

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

**Programme Evaluation
Leaving Certificate Applied
REPORT**

**Saint Angela's Secondary School
Ursuline Convent
Waterford
Roll Number: 64990D**

Date of inspection: 14 January 2011



**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 APPLIED

INTRODUCTION

This report has been written following an evaluation of the Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) programme in Saint Angela's Secondary School, Ursuline Convent Waterford. 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, the LCA programme co-ordinator, the learning support teacher, members of the teaching team 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. The board of management was given an opportunity to comment in writing on the findings and recommendations of the evaluation; a response was not received from the board.

Saint Angela's Secondary School is an all-girls voluntary secondary school situated in Waterford City. To cater for its 868 students the school offers the Junior Certificate, the established Leaving Certificate, the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP) and the LCA programme.

1 QUALITY OF PROGRAMME ORGANISATION

1.1 Whole school support

LCA is a well-established component of the school's curriculum. Currently there are sixteen students enrolled in the programme, seven in fifth year and nine in sixth year. To ensure the viability of the programme, management combines these groups for certain subjects. This is an appropriate short-term solution until enrolment in the programme increases to a level that will sustain two distinct class groups.

The principal is fully aware of the issues central to a successful programme such as student attendance, positive student attitude, good behaviour and retention of students. The principal values the programme and its outcomes for students, and is committed to the long-term future of the LCA in the school. Regular communication between the programme co-ordinator and the principal helps to ensure that the aims and organisational requirements of the programme are clearly outlined especially at the planning stages of the school's timetable.

The LCA has a positive profile within the school community. This is achieved by the scheduling of whole-school activities throughout the year to help ensure that LCA students are fully integrated with their peers. Examples of these events include a variety of catering events, a first-year table quiz and the annual Saint Patrick's Day festivities. These events are key components in the development of LCA students' organisational skills and their sense of inclusion in the school. The possible development of an LCA newsletter would help to further publicise the programme in the school and among the school's parent body.

Induction for new teachers to the programme is mainly informal and is conducted during the teaching team meeting at the beginning of the academic year. At this meeting the aims and

objectives of the programme are revisited and experienced LCA teachers share their experiences with new members. This good practice should be formalised as part of the LCA plan.

1.2 Resources

Teachers are assigned to teach the LCA programme based upon their experience and willingness to implement methodologies appropriate to the programme and to adapt their practices to the particular student cohort. It was also reported that there is a good balance of longstanding members of the LCA teaching team and new members. This approach helps to develop an appropriate skill set among LCA teachers while also maintaining a high level of consistency and good practice within the teaching team.

Currently both LCA groups are assigned a home room. The provision of the rooms is of considerable benefit to both students and teachers and helps to raise the profile of the programme. Allocating home rooms allows teachers to plan for the use of resources and also facilitates teachers' and students' access to information and communication technology (ICT). The display of LCA students' project and class work in the rooms helps to showcase their achievements and provides opportunities for positive affirmation of their work.

The school provides LCA students with many of the required consumables for practical lessons. This positive intervention assists students from disadvantaged backgrounds and helps to reduce one barrier to educational inclusion. An annual budget is agreed between senior management and the LCA co-ordinator at the beginning of the year. The co-ordinator has responsibility for the budget. This responsibility allows minor procurement decisions to be made easily and promotes a distributed leadership approach to programme co-ordination.

An overarching framework document explicitly outlines the overall delivery of the programme and provides subject teachers and the co-ordinator with a useful source of reference. The timetabling of the LCA programme is generally in line with the relevant departmental guidelines and circulars. However, the scheduling of an additional period of Vocational Preparation and Guidance (VPG) for fifth-year students should be seen as a priority.

ICT is utilised effectively in the organisation and implementation of the programme. Students have very good access to ICT in their classrooms and in the school's computer rooms. The accessibility of ICT facilitates teachers' integration of this resource into lessons easily.

The LCA co-ordinator and subject teachers attend continuing professional development (CPD) courses regularly. School management are fully supportive of teachers' ongoing professional development and this commitment to CPD is commended.

1.3 Student selection and support

Students wishing to enrol in the school's LCA programme may progress directly from third year. All other students must complete the school's Transition Year (TY) programme. Currently this is not outlined in the school's admissions policy. To ensure students and parents are fully aware of these procedures the board of management should review its admissions policy to include information pertaining to progression from junior to senior cycle programmes.

To support students when making programme choices the school has developed a number of strategies aimed at informing students about the aims and objectives of the LCA and identifying suitable candidates. These include meetings with parents of third and fifth-year students in

February and information meetings with the full third year and TY cohorts. Following these meetings students are encouraged to apply for a position in the programme. The steps taken by the school to ensure that students suited to the LCA programme apply for a position are commended.

Supports for LCA students in need of additional assistance and learning support are delivered primarily through the reduced class size of their class groups. However, specific targeted interventions have not been implemented. The phased introduction of individual education plans that is currently taking place in the school is a positive development and in time will help with the delivery of in-class supports for LCA students in receipt of resource or learning supports. The learning support department has also facilitated some CPD among staff regarding software that is useful in developing students' literacy and narrative skills. Senior management should now investigate all possibilities in relation to the further integration of learning support and resource support within the LCA programme. This should be achieved by scheduling the learning support teacher for a number of periods per week to work collaboratively with subject teachers. This model will help the learning support teacher to impart key skills, particularly in relation to literacy and numeracy development.

An induction programme is provided for fifth-year LCA students at the beginning of the year. However, when interviewed some members of the representative group of students were unclear about aspects of the programme such as the concept of task work. To ensure that students are fully aware of the specific terminology associated with the LCA and to further develop the group dynamic, a review of the student induction procedures should take place.

1.4 Home-school links

An information evening is held for parents of third-year and TY students in February to inform them of the curricular programmes on offer. A variety of supporting documents including leaflets and information sheets has also been developed to help familiarise parents with the LCA programme. Parents of LCA students are invited to the LCA coffee morning. Following this engagement parents accompany their daughters to the school's computer room to view their tasks and assignments. This serves a number of worthwhile purposes such as improving the links between the school and parents of LCA students and providing students with additional opportunities to gain deserved recognition from their parents and teachers for their efforts.

Parents receive meaningful feedback on student progress during parent-teacher meetings and through the reports sent home at Christmas, summer and for 'mock' examinations in sixth year. Examples of report cards included summative, affirmative and formative comments. The plan to introduce a mid-term report for LCA students to supplement the existing good practices will be a further positive development.

2 QUALITY OF PROGRAMME PLANNING AND COORDINATION

2.1 Planning

A well organised programme plan with supporting documentation has been produced to assist in the delivery of the LCA. This plan includes: the school's rationale for offering the LCA; the current curriculum; admissions information; reporting practices; a detailed description of the role of the co-ordinator; enrolment and acceptance information and a wide range of templates and record sheets. To further develop the programme plan, information pertaining to the specific interventions in place to assist students with additional educational needs and detailed course

module plans should also be included to help develop strategies for individual students and to promote the consistent delivery of courses from year to year.

Currently there is no designated core team in place to plan, monitor and evaluate the delivery of the programme. Senior management should work towards reinstating such a planning team. In doing so, capacity will be further developed among the teaching team. Core group meetings will also facilitate the discussion of key issues particularly in relation to teaching and learning methodologies and student-support structures.

2.2 Coordination

A formal job description of the role of co-ordinator is in place. The duties attached to this role are carried out effectively and include convening teaching team meetings, annual planning duties, liaison with parents and targeting potential students. The programme co-ordinator has regular timetabled contact time with both LCA class groups and this helps in the development of a positive rapport and a supportive relationship. Subject teachers are delegated the responsibility of organising students' key assignments and maintaining up-to-date records. These assignments are stored securely and retained until students complete the programme. Teachers confirm the completion of key assignments and students compliance with the minimum attendance requirement. This system is operating effectively.

2.3 Curriculum

The LCA curriculum provides students with a wide range of courses that are useful in the development of essential vocational and life skills. The school offers Hotel Catering and Tourism (HCT) and ICT as its vocational specialisms and Religious Studies and Science as the elective modules. In previous years Office Administration and Customer Care (OACC) and Art, Craft and Design were also included on the curriculum. This level of flexibility is commended as it enables the curriculum to be regularly refreshed and tailored to students' needs.

LCA Students attend school for four days every week. The fifth day is assigned for work experience when students attend their work placements. These placements are undertaken in four sessions throughout the duration of the programme. This system results in a deficit in tuition time for students of up to ten days per year. These days occur prior to and following each placement as the school does not provide tuition for LCA students at these times. To remedy this situation senior management must ensure that all students are timetabled for a minimum of 167 days instruction time in line with Circular M29/95.

3 QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING

3.1 Planning and preparation

Planning and preparation for the lessons observed was very good in all instances. Best practice was noted where the planned lesson targeted the development of students' key skills particularly in relation to communication, literacy, personal and social development, team work, active learning and reflection.

Planning for teaching aids and resources was effective in all lessons. The range of supplementary materials that was incorporated into lessons assisted and supported student learning. Planning for the integration of ICT was appropriate and in some cases very good. The use of a web-quest in a

HCT lesson provided a good example of how a planned student activity can utilise ICT to help students to achieve the desired key learning outcomes. The structured approach adopted helped to scaffold students' learning, enabling them to learn incrementally and at a pace suitable to their abilities.

3.2 Learning and teaching

The lessons observed were delivered in a structured manner and sought to develop students' understanding sequentially. The practice of introducing topics at the beginning of lessons and referring to previous learning helped to frame lessons within a learning continuum. This was achieved primarily through questioning and recapitulation.

The methodologies employed during lessons were appropriate to the programme. These methodologies included teacher and student-directed research, individual task work, discussion, student presentations and collaborative learning techniques such as group and pair work. These active learning methods were successful and should be utilised whenever possible. Students were complimentary of their collaborative learning experiences and expressed the view that they enjoyed learning in this manner.

Students were encouraged to answer questions posed by teachers in a supportive manner and classmates were often asked to prompt or help students in need of assistance. This facilitative environment fostered good levels of collegiality among students.

In one lesson students incorporated ICT into their class work through the use of an electronic presentation. This lesson was particularly effective as it was the result of a number of independent student activities including research, teamwork, interview and time management. These activities culminated with the group presenting their findings to their peers. The variety of skills developed through the completion of this project is particularly applicable to the LCA programme and similar methods should be incorporated into as many subject areas as possible.

In some instances difficult pronunciations and spellings were identified during lessons. When this occurred care was taken to ensure that spellings were corrected and definitions obtained. This form of literacy intervention should be developed throughout the programme.

Students were respectful and very well behaved. Their participation was very good and lively debate characterised many lessons. Teachers' classroom management was firm and very supportive. This resulted in a positive atmosphere permeating all lessons.

Students' participation, engagement and responses to questions posed demonstrated an appropriate level of learning. Good practice was observed where formative feedback was utilised during lessons most notably in the Social Education and Science lessons observed. The use of formative feedback and other assessment for learning (AfL) techniques on students' written work, key assignments and task work is commended.

3.3 Assessment

Students' classwork received very good levels of monitoring and feedback. Common errors encountered were occasionally explored with the entire group and this good practice should be extended to all subject areas. Students were encouraged to identify areas where they exceeded their key assignment tasks and to record these achievements. This very good practice promotes the

maintenance of high expectation among students and teachers and also encourages a differentiated approach to class work, assignments and tasks.

Teacher-supported peer assessment featured in one lesson and this had the effect of involving all parties in the learning and assessment process. Efforts should be made to extend this good practice to all appropriate applications.

4 SUMMARY OF STRENGTHS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT

The following are the main strengths identified in the evaluation:

- LCA is a longstanding and valued component of the school's curriculum.
- LCA students form an integral part of the school community and actively contribute to the school spirit.
- Appropriate resources are made available for the delivery of the programme and to enhance students' experiences.
- The school ensures that all potential LCA students are identified and fully informed about their progression routes from junior cycle or Transition Year.
- Programme co-ordination is effective and the framework documents developed support the implementation of the programme.
- The curriculum provided for LCA students is broad and balanced and helps students develop a wide-ranging knowledge base founded in the development of key life skills.
- Planning for lessons was of a high standard.
- Active learning methods were incorporated into almost all lessons resulting in the creation of participatory learning environments in many instances.

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

- The board should review the school's admissions policy to include progression procedures from junior to senior cycle programmes.
- Senior management must ensure that all students are timetabled for a minimum of 167 days instruction time in line with Circular M29/95.
- In line with departmental guidelines, an additional period of Vocational Preparation and Guidance should be scheduled for fifth-year students.
- Senior management should include co-operative teaching strategies to supplement learning supports for LCA students.
- Detailed course module plans should be developed for each subject and included in the LCA programme plan.