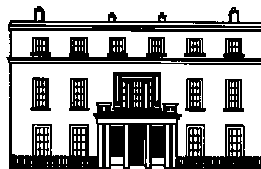


**An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna**  
**Department of Education and Skills**

**Whole-School Evaluation**  
**REPORT**

**Coláiste Dhúlaigh Post Primary School**  
**Coolock, Dublin 17**  
**Roll number: 70330Q**

**Date of inspection: 22 November 2010**



**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**

## **WHOLE-SCHOOL EVALUATION**

A whole-school evaluation of Coláiste Dhúlaigh Post-Primary School, Coolock was undertaken in November 2010. This report presents the findings of the evaluation and makes recommendations for improvement. During the evaluation, the quality of teaching and learning in four subjects was evaluated in detail, and separate reports are available on these subjects (see section 7 for details).

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.

## **INTRODUCTION**

Coláiste Dhúlaigh was established in 1969 to provide for the post-primary education of students in the rapidly expanding Coolock area. From 1980 onwards, due to a decline in student numbers, the school began to provide Post Leaving Certificate (PLC), Vocational Training and adult education programmes in addition to the existing second-level certificate programmes. As a result of this diversification, in 2005, the school was divided into Coláiste Dhúlaigh Post-Primary School and Coláiste Dhúlaigh College of Further Education.

Enrolment in Coláiste Dhúlaigh Post-Primary School currently stands at 424 students, 252 males and 172 females. These students mainly come from five local feeder primary schools. This enrolment has been in decline over the past number of years and is an area of concern for management. The school is a participant in the DEIS initiative (Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools) and has the support of the School Completion Programme (SCP).

### **1. QUALITY OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT**

#### **1.1 Characteristic spirit of the school**

Coláiste Dhúlaigh's mission statement is *"To offer an excellent education that is relevant to the needs of our students."* It is commendable that the school strives to live up to this statement in its daily routines. Consistent and long-term efforts have been put in place to make the experience of being in school attractive to students. This approach attempts to counter the culture of low expectations and low engagement with schooling that prevails amongst some of the school's students. School management considers that being supportive of both staff and students is extremely important and strong emphasis is placed on providing an education that is relevant to the students and cultivating a team approach among the staff. There is a shared awareness and acknowledgement of the necessity of integrating the social, personal and academic aspects of educational provision by all those who work in and for the school.

The school has a very proud tradition of providing for students of all abilities and is inclusive. This is evident, not only in school documentation relating to the admission and participation of students in the life of the school, but also in practice. The teaching team aims to create a warm, caring and nurturing environment within the school where parents and teachers share a common goal of providing for the welfare of students. During the evaluation, students expressed great appreciation of the efforts made by their teachers in all areas of school life.

The City of Dublin Vocational Education Committee (CDVEC) plays an active role as trustee of the school. It is very supportive of the senior management team which has been

appointed relatively recently. The assigned education officer maintains close links with the school and provides good support.

## **1.2 School ownership and management**

The board of management is properly constituted and is a sub-committee of the City of Dublin VEC. Almost all of its members were new to the board at the time of the evaluation. It is recommended that the board seek training from the VEC for its new members with a view to informing them of the role, functions, responsibilities and statutory obligations of a board of management. Such training would facilitate the development of a focused and cohesive body with a shared sense of purpose and would aid the members in their work for the school. Members of the board attend school functions and award ceremonies as a means of affirming staff in their work and students in their achievements.

The principal acts as secretary to the board. Agendas are agreed in advance and minutes of meetings are maintained. The principal's report, in which he reports on school activities and school issues, is a fixed item on all agendas. The board has regular scheduled meetings, with other meetings taking place as the need arises. It was acknowledged by the board that much of the time of the previous board was spent on issues arising from the implementation of the code of conduct and with suspension, exclusion and appeals of same. Great credit is due to the school for its efforts in the ongoing management of the poor behaviour of a small minority of students. There is no formal school plan: an opportunity now exists for the new board to play an active role in school policy development.

The board of management communicates with the VEC, in-school management, staff and parents through the representatives of these groups on the board. Following each meeting, a report is issued to the VEC. It is suggested that the board provide an agreed written report after each meeting to be circulated to all stake holders in the school, including staff and parents. The school's website could be used to publish the report for the general body of parents.

## **1.3 In-school management**

The principal and deputy principal comprise the senior management team and both were appointed in September 2009. They share a vision for the school and work as an effective cohesive team. Regular meetings before school and during the day ensure that there is ongoing open communication at senior management level. They have a partnership approach to school leadership and show a high level of commitment to the school. The principal, in leading and managing the school, has identified, as a priority, the importance of raising the achievement levels of students in certificate examinations and is working with staff in order to achieve this aim. The deputy principal's role is primarily administrative. While each has distinct duties, many duties are shared, with a flexible routine in place. Both principal and deputy principal have an active, on-the-ground presence in the school and consider it vitally important to maintain a high level of visibility around the school. This approach was commented on positively by both teachers and students. It is suggested that it would be good practice and timely for both the principal and the deputy principal to carry out a full review of their respective roles and, on the basis of their experience to date, to reassign duties as appropriate.

Communication between senior management and staff is good and consultation with staff on a variety of issues takes place in an open and inclusive manner. Short staff meetings are held on a regular basis. These meetings do, however, impinge on class contact time and this arrangement needs to be reviewed. A daily notice board is used for immediate communication with staff. A weekly staff bulletin is distributed to ensure that staff members are appropriately and adequately informed regarding current and upcoming events.

Currently, among the teaching staff there are six assistant principals (AP) and nine special duties post holders. Each post holder is fully aware of his or her duties which have been agreed following a discussion with the principal and are based on the needs of the school and the skills, capacity and interests of the post holders. Post holders execute their duties in an effective and professional manner. It is recommended that, in the interests of openness and transparency, detailed job descriptions of these duties be formulated and included in the school planning documentation. The valuable contribution which the post holders make to the day-to-day running of the school is acknowledged and commended.

Senior management meets many of the post holders at a weekly scheduled meeting for year heads and another scheduled meeting of the Care Team. This provides an opportunity to discuss common issues in the management of students. The principal is actively encouraging a culture of distributed leadership in the school. While individual assistant principals see themselves as members of a middle management team by virtue of their duties, some work needs to be done on developing a cohesive middle-management structure.

A year-head and tutor system is in operation in the school to assist with managing care and discipline issues. This system is working well. Each year group has a year head and both first year and transition year groups also have an assistant year head. The role of the class tutor is seen as pivotal to the care system and is best described as a pastoral role, with some disciplinary functions.

Some students have poor records of attendance and this is a serious issue for the school. Management has been proactive in putting measures in place to counter this. A well-operated system of roll-call and marked registers tracks attendance, with class tutors and teachers involved in the process. Through the SCP, the school has an attendance officer whose core responsibility is to monitor students' attendance in the morning and the afternoon. Effective systems are in place to facilitate liaison between the attendance officer and the class tutor and the year head. To further improve the monitoring of attendance, the principal is investigating the possibility of installing an *ePortal* system. This will allow the tracking of students on a class-by-class basis and will enable up-to-date attendance information to be accessed immediately.

Additional interventions to improve attendance are the *Belonging+* programme from the National Behaviour Support Service (NBSS), the use of JCSP postcards, and a conscious effort on the part of management and staff to make coming to school attractive by making it a more enjoyable experience. These interventions have made a difference to the attendance profiles of some students. It is accepted however that it is extremely challenging to counter the economic and social basis for some absences. It is to the school's credit that, despite a low success rate with some sections of the student community, management and staff have been untiring in their efforts to improve attendance.

The code of conduct currently in operation in the school is strongly rules-based with a heavy emphasis on sanctions. The school has recognised the need to introduce a more positive perspective to behaviour management and work has already begun on reviewing the current code of conduct. This work is being guided by *Developing a Code of Behaviour: Guidelines for Schools – May 2008* which was published by the National Educational Welfare Board. The school has also been guided by discussions with the NBSS. Through these close links, the school has already introduced several new approaches to classroom management. The strength of these changes lies in the fact that they are based on needs identified by the staff and that they are being consistently applied. The senior management team is promoting a policy to reduce the number of suspensions

and exclusions. The recent introduction of restorative justice practices is a positive development in this regard.

The continuing professional development (CPD) of staff is actively supported and encouraged by both the board and by senior management. With the help and support of the school, many members of the teaching staff have furthered their professional development through a variety of post-graduate and in-service courses. Whole staff in-service courses have also been provided on a variety of relevant topics. This commitment to empower and build capacity amongst all staff members is commended.

The student council is democratically elected and is representative of the full student cohort. The council is supported by a liaison teacher and students have a good awareness of their collective role and responsibilities. They are well supported by management who encourage their input. It is recommended that structures be put in place to raise the profile of the student council and to ensure that the council engages with, and involves, the full student community in the school. It is suggested that a priority for the present student council would be the formulation of a constitution and the development of structures to ensure the systematic flow of communication between the council, the students and in-school management. Useful resources and guidelines are available on the student council website ([www.studentcouncil.ie](http://www.studentcouncil.ie)).

There is a long-standing parents' association in Coláiste Dhúlaigh. Participation in school activities by parents is valued by school management and teachers. The association plays an important and constructive role in the life of the school by contributing to policy development and by providing support through fundraising, attendance at open nights, paired reading and *Maths for Fun*. The current parents' association committee meets monthly and works closely with the Home School Community Liaison (HSCL) co-ordinator. The work of the association is highly commended. The representatives of the association who met with inspectors praised the school for being inclusive and expressed confidence in its leadership team.

Communication between the school and the general parent body is very good. Parents are informed about school activities in a variety of ways. The students' journal provides a regular point of contact between subject teachers and parents. Members of the parents' association expressed satisfaction with the varied methods of communication and stated that the school is very approachable and supportive.

The school has recently launched an impressive website which is developed and maintained by the information and communications technology (ICT) co-ordinator. It contains highly practical information on the school and is presented in a user-friendly format. It is recommended that the school's website address be printed on all school stationery in order to promote the use of the website by parents and students.

Coláiste Dhúlaigh has established strong links with a range of outside agencies, including providers of educational and counselling services which are used to support programmes and individual students in the school. Good links with the community have been developed due to the wide range of co-curricular and extracurricular activities on offer. The school is closely linked to its main feeder primary schools and an extensive transfer programme is in place to ease students' anxiety when moving from primary to post-primary school. Staff and management are highly commended for their commitment to working with a wide range of groups and agencies for the benefit of the students.

#### **1.4 Management of resources**

Current timetabling arrangements for students are not in line with the requirements of *Circular Letter M29/95*. Most students have access to a maximum of twenty-seven hours

and thirty minutes class contact time, instead of the stipulated minimum of twenty-eight hours. Students participating in the JCSP programme have a shorter school day on all days except Wednesdays, which further reduces their contact time to twenty-four hours and fifty minutes. As mentioned earlier in the report, the holding of short staff meetings during class time further impinges on students' class contact time. Furthermore, it is evident that all the teaching hours provided for by the Department are not being utilised as intended. A number of whole-time teachers are timetabled for weekly class contact time of less than eighteen hours. While it is recognised that some reductions have been made to accommodate duties associated with posts of responsibility, it is recommended that a full review of all teachers' timetables be carried out to ensure that the teaching hours available to the school are being fully and appropriately utilised. This review should be undertaken by school management, in consultation with CDVEC.

Work is ongoing on the maintenance and upgrading of the school building. The principal places great importance on having the physical infrastructure and surroundings looking well to enhance the learning environment for students. The school has benefited from the Department's summer works scheme in relation to electrical work and the school yard has been resurfaced. Other work is being carried out on the exterior flat roof and the interior ceilings.

The entrance lobby is bright and welcoming and contains displays of student work as well as a trophy cabinet containing evidence of the many impressive sporting successes of teams and individuals. The school has small grounds and does not have any outdoor sporting facilities. It does however have access to nearby pitches. Other sporting facilities include a well-equipped weights training room and a large multi-purpose sports hall.

ICT facilities and resources in Coláiste Dhúlaigh are very good and include two fully equipped ICT rooms. The school has allocated a post of responsibility to the co-ordination of ICT and also has an internet usage policy which is printed in the students' journal. Subject folders have been created on the school server to facilitate the storing and sharing of teacher resources, which is good practice. It is recommended that subject departments plan for the integration of ICT into teaching and learning, and work collaboratively to maximise the use of these facilities for the benefit of students.

In 2007, the school was included in the JCSP demonstration library project which is designed to improve overall literacy levels in schools. To help facilitate this, the library is staffed by a full-time librarian. It is a wonderful addition to the school and provides a very welcoming environment for students. All students may visit the library but priority is given to JCSP students.

The health and safety statement is outdated and requires urgent review. It is recommended that a safety audit and risk assessment be carried out across all areas of the school. This should be followed by a time-bound plan to address any risks and hazards identified. The plan should include details on safety equipment, "occupational first-aiders" and clarity regarding the safety officer. The Health and Safety Authority (HSA) *Guidelines on Managing Safety and Health in Post-Primary Schools* would prove useful as a template for drafting the school's health and safety statement.

## **2. QUALITY OF SCHOOL PLANNING**

### **2.1 The school plan**

The School Development Planning (SDP) process was introduced to the school in 2005. The principal currently acts as planning co-ordinator: this is a duty which could be

delegated to a post holder in the near future. The school does not have a formal school plan which is a requirement under *Section 21* of the *Education Act 1998*. A collection of documents, which could form the basis of a school plan, is available however, and the school has already identified a number of long-term development targets. Although a number of policies have been approved by the board, it was not clear from the policies that were presented, which of these had been ratified and which had not. To ensure clarity and consistency, it is recommended that clear procedures should be put in place for the ratification of policies, including the dating and signing of all ratified policies and a date for review. City of Dublin VEC provides all schools within its area of responsibility with a number of generic policy documents. These need to be adapted and tailored within the context of this school. The initial leadership for developing the school plan should properly come from the board of management. It is recommended that the board progress this body of work and strengthen its role in setting the school's agenda for change, improvement and development.

Several policies should be developed as a matter of urgency. These include a Critical Incident Response policy, a Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) policy and a Whole-School Guidance Plan. An audit of policy documents and the minutes of board meetings should be carried out to ascertain the true position of all existing policy documents. A database should be set up to list the policies which need to be drawn up and to record policies which are already in place, their date of ratification and the date they are due for review.

In developing the school plan in Coláiste Dhúlaigh, cognisance must be taken of the requirements of participation in DEIS. Under this initiative, the school is obliged to develop a three-year plan and to set targets and track the progress being made in the eight areas of interest: attendance, retention, literacy, numeracy, examination attainment, educational progression, partnership with parents and partnership with others. The school is at a very early stage in this planning process. It is imperative that the school focuses on the development of a three-year plan in order to maximise the benefits from the initiative. Senior management believes that students are benefiting from initiatives already put in place by the school, but very little measurement of these benefits has taken place. More work needs to be done on the collection of baseline data from which specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, time-bound (SMART) targets can be set.

Two areas central to the DEIS initiative are the development of literacy and numeracy levels. As part of the school's development of its three-year DEIS plan, Coláiste Dhúlaigh should adopt a whole-school approach to literacy and numeracy. While there are strategies in place within the school's JCSP programme to develop literacy and numeracy these strategies need to be adapted and extended across the full curriculum, targeting all class and year groups. Specific, measurable areas for improvement need to be identified and a whole school awareness of these should inform subject planning and classroom practice. The SEN team has already compiled many useful ideas which could form the basis of a strategic plan. Excellent resources regarding the development of such a plan are available on the SDPI website ([www.sdpi.ie](http://www.sdpi.ie)).

The co-ordinator of students' work experience manages an average of 160 students seeking placements annually. This work is carried out in an organised and conscientious manner. Concerted efforts are made to encourage and motivate students to access their own work experience placements. A good system for monitoring students is in place and comprehensive records are kept. The co-ordinator and staff members are commended for their regular review of work experience and their dedication to ensure that it is productive, relevant and meets the needs of the student cohort.

Confirmation was provided that, in compliance with Post-primary Circulars M44/05 and 0062/2006, the board of management has formally adopted the Department's *Child Protection Guidelines for Post-primary Schools* (Published September 2004). Confirmation was also provided that these child protection procedures have been brought to the attention of management, school staff and parents; that a copy of the procedures has been provided to all staff (including all new staff); and that management has ensured that all staff are familiar with the procedures to be followed. A designated liaison person (DLP) and a deputy DLP have been appointed in line with the requirements of the guidelines.

### **3. QUALITY OF CURRICULUM PROVISION**

#### **3.1 Curriculum planning and organisation**

Coláiste Dhúlaigh offers the fullest possible range of post-primary programmes. Currently on offer in the school are the Junior Certificate (JC), Junior Certificate School Programme (JCSP), a compulsory Transition Year (TY), the Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) programme, the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP) and the established Leaving Certificate (LC) programme. Students are streamed on entry to the school based on a new profiling test which has been introduced by the City of Dublin VEC. Information gathered from parents and feeder primary schools is also used to cross check findings. There is some testing of students using standardised tests early in first year. Students in the first and second streams follow the JC while those in the third and fourth streams follow the JCSP. At the time of the evaluation, the school was exploring the introduction of mixed-ability classes across each year group in junior cycle and the broadening of the JCSP provision to all classes within each junior-cycle year group. This review of the organisation of class grouping in the junior cycle is a positive development.

Management facilitates concurrency on the timetable within some bands in Mathematics and English. This should enable students to study these subjects at a level which best suits their abilities by allowing movement between classes. This is good practice but it is important that this facility be used effectively by teachers. Currently there is little evidence that this is the case in Mathematics, with the compilation of class groups remaining rigidly set. For each year group the teachers of Mathematics and English should work collaboratively to ensure that student movement across class groups is facilitated.

The JCSP plays a significant part in rewarding student success and achievement in this school. The programme is very well co-ordinated and organised, with good planning taking place. An extensive schedule of cross-curricular outings is in place for first-year and second-year JCSP students. These outings are seen by the school as a vital component in making learning meaningful. Nevertheless, it is recommended that the number of trips for students be reviewed, as collectively they result in a considerable reduction in class contact time.

All students take the TY programme. Students in TY are provided with a very impressive specially designed journal in which they are required to keep a weekly log of all activities. The structure of the TY programme is impressive. It includes core subjects, subject modules, work experience, performing arts, sports and community awareness as well as TY-specific programmes. The co-ordinator is to be commended for incorporating such a wide range of events and activities into the year. Assessment of students' progress is based on a credit system where students earn credits by completing the tasks assigned by their teachers. As is best practice, the programme is evaluated annually with the results of the evaluation being used to remodel the programme each year.

The LCA programme has had a long and successful history in the school with a significant uptake by students. On average, two thirds of the students select LCA on finishing TY. A

new co-ordinator has been appointed and has recently completed an in-service course. The programme is well run with due attention paid to attendance, the completion of tasks, vocational specialisms and work experience. An induction programme during the first week helps to make students aware of the importance of each of these components.

Students who fit the pre-determined subject groupings and who are therefore eligible to sit the LCVP examination are encouraged to do so. Time allotted to the teaching of link modules in the LCVP is appropriate and there is very good access to ICT facilities. Students who follow the established LC are given tuition in ICT and complete modules of the European Computer Driving Licence (ECDL), while the LCVP students study the link modules.

The senior management team carries out the task of organising the school timetable. Various programme co-ordinators are invited to have an input into the timetable structure and this is commended. The co-ordinators also expressed satisfaction with the freedom they are given to be innovative and creative. This is further evidence of distributed leadership. Time allocation to subjects is appropriate and is in line with syllabus recommendations. Lessons are well distributed across the students' timetables which allows for regular contact with subjects.

### **3.2 Arrangements for students' choice of subjects and programmes**

Parents of incoming first-year students are invited to the school for a meeting regarding subject choice in June each year. A booklet, which includes guidelines and advice on settling into school, is distributed. A transfer programme is also run in June to allow students from feeder schools to experience subjects first hand before starting school in Coláiste Dhúlaigh. This programme is run in conjunction with the SCP and forms a good support for parents and students.

A subject sampling programme is in place for all first-year students from September until the mid-term break. This provides a robust support for students in making subject choices. Students following the JC programme sample four subjects in two option bands, choosing one from each band at the end of the sampling period. Those students who follow the JCSP programme have a more restricted choice of optional subjects. In light of the school-based review of the junior cycle currently taking place, the school is urged to ensure that a broad and balanced curriculum is offered to all students.

At the end of TY, students are offered their choice of three programmes: the established LC, LCA and LCVP. Students are advised on programme choice and are permitted to change programmes within the first few weeks of fifth year. In the past, as an additional support for parents and students, information evenings on subject and programme choice were held annually. These were poorly attended and were discontinued. It is recommended that such information evenings be re-launched and that thought be given as to how to encourage parents and students to attend. It is suggested that the HSCL co-ordinator may be of some assistance in this regard.

In line with good practice, students progressing to the established LC are presented with an open choice of subjects with subject bands formed around their choices. In addition to this, students who wish to study a subject that is not available on the school's curriculum are provided with extra classes outside timetabled hours. For example, two fifth-year students are receiving Art classes during lunch time and a sixth-year student is studying Music. This is indicative of the priority the school places on meeting students' needs and is highly commended.

### **3.3 Co-curricular and extracurricular provision**

Co-curricular and extracurricular events are a central strand of the school's curriculum in Coláiste Dhúlaigh. These activities are designed to support students' academic subjects, to encourage their social development and to enable students to develop leadership and teamworking skills. Much time-consuming work is being done by a number of teachers in providing these opportunities for students. It is acknowledged that the extensive co-curricular and extracurricular provision available would not be possible without this notable generosity of the staff.

The school has a long tradition of involvement in sport and has had particular success in boxing. The school is well supported by City of Dublin VEC in the organisation and running of competitions. Other events include Gaelic football, hurling, soccer, basketball, table tennis, an after-school Nail and Beauty Club, access to the local youth club, hill-walking at weekends, a lunchtime drama club, a musical, Art workshops and cookery for junior students.

Some of the highlights of TY include the organisation and production of up to three concerts and an end-of-year drama. Last year, the school successfully ran the *Log on and Learn* initiative and plan to do so again this year. Central to TY in Coláiste Dhúlaigh is participation in the Network for Teaching Entrepreneurship (NFTE). The students hold a NFTE Christmas Market where they have an opportunity to showcase their business ideas. This event is attended by all the school partners and is promoted by the local and national media. Over the past five years, three of Coláiste Dhúlaigh's teachers have won NFTE *Teacher of the Year* awards and have earned trips to America for further training. Through their contacts with the Christina Noble Children's Foundation and WorldWise a number of TY students travelled on a working trip to Vietnam. A similar trip will go ahead this year. TY students are also encouraged and supported to participate in Junior Achievement programmes.

The school encourages students to develop a sense of citizenship through fundraising for various charitable organisations. For example, an annual sponsored Skipathon has raised over half a million euro to date. This is a very special event in the school calendar with past pupils and a range of sporting dignitaries invited.

## **4. QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN SUBJECTS**

### **4.1 Planning and preparation**

School management supports subject department planning by providing formal planning time. Ongoing informal discussions take place between teachers in relation to planning matters. Inspectors noted the important contribution of subject co-ordinators in the planning process and, in one instance, suggested that consideration should be given to extending the tenure of office for co-ordinators to two years to allow for a year's familiarisation period. The good practice of maintaining records of department meetings was also noted. Best practice was evident where the members of the subject department worked collaboratively to develop the organisational arrangements for the subject, agreed schemes of work for each year group and planned for students with special educational needs. It is recommended that this collaborative approach should be adopted by all subject departments.

Planning documentation, with varying degrees of detail, was presented during the evaluation. Most subject departments presented schemes of work for each year group, to be

delivered within agreed timeframes. Inspectors commented that in some instances there is scope for further detailed development of subject plans. In line with best practice, these plans should be developed to include reference to learning objectives for each year group linked to curriculum topics, resources, teaching strategies and assessment, and agreed timeframes. These long-term curriculum plans should then be adapted by teachers in light of the needs of individual class groups.

In three of the subject areas inspected as part of the evaluation, documentation was provided in relation to the planned teaching programme for the compulsory TY. Inspectors expressed some concern in relation to the content and methodologies outlined in this documentation. These schemes should be reviewed and amended so as to provide sufficient academic challenge for students and provide them with a broader educational experience. There should also be a focus on the use of teaching strategies that provide for the more active participation of students.

Planning and preparation by individual teachers for the lessons observed was, in the majority of instances, very good. Lessons formed part of a larger unit of work and were supported by the careful preparation of student worksheets, teacher notes and, in some lessons, digital presentations. Some teachers also made available a range of resources, assembled over a period of time, which were used to support teaching and learning. The preparation of such resources reflects the commitment of teachers to providing rich learning experiences for their students.

## **4.2 Learning and teaching**

Lessons were observed in four subject areas; Mathematics, Geography, French and Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE). Specific findings and recommendations for each of these subjects are included in the individual subject inspection reports. The following are the general findings on teaching and learning.

In the majority of lessons observed, the standard of teaching and learning was good. Clear routines and good practice were evident at the outset of most lessons when teachers shared the aims and objectives with their students and, in some cases, returned to these at the end of the lesson to assess what had been achieved.

When methodologies were varied, when lesson content was related to the students' experiences and when students were given the opportunity to participate actively in lessons, the levels of engagement and interest were very high. It is recommended that an appropriate balance between teachers' input and the use of active learning strategies be maintained to ensure that optimal learning occurs.

In some lessons observed the pace and content were appropriate to the age and ability of the learners. In other lessons, however, students were not sufficiently challenged and, consequently, their skills were not enhanced and they did not experience a sense of progression in the subjects concerned. It is recommended, therefore, that lessons be planned thoroughly, taking cognisance of the levels students have already reached with a view to progressing learning.

Focused questioning was used successfully in many lessons, but, in some cases, there was scope to place greater emphasis on the development of higher-order thinking skills. With a few exceptions, where students were unco-operative in class, classroom management was effective and students responded positively when they were affirmed and encouraged to contribute to discussions.

The whiteboard was used to good effect to revise material, to reinforce concepts and to gather students' ideas. The use of ICT and Powerpoint presentations was a notable feature of lessons in some subject areas. In general, however, ICT was under-utilised and there is considerable scope to increase the use of technology to give students a broader range of learning experiences. The internet is an excellent source of stimulating, authentic material and its extended use would assist greatly in engaging students.

The classrooms visited were bright and attractive. They were suitably decorated with students' work, charts, posters, maps and photographs, all of which helped to create a stimulating learning environment.

### **4.3 Assessment**

There is a range of appropriate assessment methods used to monitor students' progress. These include in-class questioning, teachers' observations of students' work, the completion of worksheets and homework, class tests and term examinations. It is recommended that this range be extended and incorporate, as relevant, student reflection, student self-assessment, oral competence and a greater variety of data-response questions in written examinations.

During the inspection process, samples of students' written work were reviewed. The quality was variable, with improvement required in a number of instances. Teachers should increase the monitoring of students' written work and adopt a consistent approach to the achievement of improvement in this area.

A number of subject departments have developed homework policies but their implementation was not always evident in class. Homework should be assigned and corrected regularly. In corrections, attention should be paid to students' errors, ensuring they are understood. In class, there should equally be a focus on students recording class work fully and accurately in their copy books.

There were some commendable examples of teachers using assessment for learning (AfL) strategies. Positive written affirmation and 'comment only' marking were observed in some subject areas. It is recommended that this be extended across the curriculum and at all levels. Peer assessment, observed in one area, would benefit from giving students the opportunity to discuss common errors and strategies for improvement.

## **5. QUALITY OF SUPPORT FOR STUDENTS**

### **5.1 Inclusion of students with additional educational needs**

There are five fully qualified special educational needs (SEN) teachers on the school staff with another member of staff currently attending a course. There is a keen interest from other teachers to up-skill in this area. The SEN department has a designated co-ordinator and the SEN team ensures that a very good service is provided to students with additional educational needs. The team meets regularly and a SEN policy which covers all aspects of special education needs and learning support provision has been developed. The school caters for a significant number of students in need of extra support. Students with educational needs are identified before and during the transition from primary school. This process is well organised and is carried out with the assistance of the SEN co-ordinator and one of the guidance counsellors.

All fifteen special needs assistants (SNAs) meet with the SEN co-ordinator at the start of the school day and again at the end of the day. These meetings are held to plan and co-ordinate relevant student supports and to monitor students' progress. A weekly report is completed by each SNA giving details on the progress being made with their targeted students. This is very good practice.

Good communication is maintained between mainstream teachers and the SEN team to ensure that teachers have the necessary information regarding the needs of students. A presentation is made to the whole staff by the SEN co-ordinator at the start of the year and the SEN department has an input into the staff bulletin every week.

A detailed register of SEN students is maintained. This is used to record and monitor students' progress and to provide information to teachers on students who need learning support. Teachers are encouraged to discuss learning strategies and methodologies for individual students with the co-ordinator. The SEN department is commended for its openness and willingness to act as a resource for all other subject departments.

Learning support takes the form of in-class support for English, Irish and Mathematics. There are up to fifteen teachers involved in providing learning support and resource teaching and these teachers liaise with the subject teachers to ensure that they are aware of, and are implementing, student targets. A weekly progress sheet must be filled out by each learning support and resource teacher for the students with whom they are working. This is very good practice.

Students from minority groups or disadvantaged backgrounds are encouraged and facilitated to participate in all aspects of school life. The excellent student support systems in place in the school ensure that these students can avail of what the school has to offer. Designated staff contribute greatly to the support of these students. Management has recently initiated the development of extra supports for exceptionally able students. Some of these supports take the form of guest speakers, culture trips, attendance at college open days and the very regular testing of students, with progress reports sent home. This allocation of extra supports to these students is commended. It is suggested that the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) document *Exceptionally Able Students: Draft Guidelines for Teachers* may prove useful in this work.

## **5.2 Guidance and student support in the whole-school context**

The school has an allocation of 1.23 whole time equivalents (WTE) for Guidance. Two appropriately qualified guidance counsellors are involved in the delivery of Guidance in the school. Resources for Guidance are good, with a suite of offices which is well equipped with ICT hardware, internet access, display and storage facilities, telephone and office equipment.

A whole-school guidance plan is at an early stage of development. It is recommended that a planning team be assembled to quickly progress this project. In the development of this guidance plan, it is recommended that the following documents be consulted, *Planning a School Guidance Programme*, National Centre for Guidance in Education (NCTE) and *Guidelines for Second Level Schools on the implications of Section 9 (c) of the Education Act 1998, relating to students' access to appropriate Guidance*.

Students in fifth year and in sixth year are timetabled for one period of Guidance per week. Individual appointments are also arranged for sixth-year students. TY students have no timetabled guidance classes but they do receive Guidance on a one-to-one basis. The guidance counsellors have an input into programme and subject choices at the end of TY.

As recommended earlier in this report, it would be important that the guidance team attend information meetings for parents and students around subject and programme choice.

Junior-cycle students are not timetabled for Guidance but they receive modules of Guidance during the year. The presentation of these modules is facilitated by borrowing classes from subject teachers. The guidance team has no input when first-year students are selecting their option subjects at the end of the sampling period. It is recommended that some supports be put in place at this time as the choices made have long-term educational and career implications. The lack of timetabled Guidance at junior-cycle level is currently under review by management.

A good balance is maintained between Guidance and counselling. Both guidance counsellors have completed extensive CPD and are commended for this. Students may meet a member of the guidance team through an appointment, self-referral, referral from a year head or referral from a teacher.

A care team exists in the school which comprises the principal, deputy principal, guidance counsellor, SEN co-ordinator, HSCL co-ordinator, a relevant year head and a psychologist, who is employed by City of Dublin VEC and attends Coláiste Dhúlaigh for one day a week. This shows further evidence that the school prioritises the welfare of its students. This group meets weekly and liaises with teachers and year heads regarding the welfare of students. It is recommended that a care policy document be developed to reflect these good practices. This policy document should give details of the structures and processes involved, the types of interventions used, and who is responsible for implementing these interventions. It is also recommended that the care team contribute to drafting a Critical Incident Response policy, which was mentioned earlier in the report, as this group includes many of the key personnel who should contribute to the development of this policy.

The school has a long standing involvement with the *Reach Out* programme which is run by an external agency. Currently one of the second-year classes is participating in this programme and it involves being off the school campus every Tuesday afternoon. While the programme is seen as very beneficial to students, their regular absence from class may impact on their academic progress. It is recommended, therefore, that the school's involvement in such programmes be kept under constant review.

With support from the NBSS, specific classroom routines have been developed, at a whole-school level, which have supported classroom management. In addition to this, the school has recently established, with the assistance of the NBSS, extra support structures for students who are persistently causing disruption. Students are referred through the care team and are provided with focused interventions. Students are encouraged to evaluate their own behaviour and to develop strategies to reduce conflict situations. This is a positive development for the school and a good support for students and teachers.

The HSCL co-ordinator acts as a strong link between home and school. There is close liaison with the SCP, particularly regarding the monitoring of attendance and the transfer programme from primary school to post-primary school. The HSCL co-ordinator helps to encourage on-going parental involvement in the school. The work of the HSCL co-ordinator is commended and is a significant element of the school's commitment to student care and support.

Through the DEIS initiative, the school runs a breakfast club and a lunch club for students in a well appointed canteen. The school also has a "Nurture Group" which aims "*to provide a carefully routined classroom setting where there is a balance of teaching and learning, socialisation and structure within a homelike atmosphere.*" Students from first year or second year may be referred to this group through the SEN department. The maximum in

the group is five and the intervention lasts for one or two terms. A specially adapted classroom is used for the delivery of a well structured programme to these students. The programme has a strong emphasis on developing students' social skills. The work of the teachers involved with this group exemplifies the genuine care for the individual which is such a strong theme in Coláiste Dhúlaigh.

## **6. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT**

The following are the main strengths identified in the evaluation:

- Consistent and long-term efforts have been put in place to make the experience of being in school more enjoyable for students.
- The school is inclusive and student care is a core value. Students with additional learning needs are well supported through a wide variety of interventions.
- Senior management share a vision for the school and work as an effective team. Their management style is open and consultative.
- The school has a committed and well qualified staff.
- The school has been proactive in countering the poor attendance of some students.
- Through links with the NBSS, the school is reviewing the current code of conduct and has already introduced several new approaches to classroom management.
- Strong links have been established with a range of outside agencies to support programmes and individual students in the school.
- A broad range of subjects and programmes is offered to students. Each of the programmes is effectively co-ordinated.
- There were some commendable examples of teachers using assessment for learning strategies.
- A wide variety of extracurricular and co-curricular activities is on offer including activities that enhance the social, cultural and academic development of students.

As a means of building on these strengths and to address areas for development, the following key recommendations are made:

- The board should be more proactive in leading the school's agenda for change, improvement and development. Several policy documents need to be developed, as a matter of urgency.
- DEIS planning should be progressed with particular emphasis on a whole-school approach to the development of literacy and numeracy.
- The length of the school week falls short of the twenty-eight hours contact time for students. Management must ensure that the school complies with Circular Letter M29/95 *Time in School*.
- All teachers' timetables should be reviewed by senior management and the CDVEC to ensure that the teaching hours provided for by the Department are being fully and appropriately utilised.
- Many subject department planning documents need further development. There should be a focus on the development of literacy and numeracy, sharing of resources, integration of ICT into lessons and, in particular, the raising of academic expectations.
- The ongoing discussions around introducing mixed-ability class arrangements across all year groups and the broadening of the JCSP provision to all classes within junior cycle should be concluded in time for any changes to be implemented by the beginning of the next school year.

Post-evaluation meetings were held with the staff and board of management when the draft findings and recommendations of the evaluation were presented and discussed.

## **7. RELATED SUBJECT INSPECTION REPORTS**

The following related Subject Inspection reports are available:

- Subject Inspection of French – 24 November 2010
- Subject Inspection of Geography – 15 November 2010
- Subject Inspection of Mathematics – 24 November 2010
- Subject Inspection of SPHE – 27 November 2010