review and development planning has impacted positively and resulted in worthwhile

development. However, an analysis of student attainment in certificate examinations should form part of programme review and be included in the LCVP plan.

2.2 Coordination

Effective coordination has brought an organisational cohesion and efficiency to the programme. More importantly, the motivation and enthusiasm of both teachers and students for the programme was clearly in evidence. This can be attributed, in part, to the quality of the coordination. The presentation prepared by the LCVP coordinator to inform both parents and students about the programme is exemplary. The present co-ordinator has been in the position for the last four years and has responsibility for two LCVP groups, year one and year two. The role of LCVP co-ordination is not presently attached to a post of responsibility, nor has there been any allocation of time to the co-ordinator for the fulfilment of duties up to now. Senior management provided assurance that the matter of allocation of time to the co-ordinator role will be addressed as soon as practicable.

The range of co-ordination activities includes: planning for the Link Modules; contact with parents of LCVP students; organising visits-in and visits-out; student and teacher induction to the programme; and dissemination of information relating to the LCVP in the college. The LCVP co-ordinator is also a teacher of Business, giving LCVP students direct access to the expertise of Business. The co-ordinator is also a guidance counsellor and has a guidance service office which facilitates storage and maintenance of records relating to the programme. These include records of LCVP team meetings, examination results both internal and external, records of student attendance, in-school assessments and class tests as well as student portfolios. Materials for presentations and information giving are also stored and updated from year to year. The work of the co-ordinator in achieving effective organisational and administrative procedures is to be praised.

In discussion with the inspector, the co-ordinator identified as the most rewarding aspect of the programme observing the students develop and grow in confidence with the necessary skills and qualities for the world of work, third level education or further study. The lack of time allocated for co-ordination, a matter which was now being addressed by school management, had been a source of difficulty for the co-ordinator. The least effective aspect of the actual programme up to this time was the lack of a work experience element for students, the introduction of which was now being actively pursued. The co-ordinator acknowledged the excellent teamwork of the LCVP team and support of senior management.

2.2 Curriculum

All requirements for the programme are being fulfilled or are being addressed in LCVP planning for implementation. The co-ordinator as guidance counsellor assists students in their career exploration; administers aptitude tests and interest inventories; organises mock interviews; and arranges for students to attend career exhibitions and college open days. Students reported that they most enjoyed preparation for careers and work with interview skills, research of careers and career paths. A training consultant from the local enterprise centre helps with interview techniques. Through the school's LCVP Enterprise activity, students are provided with opportunities to plan, organise and engage in active learning experiences both inside and outside the classroom. Ideas for the type of activity undertaken have come from the students. In interaction

with the inspector, the students mentioned the range of teamwork tasks they participate in as part of LCVP.

Business and community visits are an integral part of the programme. Three visits to local companies are organised. These were varied, suited to students' interests and mainly local. Links with the local enterprise board are also being fostered. Activities involved both internal and external communication and communication in different media, such as email, personal contact, letters and phone calls. The profile of the school will be raised through new links with local businesses and the local community.

Cross-curricular work is an important aspect of the LCVP and the commendable practice of different members of the teaching staff assisting with specific LCVP activities and events was very much in evidence. Examples of cross-curricular planning are evident in the preparation for the world of work, the drafting of the CV, which involves both the ICT and Guidance departments as well as English. Skills from Art, Home Economics, PE and Business are also drawn upon. The History and Geography departments are involved in helping with the My Own Place portfolio item.

The development of ICT skills and use of technology was particularly highlighted by students as being useful and enjoyable. Research work was conducted both at school and at home and students used a memory key to transport data. The use of active teaching and learning methodologies is encouraged in LCVP and these were observed in lessons in the course of the evaluation. Students reported that they liked when the LCVP students came together as a group and the approach adopted in the Link Modules. They enjoyed the interactions in class and the opportunity to conduct research and to work in groups.

Work experience has not formed part of the programme up to the current school year. The immediate objective at the time of the evaluation was to introduce the work experience element to the programme. The LCVP team had already begun the process and asked students to find their own placements and formal and informal contacts have been completed. In preparation for work placements, questions for prospective work shadowing were being prepared. When fully embedded in the college, the work experience component will complete the very good programme in place for students.

3 QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING OF LINK MODULES

3.1 Planning and preparation

Good short-term planning contributed to well-structured lessons which included a variety of methods and student-centred activity. Lesson content was appropriate and lesson materials prepared in advance were very good, allowing each student to receive similar yet individual work sheets to reinforce learning. The colour coding of the work sheets was both attractive and useful. Materials were also prepared for distribution for homework. Homework also took the form of reflection, in line with recommended programme approach, and students were presented with a list of things to think about. This approach by the Link Modules teachers is commended.

3.2 Learning and teaching

The quality of teaching observed was very good. Lessons were characterised by clarity of direction and purposeful learning. Objectives of lessons or a series of lessons were shared with students and recorded on the board. At the beginning of lessons observed, links with previous learning were clearly established, whereby students, for example, were asked to reflect on what they had observed and learnt during the previous day's activity. Personal reflection was also built in to the lesson structure and the use of silent reflection was effective.

Lessons opened with a brief teacher presentation using a data projector. Students were reminded of where the theme or series of lesson objectives fitted in the broader examination and course content context. This is very good practice. The approach adopted by the teachers was in line with that recommended for LCVP with active learning methodologies being deployed, and with their pleasant manner, teachers created a positive atmosphere conducive to learning. There was a good work ethic among students and excellent rapport between student and teachers. Classrooms, well decorated with relevant posters and charts, also contributed to the stimulating learning environment.

From the outset, there was clearly an emphasis on definition of terms and clarity of understanding. The teachers were affirming of student interventions and suggestions, providing commentary and clarification of student responses, when necessary. The contributions from group work were recorded on the whiteboard and also by the students as they listened. Some good ideas came from the students as the teachers gathered responses on the board. Students demonstrated awareness of what was required of them and were attentive and participative. Students broke into groups easily and organised themselves well, appointing a recorder, reporter and timekeeper. Students participated well in lessons, were co-operative in their learning and, when working in pairs and groups, demonstrated sound knowledge. Students were observed brainstorming, speaking quietly together and engaging well with activities assigned. When the class worked in plenary, the level of student participation varied, with some students being quite vocal, some quieter and some who did not contribute. Students observed and interviewed in the course of the evaluation were courteous, well behaved and a credit to school management and their teachers' classroom management.

3.3 Assessment

Evaluation and self-reflection are integrated into the programme. Students are taught to evaluate at the end of a lesson, at end of activities and to evaluate themselves and the qualities they have. A useful strategy deployed by teacher is to ask students to correct each other's work and they benefit and learn from each other in this way. Assessment is both formative and summative. The coordinator keeps a record of student adherence to deadlines for completion of portfolio items and students are tested on completion of a topic. Students in fifth year have examinations twice a year and in sixth year the students do mock examinations. The student journal is used to communicate with students and parents. There is an emphasis on the practical and learning by doing. The students are viewed as a strength of the programme by the teachers and what helps greatly is that they want to be there. Student attainment in certificate examinations has been consistently high from year to year with a considerable number of merits and some distinctions achieved.

4 SUMMARY OF STRENGTHS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT

The following are the main strengths identified in the evaluation:

- Senior management, teachers and students demonstrated awareness and appreciation of the value of the LCVP in developing students' learning and skills.
- The LCVP teaching team which have a complementary set of skills and expertise to ensure the successful implementation of all aspects of the programme.
- School management ensures that students and parents are well informed about the programme.
- Senior management, together with LCVP co-ordination, has introduced its own quality assurance system to evaluate the programme.
- The LCVP planning documentation examined was thorough, attractively presented and included the main elements of good planning for programme implementation.
- Effective coordination has brought an organisational cohesion and efficiency to the programme.
- Students are provided with opportunities to plan, organise and engage in active learning experiences both inside and outside the classroom.
- Good short term planning contributed to well-structured lessons
- The quality of teaching observed was very good.
- Lessons were characterised by clarity of direction and purposeful learning.
- The approach adopted by the teachers was in line with that recommended for LCVP with active learning methodologies and an atmosphere conducive to learning.
- Student attainment in certificate examinations has been consistently high from year to year.

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

- It is recommended that senior management conduct destination tracking of former students who have completed the LCVP to inform programme evaluation and review.
- It is recommended that senior management should review timetabling arrangements whereby the Link Modules lessons are timetabled at the same time as periods for physical education (PE) and religious education (RE).
- It is recommended that the introduction of an induction outing should be considered by the LCVP team and senior management to consolidate the induction process for the LCVP group.
- It is recommended that in the introduction to the LCVP plan reference to the school's mission statement should be made, outlining where and how the LCVP fits in to the overall curriculum of the college and in the achievement of its objectives.

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