

Department of Education and Science

Programme Evaluation LCA REPORT

**Moville Community College
Moville, County Donegal
Roll Number: 76084L**

Date of inspection: 9 October 2008

Evaluation of the leaving certificate applied (LCA)

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EVALUATION OF THE LEAVING CERTIFICATE APPLIED (LCA)

INTRODUCTION

This report has been written following an evaluation of the LCA in Moville Community College. 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 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. 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.

Moville Community College opened in 2001. The school currently caters for 478 students. At senior cycle the school offers the established Leaving Certificate, the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP), the Transition Year programme (TY) as well as the Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA). A number of post leaving certificate courses (PLC) are also offered. The school is part of the Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) action plan, and it benefits from its involvement in the School Completion Programme (SCP) and the Home-School-Community Liaison scheme (HSCL). These initiatives were reported by management to have a positive effect on retention levels in the school and on the numbers of students completing the senior cycle. There are currently seventeen students in year one (LCA1) of the LCA programme and twenty-three students in year two (LCA2).

1. QUALITY OF PROGRAMME ORGANISATION

1.1 Whole-school support

The programme is well supported in the school. There is good collaboration between management and the LCA team around all aspects of the programme. The current coordinator was appointed in 2004 when the programme was introduced in the school. A team of fourteen teachers is involved in teaching the programme. Many have been actively associated with the LCA programme since 2004. All teachers met with during the evaluation displayed enthusiasm for and commitment to the programme. In line with good practice, there is also a core planning team consisting of the LCA coordinator, the learning-support coordinator, the holder of the programme coordinator post granted under terms of Circular Letter PPT 19/02, the LCA class tutor and the principal. The teachers of LCA are encouraged and facilitated by management to avail of appropriate continuing professional development (CPD). Induction for teachers who are new to LCA is managed by the LCA coordinator and the senior management team. A full day of student induction is also organised by the coordinator. This is followed up by a team-building trip usually after completion of the first LCA task.

1.2 Resources

The LCA coordinator has a good awareness and understanding of the programme. Selection of teachers for the programme is based on teacher interest and availability as well as subject expertise. It is recommended that a staff audit be carried out to reveal teacher interests and expertise which could be incorporated in to the LCA programme in the future.

The school has three computer rooms. One of these rooms is solely used by LCA and TY students. As part of the book rental scheme all LCA students are provided with a memory stick to record and store their work. Teachers are generally classroom-based and as a result there is no base classroom for the LCA. It is recommended that the small number of LCA teachers who do not have a base classroom be timetabled for the same room, where practicable. This would allow for storage of LCA equipment and resources and the display of LCA-related material. It is good to note that the coordinator has an office where resources, files and confidential material are securely stored.

LCA students are involved in a number of activities around the school and this generates interest in the programme and promotes it. It is recommended that this be augmented by the provision of a notice board for LCA in the LCA/TY computer room.

Timetabling of the programme is appropriate. Timetabling issues are discussed annually by senior management and the LCA coordinator. Subject teachers are also consulted regarding the timetabling of the modules. These are good practices.

1.3 Student selection and support

During third year, the subject teachers and the class tutors advise students on choice of subject and programme. The LCA coordinator visits all classrooms providing a presentation on the content of the LCA programme. An information night is organised for all third-year students and their parents where the range of programmes and subjects available to them is presented. The LCA coordinator as well as LCA tutors and a student from the current LCA class attend this event. Students and parents are invited to make an appointment with the guidance counsellor and the LCA coordinator. The LCA team are commended for their efforts to assist students and their parents in making informed choices.

1.4 Home, school and community links

The school maintains effective home school links via the school journal, telephone, letters, parent-teacher meetings, school reports and the Merville Community College section in the local newspaper. The school also publishes a newsletter for all parents at the end of the school year. Students on the LCA programme can also benefit from the services of the HSCL coordinator and the SCP coordinator. The programme also has a number of links with the local community, for example, part of the leisure and recreation module includes pitch and putt training at a local amenity.

2. QUALITY OF PROGRAMME PLANNING AND COORDINATION

2.1 Planning

The principles that underlie the LCA programme permeate the planning and implementation of the programme in the school. The entire LCA teaching team meets at the start of the school year to plan for the delivery of the programme in the school. This is good practice and minutes were made available for these meetings. These minutes provided evidence that the meetings are also used to discuss student profiles, supports and resources as well as the coordination of tasks, credit records and assignments. There is scope for the core team to review the attendance strategy for LCA so that it reflects both the good practice which is taking place in the school and the attendance policy of the school. There is scope for the coordinator to present a recapitulation of the underlying principles of LCA at this meeting, especially when new members join this team. Planning for the LCA programme is well advanced and a comprehensive LCA planning folder was made available during the evaluation.

2.2 Coordination

Coordination of the programme is effective and involves liaison with the teachers of LCA, senior management, parents and students as well as with the learning support department. Good communication is achieved through announcements at assemblies, the student journal, the LCA notice board in the staffroom as well as through numerous informal meetings between team members. The coordinator teaches both LCA1 and LCA2. This promotes communication between coordinator and students and allows the coordinator to get to know students and become familiar with their class work better. Each class in the school has a tutor who meets them every day. As part of the school's care system, both LCA groups meet with their class tutor each morning. It is good practice that tutors are also timetabled to teach their particular groups.

2.3 Curriculum

The LCA curriculum provided is broad and balanced. The vocational specialisms provided are Information and Communications Technology (ICT) and Childcare and Community Care or Engineering. These were chosen in an attempt to utilise staff strengths and to take advantage of the potential for students to avail of further training in the local colleges. Four elective modules from Hotel, Catering and Tourism (HCT) are provided. These were selected in response to students' interests. The school reports that many students go on pursue careers in catering and tourism in the Tourism College, Killybegs or the North West Regional College in Derry. The modern foreign language provided is French. No student on the programme at present has an exemption from Irish. There is appropriate provision for students to develop their ICT skills.

3. QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING

3.1 Planning and preparation

Planning folders were made available during the evaluation for all subjects taught on the LCA programme. Commendably these all contained schemes of work. The majority of these schemes were based on a common template. Best practice was observed where schemes of work contained learning objectives linked to appropriate methodologies within a suitable timeframe. It is recommended that this good practice be extended to all schemes. It is commendable that the LCA chief examiners' reports issued annually by the State Examinations Commission are also used to inform planning for the LCA programme. In addition to being available in hard copy, all schemes, programmes of study and planning documentation pertaining to the LCA are available on the school server known as the P-drive. This good practice increases the accessibility of the information and facilitates the sharing of resources among team members. The LCA common folder on the school server contains an overview of the LCA programme, sub-folders for schemes and resources in the individual subject areas, as well as a folder for generic LCA resources. This level of organisation is laudable.

3.2 Learning and teaching

In line with good practice, the aim of the lesson was outlined to students at the beginning of every class visited. A range of abilities were present in the classes visited and this was noted as a challenge to cater for all abilities and learning styles. Best practice was observed where a range of methodologies was incorporated effectively into the lessons.

Good use was made of the overhead projector and data projector to outline and clarify tasks. Students were asked to work independently while carrying out calculations in one lesson and this was followed by students checking and discussing their answers in pairs. Team teaching was also observed in one lesson where the lead teacher outlined the topic and explained the concepts while the second member of the teaching team circulated the classroom assisting individual students. This approach showed a good level of co-ordination between the two teachers involved. The practical application of the lesson was then introduced as pairs of students, accompanied by one teacher went to the school gym to calculate perimeters, while the second teacher remained with the class until all students had completed the exercise. This was a good structured approach making maximum use of the extra teacher in a setting which demonstrated the practical applications of mathematics.

In one lesson, students were encouraged to present work to their peers in an informal and non-threatening manner through the use of an active methodology called 'hot seat'. In this case one student assumed the role of a character in the story which had been read and the remainder of the class could ask them a number of questions about their actions in the story. Students listened to each other's questions and answers and it was obvious that the task was thought-provoking and encouraged analytical thinking. This is very good practice as it challenges students on a variety of levels.

Newspaper clippings containing job advertisements provided the basis for a lesson which involved students making good use of word banks and dictionaries to explain terms found in the text. Appropriately, all answers were collated on the white board to provide a summary of the new terms found. There was appropriate emphasis on the pronunciation of key words through noting them on the whiteboard and reading aloud. This is good practice.

Good use of group work was observed in a number of lessons. Students discussed ideas and showed initiative and autonomy in their work. In some lessons visited, the incorporation of pair work was recommended in order to encourage students to interact with their peers and develop peer teaching. In other lessons visited, pair work was used as a method of differentiation where a more able student was paired with someone who was less able.

The classes observed had a disciplined atmosphere with a clear code of behaviour. A positive teacher-student rapport was evident throughout the lessons particularly during the many discussions which took place. Students were attentive, interested and keen to participate well. Teachers regularly revised and explained the more difficult concepts that arose over the course of lessons. This approach to the delivery of lesson content contributed to greatly enhanced student learning in each of the lessons. In general, there was an appropriate pace to the lessons and this facilitated student learning. Students displayed a sense of security in seeking clarification or assistance during lessons. Teachers' movement around the room ensured that all students remained on task and provided opportunities for students to seek individual help in a supportive structure. Very good use was made of praise to affirm students' efforts.

Practical activities observed, both on site and out of school, were well planned, organised and managed. Students displayed enthusiasm and enjoyment of these activities while at all times displaying good regard for community property. In all lessons observed there was a focus on how the skills being developed were applicable in students' everyday lives.

The majority of classrooms visited contained good visual displays of students' work, photographs of student activities and posters of subject-specific terminology. This is good practice and should be extended to all classrooms.

3.3 Assessment

A range of assessment modes was observed and these included questioning, observation, written exercises, posters, key assignments and tasks. There is also scope to photograph some of the students' completed tasks to retain them as exemplars to be used as inspiration for future students. Each teacher maintains records of students' completed key assignments. Teachers should be mindful that key assignments should be retained in the school until after the date set by the State Examinations Commission for appeals. There is scope to review the inclusion of homework activities in the LCA programme in line with the draft homework policy for the school. The core team should explore how this could be achieved. It is good practice that an analysis of all certificate examination results, including LCA results, is carried out annually by senior management and the LCA team uses this information to inform planning.

4. PROGRAMME EVALUATION AND OUTCOMES

A review of the programme takes place annually by members of the LCA team. This is good practice and it is commendable that student input is sought. It is recommended that the core team considers how the review of the programme could be put on a more formal footing. There is scope to include a questionnaire for teachers, parents and students in LCA2. Further information on the review of the LCA is available on the website of the Second Level Support Service (www.slss.ie/lca).

All parties interviewed indicated that they were happy with the programme in the school. It was reported as providing appropriate education for students and retention rates in senior cycle have improved as a result. It is commendable that the guidance counsellor tracks student destinations and retains a yearly profile of this data.

5. SUMMARY OF STRENGTHS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT

The following are the main strengths identified in the evaluation:

- There is good collaboration between management and the LCA team around all aspects of the programme.
- The principles that underlie the LCA programme permeate the planning and implementation of the programme in the school.
- In line with good practice, there is a core planning team for the LCA consisting of the LCA coordinator, the learning-support coordinator, the programme coordinator, the LCA class tutor and the principal.
- The LCA curriculum provided is broad and balanced.
- The LCA team are commended for their efforts to assist students and their parents in making informed choices.
- The LCA common folder on the school server contains an overview of the LCA programme, sub-folders for schemes and resources in the individual subject areas, as well as a folder for generic LCA resources.
- A comprehensive LCA planning folder was made available during the evaluation as well as individual plans for the subject areas.
- In line with good practice, the aim of the lesson was outlined to students at the beginning of every class visited.
- Students displayed a sense of security in seeking clarification or assistance during lessons.
- Students discussed ideas and showed initiative and autonomy in their work.
- A range of assessment modes was observed. These included questioning, observation, written exercises, posters, key assignments and tasks.

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

- It is recommended that the small number of LCA teachers who do not have a base classroom be timetabled for the same room, where practicable.
- It is recommended that the good practice where schemes of work contained learning objectives linked to appropriate methodologies within a suitable timeframe be extended to all schemes.
- The core team should consider how the annual review of the programme could be put on a more formal footing.