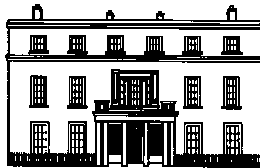


An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Programme Evaluation
Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme
REPORT

Heywood Community School
Ballinakill, County Laois
Roll number: 91427C

Date of inspection: 1 October 2015



AN ROINN | DEPARTMENT OF
OIDEACHAIS | EDUCATION
AGUS SCILEANNA | AND SKILLS

REPORT ON THE QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN THE LEAVING CERTIFICATE VOCATIONAL PROGRAMME

INFORMATION ON THE PROGRAMME EVALUATION

Dates of inspection	30 September and 1 October 2015
Inspection activities undertaken <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Review of relevant documents• Discussion with principal and key staff• Interaction with students	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Observation of teaching and learning during three class periods• Examination of students' work• Feedback to principal and relevant staff

MAIN FINDINGS

- The quality of teaching in the lessons observed was uniformly good.
- The teaching strategies used were appropriate to the nature of the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP) and to the needs of students.
- There was good evidence of the ongoing use of *assessment for learning* (AfL) techniques in the assessment of student work.
- The school demonstrated a high level of commitment to providing a quality programme.
- Very good links are maintained with the local business and voluntary communities.
- The programme, as implemented, is well balanced between practical activities and the more theoretical aspects of the course.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

- The guidance plan and the LCVP plan should both be updated to reflect the specific inputs provided by the guidance counsellor.
 - The range and variety of visiting speakers, out-of-school visits and enterprise activities should be expanded to provide wider learning experiences for students and more choice in the preparation of portfolio items.
 - School management and the relevant teachers should undertake an analysis of students' outcomes in the certificate examinations in order to assess the added value to students of programme participation and to ensure that the programme continues to meet their needs.
 - The LCVP team should work to raise awareness, at whole-school level, of the LCVP as an integrated cross-curricular programme.
 - The annual review of the programme should be extended to include the views of other staff members, as appropriate, and parents and students; and the review process should be documented as should the actions to be taken to bring about stated improvements.
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INTRODUCTION

Heywood Community School is a co-educational school with a current enrolment of 688 students, mostly from a large rural hinterland and from a wide range of socio-economic backgrounds. The Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP) has been a significant element of the school's senior cycle curriculum for many years.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

- The quality of teaching and learning in the lessons observed was uniformly good. Lessons were well planned, prepared and structured and all required resources were to hand.
- Learning outcomes were shared with students at the opening of lessons and the lessons were specifically designed to achieve these outcomes. The learning outcomes were also reviewed at the close of lessons and progress was assessed.
- The teaching strategies used were appropriate to the nature of the LCVP and to the needs of students. A variety of inputs was used and lessons, while teacher led, were student centred and active-learning methodologies were strongly in evidence. Lessons were well paced.
- Good attention was paid to the literacy development of students. This was especially evident in the repeated contextual use of topic-specific keywords and terminology.
- Teacher movement throughout the lessons was very good, monitoring and assessing students' work and providing differentiated support as necessary.
- There was very good evidence of the ongoing teacher use of AfL techniques by teachers in the assessment of students' work, including the manner in which their draft portfolio items were assessed and returned to them for further attention. It is noted that the school's information and communication technology infrastructure is creatively used in this process.
- The subject material of each lesson was well linked to students' everyday experiences and earlier learning, thereby ensuring that new learning was well grounded in students' prior knowledge.
- Classroom interactions were positive, creating an atmosphere that was conducive to good quality learning. The quality of student-teacher interactions was high. Students were well challenged by the questioning strategies used by teachers and in the ensuing discussions.
- High expectations of students were apparent and students responded accordingly. They worked diligently, in a mature manner and their behaviour was exemplary at all times.
- Students were well affirmed for their work, they were encouraged to participate to the fullest extent in lessons and they made significant and valuable contributions to all lessons.
- There was very good evidence that students were progressing well in further developing their knowledge, understanding and skills.

PROGRAMME PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- The staff members involved in the LCVP showed an appreciation and understanding of the value of the programme and the school demonstrated a high level of commitment to providing a quality programme.

- The effective support of management ensures that students are afforded the opportunity to benefit from a high quality programme.
- Teachers' continuing professional development in relation to LCVP has been facilitated and availed of to the greatest extent possible.
- Clear and timely information is provided to students and parents to help them make informed choices. There is an appropriate level of contact with parents regarding out-of-school activities.
- School management's review of timetabling arrangements to facilitate direct classroom input from the guidance counsellor is a very welcome development. It is recommended that the guidance plan and the LCVP plan are both updated to reflect the specific inputs provided by the guidance counsellor.
- In addition, school management and the relevant teachers should undertake an analysis of students' outcomes in the certificate examinations, and in particular the grades and points achieved, in order to assess the added value to students of programme participation and to ensure that the programme continues to meet their needs.
- Very good links are maintained with the local business and voluntary communities and these links have been used to provide work experience opportunities for students and to source visiting speakers.
- Work experience arrangements are well managed. However, it is important for school management to ensure that procedures are in place to monitor and deal with difficult situations should they arise.
- The range and variety of visiting speakers, out-of-school visits and enterprise activities should be expanded in order to add breadth and balance to the programme. This will provide wider learning experiences for students and more choice in the preparation of portfolio items.

PROGRAMME PLANNING, CO-ORDINATION AND EVALUATION

- An appropriate current written plan is in place. The plan balances provision for activities leading to the preparation of portfolio items very well with that for the more theoretical elements of the programme. Outcomes in the certificate examinations for students taking the programme have been very positive to date.
- Programme coordination is effective and there is a hard-working core team in place. The good quality of communication amongst members of the core team and with school management ensures the smooth running of the programme.
- In order to enhance the programme, it is recommended that the LCVP team raise awareness, at whole-school level, of the LCVP as an integrated cross-curricular programme. The LCVP team should explore and document, with all subject departments, the links between their subjects and the link modules curriculum. Planning for the programme can then be extended to include concrete steps to implement the identified cross-curricular links, for example by selecting appropriate enterprise and other activities. Subject teachers can be encouraged to highlight these elements of their subjects for the benefit of the LCVP students in their lessons.
- It is evident that school management and the LCVP core team evaluate the implementation and outcomes of the programme on an annual basis. It is recommended that the review

process be extended to include the views of other staff members, as appropriate, and parents and students. The review process should be documented as should the actions to be taken to bring about stated improvements.

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