

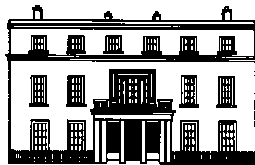
**An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna**

**Department of Education and Skills**

**Programme Evaluation  
Leaving Certificate Applied  
REPORT**

**Loreto Secondary School  
Granges Road, Kilkenny  
Roll number: 61580P**

**Date of inspection: 2<sup>nd</sup> October 2013**



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

## REPORT ON THE QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN LEAVING CERTIFICATE APPLIED

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### INFORMATION ON THE PROGRAMME EVALUATION

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| <b>Dates of inspection</b>   | 1 <sup>st</sup> and 2 <sup>nd</sup> October 2013   |
| <b>Inspection activities undertaken</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Review of relevant documents</li><li>• Discussion with principal and key staff</li><li>• Interaction with students</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Observation of teaching and learning during six class periods</li><li>• Examination of students' work</li><li>• Feedback to principal and relevant staff</li></ul> |

### MAIN FINDINGS

- The quality of teaching and learning observed during the course of the evaluation ranged from good to excellent.
- The development of students' literacy was, in almost all instances, a key component of the lessons observed.
- Student attainment in certificate examinations is very good with almost all students achieving merit and distinction grades with the majority of these students achieving distinctions.
- School management places a high regard on the value of Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) programme in the school as it provides opportunities for those students for whom the established Leaving Certificate programme may not be the most suitable option.
- Co-ordination of the LCA programme is highly effective.

### MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

- Methods to maximise differentiated teaching approaches should be explored and implemented including the further development of team-teaching and additional supports through SNA intervention where appropriate.
  - The LCA curriculum should be reviewed and rebalanced to provide a more diverse experience for students.
  - The agendas for future LCA planning meetings should address pedagogical issues including collaborative learning techniques, active learning methods and numeracy supports for students.
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## **INTRODUCTION**

Loreto Secondary School is an all-girls school with a current enrolment of 850 students. At senior cycle, the school provides a variety of programmes including an optional Transition Year (TY), the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP), the Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) programme and the established Leaving Certificate. LCA has been part of the school's curriculum for over ten years and is offered to students every second year.

## **TEACHING AND LEARNING**

- The quality of teaching and learning observed during the course of the evaluation ranged from good to excellent.
- The planning and preparation of resources and activities for all lessons observed enhanced students' experiences and contributed to active and engaging lessons.
- All lessons had clearly identifiable learning outcomes that were often shared and revisited with students during and at the conclusion of lessons.
- The methodologies employed by teachers to maximise student participation and learning included: demonstration, pair and group work, independent learning tasks and in one instance, role play. These methods were most successful and promoted ongoing communication and dialogue during lessons.
- The development of students' literacy skills was, in almost all instances, a key component of the lessons observed. This was achieved by creating opportunities for all students to read, write, listen and speak. Other methods employed included a focused approach to subject specific key word development and the provision of opportunities for communication using various digital media. Interventions to support students' numeracy skills were rare.
- Differentiated teaching approaches were evident in a few instances. Modified worksheets, self-differentiating tasks and varying levels of individual attention were the most prominent examples of these approaches. To further develop and embed a differentiated approach to teaching in the LCA programme, consideration should be given to maximising the role of additional teachers through team-teaching and further integrating the support and assistance of special needs assistants (SNA) where appropriate.
- Students were very well behaved and a positive and respectful rapport has been developed with teachers. Attendance is well monitored however student absenteeism is an ongoing concern for school management.
- A good variety of assessment models were employed to ascertain students' knowledge and comprehension. Questioning was the key assessment method utilised alongside student worksheets, teacher observation and written tasks which were also incorporated into lessons.
- Teacher and student expectations are appropriately high. Student attainment in certificate examinations is very good with almost all students in recent years achieving merit and distinction grades with the majority of these students achieving distinctions.
- Classrooms are well equipped and resources are readily available. Student access to information and communication technology (ICT) resources is good and has resulted in a high skill level in this area. LCA coursework and achievements are prominently displayed in classrooms and on the school LCA notice board.

- As a result of the planned methodologies, students were highly engaged in all lessons observed. Students' work ethic was good and participation levels in planned activities was high.
- In the majority of lessons, students were asked to reflect upon their learning. This provided them with the opportunity to identify their own learning and provided the teacher with the opportunity to assess the success of the lesson. Time for reflection is also provided during the personal reflection period each week and through the use of the reflective journal employed as part of the Religious Studies modules.
- Students demonstrated good progression in all lessons observed. Significant levels of learning and language proficiency were demonstrated in the modern language lesson observed.

#### **PROGRAMME PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT**

- Although uptake of LCA is low, school management place a high regard on the value of LCA in the school as it provides opportunities for those students for whom the established Leaving Certificate programme may not be the most suitable option.
- While it is accepted that there are a number of positive strategies in place to promote inclusion among the entire student cohort, some of the LCA students reported a sense of exclusion within the overall school population. The core group of teachers and LCA co-ordinator should explore all possible solutions with the class group and the student council in order to address students' concerns in this regard.
- Teaching staff are assigned to teach the programme in a considered manner ensuring that a consistent skill level is maintained while enabling teachers to bring personal skills to the programme such as through the incorporation of art and crafts.
- While LCA is an optional programme in the school, students for whom this would be a suitable programme are encouraged to apply. The LCA enrolment practices should be explicitly outlined in the school's admissions policy in order to ensure openness and transparency.
- A number of positive links have been developed with the local community including charity fundraising and assisting with a local homework club. Opportunities to include LCA students' parents in celebratory events should be explored to help raise the positive profile of the programme.
- The scheduling and timetabling of the various modules and subject is good. However, the current curricular provision should be further developed and broadened through a cost neutral re-balancing of existing modules.
- Students' work experience placements are divided into four two-week blocks. Students reported that this system operates effectively as the school has carefully coordinated the blocks to ensure that they do not coincide with other schools in the vicinity.

#### **PROGRAMME PLANNING, CO-ORDINATION AND EVALUATION**

- A good quality programme plan has been developed and implemented together with very good subject specific curricular plans. These plans use a tabular format to structure planned events and learning outcomes.

- Co-ordination of the LCA programme is highly effective. Good co-ordination structures are in place including a core group of teachers comprised of members of the various student support teams.
- LCA team meetings are held periodically and the proceedings are recorded as is good practice. Future agendas for these meeting should address at least one pedagogical item, for example, active learning methods, numeracy supports and collaborative learning techniques.
- An informal programme evaluation occurs at the end of each year. Some alterations to the programme have resulted from these reviews including the inclusion of a craft and design module and the scheduling of students' work experience placements.

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