Programme Evaluation in LCA Report

REPORT

Ainm na scoile/School name	St Oliver Post Primary
Seoladh na scoile/School address	Oldcastle Co. Meath
Uimhir rolla/Roll number	71990R
Dáta na cigireachta/ Date of evaluation	11/04/2024
Dáta eisiúna na tuairisce/Date of issue of report	31/05/2024

What is a programme evaluation?

The programme evaluation model of inspection is used to evaluate the quality and effectiveness of the following programmes and to provide advice and support to teachers, principals and school management in post-primary schools and centres for education:

- Junior Certificate School Programme (JCSP)
- Transition Year (TY) programme
- Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) programme
- Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP)

How to read this report

During this inspection, the inspector evaluated learning and teaching in LCA under the following headings:

1. Teaching and learning
2. Programme provision and whole-school support
3. Programme planning, co-ordination and evaluation

Inspectors describe the quality of each of these areas using the Inspectorate's quality continuum which is shown on the final page of this report. The quality continuum provides examples of the language used by inspectors when evaluating and describing the quality of the school's provision in each area.

The board of management of the school was given an opportunity to comment on the findings and recommendations of the report; the board chose to accept the report without response.

Actions of the school to safeguard children and prevent and tackle bullying

During the inspection visit, the following checks in relation to the school's child protection and anti-bullying procedures were conducted:	
Child Protection	*Anti-bullying*
1. The name of the DLP and the Child Safeguarding Statement are prominently displayed near the main entrance to the school. 2. The Child Safeguarding Statement has been ratified by the board and includes an annual review and a risk assessment. 3. All teachers visited reported that they have read the Child Safeguarding Statement and that they are aware of their responsibilities as mandated persons.	1. The school has developed an anti-bullying policy that meets the requirements of the *Anti-Bullying Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools (2013)* or *Bí Cineálta (2024)* and this policy is reviewed annually. 2. The school's current anti-bullying policy is published on its website and/or is readily accessible to board of management members, teachers, parents and pupils/students.

The school met all the requirements in relation to the child protection checks above.

While the school had developed a detailed anti-bullying policy that was updated on an annual basis, the policy did not align fully with the template in Appendix 1 of the *Anti-Bullying Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools (2013).* The board of management subsequently updated the policy prior to the publication of this report.

Programme evaluation in LCA

Date of inspection	10/04/2024 & 11/04/2024
Inspection activities undertaken • Meetings with principal and programme co-ordinator • Meeting with key staff • Review of relevant documents • Student focus-group meeting	• Observation of teaching and learning • Examination of students' work • Interaction with students • Feedback to senior management team and programme co-ordinator

School context

Saint Oliver's Post-Primary School is a co-educational school with a current enrolment of 622 students. The school operates under the patronage of Louth and Meath Education and Training Board (LMETB) and includes an autism unit called An Grianán. The school provides the Junior Cycle, Transition Year, Leaving Certificate, Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP) and the Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) programme.

Summary of main findings and recommendations:

Findings

- The quality of teaching and learning observed was very good overall, with excellent practices implemented in a number of lessons.

- Excellent formative practice was observed in lessons and in the cross-section of student coursework reviewed.

- It was very clear that the school's virtual learning environment (VLE) was used effectively to support continuity in teaching and learning, and as an interactive formative assessment tool.

- The quality of learner outcomes among students taking the programme was of a very high standard. The learning opportunities provided supported the full range of the key skills of senior cycle.

- The quality of programme provision and whole-school support for LCA was very good, with some very significant strengths apparent.

- The quality of programme co-ordination and review was excellent; aspects of collaborative planning for teaching and learning required further development.

Recommendations

- Teachers should agree a system that enables students to record their learning in lessons and to organise the storage of their completed worksheets.

- School management should review the student selection criteria for LCA, as outlined in the school's attendance and participation policy. General criteria for entry to the programme should also be included in the school's admission policy.

- Senior management should establish a core LCA team to lead collaborative planning of the programme, to include a consistent approach to planning for all LCA modules.

- On a phased basis, subject teachers should develop units of learning, which provide for high quality differentiation and transdisciplinary learning.

Detailed findings and recommendations

1. Teaching and learning

- The quality of teaching and learning observed was very good overall, with excellent practices noted in a number of lessons.

- The teaching and learning approaches deployed in lessons ensured that students could link new content to prior learning and apply concepts to everyday life. Some exemplary teacher-prepared resources, such as student booklets and digital resources, were used to enhance student understanding and deepen learning.

- In keeping with the principles underpinning LCA, there was a deliberate emphasis placed on supporting students' personal and social development. Teaching approaches, such as group work or walking debates, were very well planned. Students were given clear roles and understood what was expected in completing tasks. This approach facilitated learning outcomes, which were of a very high quality overall.

- Teachers should give further consideration to differentiating lesson tasks. In some instances, all students were provided with the same material and tasks regardless of ability. In lessons where differentiated tasks were provided, the better able students were appropriately challenged, and they could extend their capabilities and excel at their learning.

- Students' skills in numeracy and literacy were supported in many lessons. A particular strength was the opportunities provided for students to develop their oral communication skills. Students were able to discuss their learning confidently. They were comfortable asking questions and were respectful of and interested in the opinions and experiences of their classmates. Students who spoke to the inspector commented on the value of their lessons in supporting them to become confident communicators.

- In some instances, opportunities were missed for explicitly integrating areas of literacy or numeracy; for instance in terms of emphasising key terminology or including numeracy moments in lessons. Further consideration should be given to developing teaching and learning approaches to supporting other components of literacy and numeracy across the programme.

- There was some variation in classroom practice for the storage of students' work. While some very good practice was evident, it is recommended, that teachers agree a system that enables students to record their learning in lessons and facilitates the storage of completed worksheets. This approach would prove an excellent reference tool for student revision and reflection on their learning.

- The quality of formative practice noted in lessons and on the cross section of student coursework reviewed was excellent. Retrieval practices, including well-chosen questions, enabled students to reflect on previous learning and set the scene for new learning.

- Learning intentions were very well phrased and, in many instances, well differentiated to challenge all learners. Where lessons were exemplary, time was taken towards the end of lessons to summarise learning and thoroughly assess students' achievement of the intended learning.

- The quality of formative feedback observed on students' written work in many instances was exemplary. Teachers' comments affirmed students' progress, both in terms of their learning and contribution to working with their peers, and this provided a very clear pathway for improvement. It was very clear that the school's VLE was used effectively as an interactive formative assessment tool.

- A very good range of student activities was undertaken through the completion of LCA coursework. Students were well supported in developing a very good range of digital skills. At the time of the evaluation, a system of LCA e-portfolios was being developed. This system should be devised in a manner where students have ongoing access to all key assignments, including the formative feedback provided. Some exemplary practice was noted in this area during the evaluation.

- Teachers set high expectations for student achievement and the quality of learner outcomes among students taking the programme was of a very high standard. The

learning opportunities provided in lessons supported the full range of key skills of senior cycle.

2. Programme provision and whole school support

- The quality of programme provision and whole-school support for LCA was very good, with some very significant strengths apparent.

- LCA was offered every second year. This arrangement was working well at the time of the evaluation, as potential LCA students took TY in the year that LCA was not available. School management should closely monitor the continued suitability of these arrangements for each incoming cohort of senior cycle students.

- A conscious effort was made to ensure that the LCA subjects offered met students' interests and intended progression routes. The possibility of extending the range of electives or Arts Education subjects provided was being considered, based on feedback from students.

- Some aspects of timetabled provision required review. At the time of the evaluation there was a shortfall in the amount of time allocated to electives and Social Education. This shortfall needs to be addressed in the context of re-balancing the time allocated to subjects across the programme or reviewing the work experience model of one day per week.

- Staff members were deployed in accordance with their experience. Staff new to the programme were very well supported by the programme co-ordinator. Teachers were very committed to providing a high-quality programme and the high level of engagement with relevant CPD was impacting positively on classroom practice and general organisation of the programme.

- The systems to identify students for LCA were thorough and a very comprehensive range of information events was organised for students and parents. School management should review the selection criteria for LCA, as outlined in the attendance and participation policy. Some of the criteria listed did not reflect the inclusive practice evident in the school. The general criteria for admission to the programme should also be included as part of the school's admission policy.

- There was a highly commendable focus on supporting the holistic development of LCA learners. The quality of the information and support provided to students prior to and at the commencement of the programme were of an exceptionally high standard. The check-and-connect mentoring system, together with the work of the programme co-ordinator, year head, tutor, and the senior cycle student support team, facilitated an individualised approach to providing for student wellbeing.

- The programme was well resourced. The investment in a class set of tablet devices enhanced students' access to information and communication technology (ICT). The school's VLE was used very effectively to support many aspects of teaching and learning, including, submission of assignments, provision of feedback and sharing of class materials. To support continuity in teaching and learning, school management should review how students are supported to access the platform outside school. Some students reported difficulties due to non-availability of digital devices.

- Systematic procedures underpinned the organisation and monitoring of work experience. A very high level of care and individualised support was provided to students sourcing placements.

- There was very good collaboration between the special educational needs (SEN) team and the teachers of LCA to inform planning for teaching and learning. Some interventions in terms of one-to-one support were provided to LCA students, and special needs assistants were carefully deployed in alignment to student needs. In planning for next year, progress of student targets in the student support files should inform provision of an additional range of SEN interventions, using the designated SEN teaching hours provided by the Department.

3. Programme planning, co-ordination and review

- The quality of programme co-ordination was excellent. A clear vision for LCA was apparent and robust systems tracked students' attendance and completion of key assignments. The programme hub on the school's VLE facilitated teachers' collaborative practice.

- Some approaches to supporting teachers' collaborative practice required development. The full team of LCA teachers met four times a year and a good level of informal collaboration also took place. The absence of a core LCA team limited the effectiveness of collaborative planning for teaching and learning including; transdisciplinary learning and whole-programme approaches to supporting differentiation, literacy, and numeracy. A core LCA team should be established to lead collaborative planning for teaching and learning.

- The module teaching and learning plans reviewed were at varying stages of development and did not reflect the high-quality planning apparent in the lessons observed. A more consistent approach to planning for teaching and learning in each module was required. On a phased basis, time-bound units of learning that include learning intentions, which provide for high quality differentiation and transdisciplinary learning, should be developed.

- Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) was provided as part of Social Education and commendably teachers have received relevant training. The whole-school RSE policy should be revised to make explicit reference to RSE provision in LCA.

- The senior management team and staff demonstrated a very strong commitment to ongoing programme improvement. The programme was formally evaluated at the end of each programme cycle in consultation with students, parents and teachers. The outcomes have informed ongoing developments of the programme.

The draft findings and recommendations arising out of this evaluation were discussed with the principal, deputy principal and programme co-ordinator at the conclusion of the evaluation.

The Inspectorate's Quality Continuum

Inspectors describe the quality of provision in the school using the Inspectorate's quality continuum which is shown below. The quality continuum provides examples of the language used by inspectors when evaluating and describing the quality of the school's provision of each area.

Level	Description	Examples of descriptive terms
Excellent	**Provision that is excellent** is exemplary in meeting the needs of learners. This provision provides an example for other schools and settings of exceptionally high standards of provision.	Excellent; exemplary; outstanding; exceptionally high standard; with very significant strengths
Very good	**Provision that is very good** is very effective in meeting the needs of learners and is of a very high standard. There is potential to build on existing strengths to achieve an excellent standard.	Very good; of a very high quality; very effective practice; highly commendable; very successful
Good	**Provision that is good** is effective in meeting the needs of learners. There is need to build on existing strengths in order to address the aspects to be developed and achieve a very good standard.	Good; of good quality; effective practice; competent; useful; commendable; good standard; strengths outweigh the shortcomings; appropriate provision although some possibilities for improvement exist
Requires improvement to achieve a good standard	**Provision that requires improvement to achieve a good standard** is not sufficiently effective in meeting the needs of learners. There is need to address certain deficiencies without delay in order to ensure that provision is good or better.	Fair; less than effective; less than sufficient; evident weaknesses that are impacting on learning; experiencing difficulty; shortcomings outweigh strengths; must improve in specified areas; action required to improve
Requires significant improvement to achieve a good standard	**Provision that requires significant improvement to achieve a good standard** is not meeting the needs of learners. There is immediate need for significant action to address the areas of concern.	Weak; poor; ineffective; insufficient; unacceptable; experiencing significant difficulties; serious deficiencies in the areas evaluated; requiring significant change, development and improvement to be effective