Whole-School Evaluation
REPORT

St Joseph’s Secondary School
Navan, County Meath
Roll number: 64360Q

Date of inspection: 22 January 2010
WHOLE-SCHOOL EVALUATION

A whole-school evaluation of St Joseph’s Secondary School was undertaken in January 2010. This report presents the findings of the evaluation and makes recommendations for improvement. During the evaluation, the quality of teaching and learning in three subjects was evaluated in detail. A fourth subject was evaluated in advance. 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, and the response of the board will be found in the appendix of this report.

INTRODUCTION

St Joseph’s is an all-girls Catholic voluntary secondary school. It is one of four post-primary schools in Navan. St Joseph’s has a strong presence in the town both geographically and historically. The school was founded by the Mercy Order in 1925. While it is a strongly Catholic school, it also welcomes students of other religions and of none. Evidence provided in the course of this evaluation indicates that the school retains a strong appeal to parents as a quality educational provider both in terms of academic achievement and the personal development of students.

Overall enrolment figures have been very steady. Over the past decade the school has consistently operated at full capacity or close to full capacity. The current school year’s enrolment of 526 students is consistent with this pattern. Applications for first-year places in September 2011 show a significant and sooner-than-anticipated increase due to demographic changes. School management is keen to play its part in accommodating the increased demand and is committed to the best development of the site and its buildings. This latter consideration is a particular concern of the board of management.

There have been significant developments in the operation, direction and composition of the school in recent years. The present incumbent is the first lay principal of the school. The school has come under the trusteeship of Catholic Education, an Irish Schools Trust (CEIST) since early 2008. The student population has shifted from a homogeneous Irish profile to one that is multicultural. The school participates in the Navan School Completion Programme initiative.

1. QUALITY OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT

1.1 Characteristic spirit of the school

All parties interviewed, including student representatives, were clear and confident in identifying a common characteristic spirit of the school. The primary element in this shared view of identity was of a Catholic school in the Mercy tradition. Those interviewed agree that the school aims to deliver a quality and holistic education in an environment that encourages all students’ talents and respects difference. These aims and objectives are set out clearly in the mission statement which informs school policies and guides its practices. The commitment to the care and development of all students resonates well with the second sentence of the mission statement that declares a particular interest in and concern for the disadvantaged student. The school demonstrates a clear commitment to inclusiveness.

In line with its new trusteeship model, the CEIST charter is now prominently displayed throughout the school. The current school mission statement continues to guide and motivate the direction of the school and the aims of both documents complement each
other. It was noted that the second sentence of the mission statement does not appear in a number of school documents and policies. This omission should be resolved in the context of aligning the CEIST charter with the current fuller school mission statement. The agreed text of the mission statement should be used in full thereafter in all school policies and documentation.

Students’ representatives at several levels are well integrated into supporting the daily operation of the school. Students expressed confidence in the management of the school and in its fairness. They were self-confident both in describing the quality of teaching and learning and in their observed personal interactions with teachers. The representatives of parents are very active in their support of the school. Turning to the future and a shared vision, the parties who met with the inspectors identified areas for consolidation and development. At its core is the aim of providing a relevant education that continues to be guided by the founding intentions of a Catholic school in the Mercy tradition.

It is a finding of this evaluation that the school shows a real commitment in its policies to the aims of the mission statement and achieves this in most of its practices. The school shows evidence of adaptation and modernisation alongside a commitment to high standards in educational provision consistent with the educational vision of the school founders. The quality of positive relationships observed throughout the school, at all levels, is a good indicator of the school’s mission statement guiding the day-to-day operation of the school.

1.2 School ownership and management

The board of management, now in the final year of its three-year term, operates effectively and is supportive of the principal in the management of the school. Board members have availed of training in the functions of a board provided by the Joint Managerial Body (JMB). The board is properly constituted, is well informed of its functions, meets regularly, and its operations are procedurally sound. A sub-committee on finance is active in the scrutiny and management of school finances and it reports regularly to the board. Parents of former students are prominent on the board. This is another indicator of the emotional and practical loyalty to the school evident among the parents.

Evidence collected during the evaluation indicates that there is good communication with, and support from, the new trustee body CEIST. An example of this is the board’s attention to advice from CEIST on best practice in financial governance of school accounts. Copies of minutes of all meetings of the board are now provided to CEIST and an annual report on the operation of the school is also submitted. A further indication of the growing CEIST connection is provided by the school’s application to have one of its teachers of German and French pursue faith-based post-graduate studies at the Catholic University of Notre Dame supported by a CEIST bursary. This reflects the CEIST aim of acting as a ministry of influence in faith formation with its schools. On a related matter, the Parish of Navan currently provides a school chaplain who contributes to faith formation and provides liturgical celebrations in the life of the school.

Good communication is maintained with the teaching staff and the parents’ association on the proceedings of board meetings. Confidential matters are agreed at each board meeting and nominees of both bodies exclude these from their reports. Relations between the board and the staff are good. The chairperson of the board is a familiar figure in the school in maintaining contact with senior management and in informal interactions in the staffroom. In view of the important role it plays in the operation and management of the school, there is scope for the board to consider raising its profile among the school community through its members’ collective attendance at school events such as graduation and award ceremonies.
The board emphasised the recruitment of staff as an ongoing key contribution it makes to upholding and enhancing the reputation of the school in teaching and learning. The board is satisfied that the teaching staff of the school reflects its policy of appointing “teachers who love to teach”. The board expressed its full confidence in the quality of leadership and of management of the day-to-day running of the school provided by the principal and deputy principal.

The board identified a range of developmental priorities that it hopes to achieve in the interests of improving the quality of educational provision. These include the further enhancement of information and communications technology (ICT), the provision of a sports hall, the development of a broader curriculum that will advantage female students, and the upkeep and maintenance of the plant in a wholesome environment with a particular emphasis on safety of access. These are appropriate areas for the attention of the board. It is recommended that a future board consider identifying at the outset of its term of office the areas for development where it hopes to make progress within its three-year term. These priorities could be identified separately from ongoing areas of development and could provide board members with a clear agenda for the duration of their term.

1.3 In-school management

The day-to-day management of the school is in capable hands. Both the principal and deputy principal are well experienced and well qualified to discharge their respective roles in their senior management positions. The principal has served in the role for fifteen years and the deputy principal has seven years’ experience. Both were external appointments and both have earned the confidence and respect of all parties interviewed during the evaluation.

The members of the senior management team enjoy a very good working relationship and are prepared to challenge each other. Communication between them is open and regular and information is fully shared. Formal meetings are held between them at 8.00 am on Monday mornings in addition to informal meetings that are held each day of the week. The principal keeps the deputy fully informed on the business of board of management meetings.

The core shared aims of the two members of the senior management team in their leadership and management of the school are the welfare of students and staff, maintaining and enhancing the reputation of the school, and high-quality teaching and learning. Each of these aims clearly reflects key elements of the school’s mission statement. Both members of the senior management team set high standards for themselves and expect the same of others. Apart from the shared aims, the principal and deputy principal have clearly defined areas of responsibility and a comprehensive list of these duties was provided. In the separate and joint discharge of their duties both are exemplary in the thoroughness of their commitment to providing the highest possible educational service to the students.

The senior management team identified a long list of key developmental areas for the school. Consideration should be given to promoting these areas more widely and to agreeing reasonable timeframes for their achievement. In the interests of providing leadership for the future direction of the school therefore it is recommended that the senior management team set aside time, separate from the day-to-day management of the school, to consider a clear joint vision for the future. The purpose of this reflection would be to agree the key developmental priorities of the senior management team for promotion among the school community as a whole with targets for achievement in the short, medium and long term.

Communication between the senior management team and the staff is open and in almost all cases is well managed both formally and informally. Staff meetings are held on five
occasions each year. The arrangements for staff in setting the agenda, in participation at meetings, and in recording the proceedings are open. Examples of good communication to staff are found in the staff handbook, the whiteboard and pigeon holes in the staffroom and announcements at break times. The planned introduction of a staff e-mailing system would provide a helpful extra support to senior management communication with staff and should be introduced as soon as is feasible.

The senior management team is assisted by a middle management team of seven assistant principals (AP) and fourteen special duties teachers (SDT). Each of these holders of posts of responsibility (POR) has a clear set of assigned duties that are well specified in signed contracts. Good efforts have been made to ensure that the duties attaching to the posts of responsibility remain current to the needs of the school. It is good that non-promoted teachers are well represented on a POR committee that has reviewed the relevance of those duties. The most recent review was carried out some eighteen months ago and some revision of duties emerged. A further consideration of the reasons for designating some of these duties as priority areas at that time would be timely. Arrangements for the monitoring by senior management of duties performed by post holders are informal and take place as an ongoing part of the post holders’ work. It is recommended that any future review of the duties attaching to the post-of-responsibility structure consider taking over some of the functions currently carried out by the principal and deputy principal. Such a move would broaden the contribution that middle management can make to the operation of the school and build leadership capacity at this level.

Those post holders who hold the position of year head meet formally with the senior management team at a scheduled slot on the timetable once a week. Beyond this discrete group the practice of senior management meeting with the full middle management team or with the full AP team or full SDT team separately has not been established. Consultation with those post holders who are not year heads is an informal arrangement. While each member of the middle management team contributes to the operation of the school there is scope to develop a more cohesive team at middle management level. Consideration should be given to developing the distributed leadership model. This could be done by creating opportunities for all post holders to contribute to the management of the school beyond the assigned duties outlined in the POR contracts.

The senior management team communicates with teachers generally on their performance in the area of teaching and learning. The nature of this communication is informal but clear. Teachers’ observations match senior management assertions that staff are well affirmed in their work and in their contribution to the school. Senior management communicates clearly that a commitment to student welfare and academic achievement is an expectation of staff. There is also very good senior management support for staff in availing of continuing professional development (CPD) both in subject-specific areas and whole-school issues and in the induction of newly-appointed staff members. Teachers were positive about the working atmosphere in the school and about the support and encouragement provided by management.

The same positive work atmosphere applies in the case of ancillary staff. This combination of factors indicates that senior management shows considerable strengths in the management of staff. In order to build on those strengths it is recommended that more formal procedures be considered for reviewing and affirming the performance of teaching and post-of-responsibility duties than those currently applied. This approach would encourage self-review among all members of staff as well as providing all parties with a formal record of management’s evaluation of the quality of teachers’ work.

The admissions policy is a key document in that it has considerable impact on the operation of the school generally. It recognises the principles of inclusiveness, equality, access,
parental choice and diversity and affirms the duty of care to students set out in the school mission statement. The criteria to be satisfied for the admission and transfer of students are clearly set out. The policy properly shows the date of ratification by the board of management. The date shown predates the formation of the current board and, since the school is immediately facing a steep rise in demand for places to first year sooner than expected, it would be prudent for the board therefore to review the policy in the interests of ensuring the fairest application of criteria to meet changed circumstances.

The code of behaviour is an important document in the management of students. The deputy principal has specific duties assigned in the area of student discipline and liaises with year heads who on occasions must make recommendations in favour of sanctions. Year heads meet with senior management on a weekly basis and communication on student welfare, including attendance, is thorough and up to date. The deputy principal is perceived as entirely fair in the implementation of these duties. The current undated code of behaviour, also bearing the name *Code of Discipline Policy* is five to six years in existence. The code would benefit from a rebalancing of the encouragement and affirmation of positive behaviour that happens in practice with the sanctions and offences that are set out in the current document. It is appropriate that the code is currently being reviewed in line with the National Educational Welfare Board (NEWB) 2008 publication: *Developing a Code of Behaviour: Guidelines for Schools*. It is recommended that a target date for completing the review of the code of behaviour in line with the NEWB guidelines be agreed and achieved.

Good supports are in place for the management of students and for their encouragement to play an active and responsible role in school life. Year heads and class teachers play a central role in this area and in the monitoring of attendance, punctuality and uniform. The school completion programme co-ordinator is an important support to particular students. Student prefects operate at many levels within the school every day and make a very telling contribution to the good order, good atmosphere and good environment that is evident throughout the school. Sport is very prominent in the activities provided for students and an end-of-year awards ceremony pays particular attention to participation and achievement in sport. Student mentors are in place. Students have access to the redeveloped library at lunchtime and to the assistance of a librarian. After-school study supports are provided.

The student council provides a forum for students to express their views and to contribute to the operation of the school. It includes an elected representative from all class groups. It is well supported by a liaison teacher who co-ordinates its work and weekly meetings. Council members are provided with training. The council members presented as being enormously proud of their school, proud of being elected and eager to contribute to the running of the school. Senior management shows recognition and affirmation for the activities of the council. This is apparent through the provision of a notice board, the display of photographs of members, the wearing of badges, end-of-year affirmation and certification. Council members can point to effective inputs in the areas of revisions of the school uniform and changes to the house examinations and they have been consulted on school policies. The work of the council is also focused on the development of social awareness and civic responsibility as members of society. Examples of this are the school show organised as a fundraising event in aid of Meath Women’s Refuge and an awareness week and poster competition focused on human rights and *Fair Trade*.

The parents’ association plays a particularly active role in supporting and promoting the school. The promotion of the school to prospective parents at the annual open night for applicant first-year students is a case in point. The association has provided very significant funding that has permitted a major investment in ICT in the school. This has resulted in the provision of computers and data projectors in all classrooms. A book rental scheme and the position of librarian are further initiatives supported by the parent body. There is very good
communication between senior management, the teaching staff and the association. A section of all meetings of the parents’ association is attended by the senior management team and two teacher representatives. The principal provides an annual report to the parents’ association on the operation of the school.

The school has strong links with the local community and with outside agencies including all the relevant education and welfare agencies. These links have been further developed through transition year (TY) work-experience links, the sharing of the school’s sporting facilities, major musical and drama performances, and social and charitable links. The response to major fundraising efforts indicates that strong links have been developed by the school with the community it serves.

1.4 Management of resources

The school is fully compliant with the provisions of circular letter M29/95 *Time in School* regarding instruction time and teaching days. The school operates a full daily timetable on all five weekdays and provides a total of forty-six class periods of instruction time. It is planned to review the ten class periods provided on Wednesday with a view to providing a nine-period day similar to other days. This would not affect the present arrangement of providing a twenty-eight hours timetable of instruction to students.

The teaching staff is deployed in accordance with qualifications and experience in a fair manner. The deputy principal is well experienced in constructing the timetable and performs this task effectively. Teachers in whole-time positions or equivalent temporary positions are timetabled close to the maximum class-contact allocation in most cases. In the matter of the better use of teaching resources, attention is drawn to the timetabling recommendation in the accompanying subject inspection report for Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE). Subject department meetings should not be scheduled where this results in the routine and regular loss of instruction time for students and particularly so where the subject in question operates on a weekly time allocation of just one class period.

Subject department budgets are operated fairly. An annual budget allocation is made following application by each department. Record-keeping is good, open and transparent. Comparative figures were provided for grants paid to each subject department in the current year, alongside the sums sought by application, as well as the approved previous year budget. The support of the parents’ association for subject departments is very apparent. For example, the parents’ association subvention amounted to almost two thirds of the total paid to subject departments in 2009/10.

There has been very considerable investment in information and communications technology (ICT) and the positive results are in evidence throughout the school. All classrooms are provided with a screen, internet-access computer, and ceiling-mounted data projector. The sums raised by the parents’ association to achieve this level of provision in a short time have been very considerable. Staff members have availed of training opportunities and are integrating ICT into teaching and learning. The current ICT development plan has become redundant since it has been implemented ahead of time. This has permitted the targeting of more ambitious developments to support students’ learning. This aims to provide a complement of mobile laptops for classroom use by students.

A new extension opened in 2001. The main school building has been upgraded to meet the needs of physically disabled students. An oratory and art room have been provided in recent times. Evidence of students’ achievements in photographs, plaques, trophies and awards are prominently displayed. The renovation of buildings and the development of facilities are ongoing. In this regard the school has been successful in securing contingency funding from the Department of Education and Skills through the Dormant Accounts Fund.
and the Summer Works Scheme. Within the past five years a general classroom has been converted to a science laboratory, further ICT resources have been secured for the planned introduction of Design and Communication Graphics (DCG) and the school has developed a library with ICT facilities. Plans to enhance the position of Physical Education (PE) on the curriculum are centred on the application for a new PE hall facility. Roof repairs, window replacement, fencing of the site and car parking improvements have also been carried out. Separate from these improvements senior management has secured resources donated to the school that benefit students and learning. These include enhanced ICT resources for DCG, an altar for the oratory and facilities that permit students take lunch outdoors in clement weather.

The school grounds and buildings are clean and very well maintained. Students are encouraged and well directed in support of the upkeep and care of the school. This is evident throughout the school day and notably at the hour-long lunchtime break. Student prefects make a significant contribution in this area in ensuring that fellow students show respect for the buildings and grounds and for the successful operation of recycling facilities. A post-holder with responsibility for the environment directs and oversees these activities effectively. Shelving for schoolbags has been installed on various corridors. This allows freer and safer movement and contributes to greater order particularly as there is significant movement on corridors throughout the day arising from the teacher-based classrooms. The good attention to environmental awareness and the active involvement of students in contributing to a well maintained school building and grounds provide strong reasons for reconsidering school participation in the Green-Schools programme and award scheme. This would provide opportunities for students and teachers to explore valuable cross-curricular initiatives apart from the distinction of achieving the award.

Ancillary staff make a significant contribution to the smooth operation of the school and senior management acknowledges and affirms these efforts. All ancillary staff members interviewed confirmed this. Job satisfaction, an attachment to the school, and a desire to contribute to its operation were recurring themes during these interviews.

Health and safety is well managed in the attention to fire drills, in the ongoing programme of the removal of asbestos throughout the buildings, and in the treatment of dry rot in the listed building. A new entrance for the school from the public road, exclusive to the secondary school, is a particular safety concern prioritised by the board of management and is progressing through the planning stages. The current entrance is shared with St Joseph’s Primary School and with the Health Service Executive. Management is hopeful that the new entrance can soon be achieved. The orientation of the most recent extension to the school in 2001 is towards this proposed entrance. When achieved, the likely effect will also be to enhance the aspect of the buildings in addition to enhanced safety.

Health and safety is an issue addressed in individual subject plans. The health and safety statement relied on at present is twelve years old and predates the most recent legislation Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Act 2005. A new health and safety statement has been prepared and it now awaits expert vetting. Subject departments should be involved in the identification of hazards in the classrooms that are used for their particular subjects. This would permit a closer identification with health and safety measures. The revised health and safety statement should be progressed for early ratification and implementation.

In the area of communications with parents, public relations, and in the potential to promote the school to a wider audience, the quality of the current school website represents a missed opportunity. Neither does it fit well with the school’s much enhanced ICT capacity. The website is an effective tool to further these aims. The school website would seem to complement the duties attached to the post of public relations that is within the current post-of-responsibility schedule. The development of a staff e-mail system, as contemplated,
is also an area that could further support the quality and reliability of internal communications. It is recommended that attention be given to the early development of the school website and of a staff e-mailing system.

2. QUALITY OF SCHOOL PLANNING

2.1 The school plan

The process of school development planning (SDP) has been well established in the school. The staff and board of management have been the main agents in the process of drafting and approving a number of key policies, particularly in the last five years. The board’s role has been to consider policies submitted for approval. A consultative role has also been extended to the parents’ association and to students in that time. Parents’ involvement has been most noticeable in the area of relationships and sexuality education (RSE) and in the drafting of the school’s anti-bullying and homework policies.

A list of approved policies provided to the evaluation team indicated that parents and students were involved in contributing to the review of a number of policies. These include the code of discipline, homework, internet acceptable use, Religious Education, special educational needs, SPHE, the updated anti-bullying policy and the school guidance plan. The involvement of parents and students in contributing to policies that are central to the operation of the school is a positive development. The student council is an appropriate forum through which the school can consult the views of students. While the current student council did list an area in which its views were sought there is scope to make consultation on the operation of the school more prominent in the duties assigned to the council.

Parents’ representatives were familiar with the process of planning that is taking place in the school and with areas where they had made a contribution. They rightly associated planning with contributing to improvement in the operation of the school. They were less familiar with the existence of a school plan. This disconnection between the planning process and the actual school plan could be remedied by better communication of the purpose of planning and of the existence of the school plan. The potential of the school website should be explored as a means of providing a clear picture of the purpose and progress of school planning as well as access to the school plan. The success of the first ICT plan and the enhancement of the school environment are but two practical examples of positive outcomes from planning.

There is evidence of the involvement of staff on a wide scale in SDP through attendance at in-service activities and involvement in a number of committees with discrete tasks. The school has worked closely with the regional co-ordinator of the School Development Planning Initiative (SDPI), particularly in the area of subject department planning and curriculum planning. There is evidence of considerable preparatory work at school level in advance of SDPI in-service support in reflecting on the purpose and aims of subject department planning. Collaborative subject department planning is firmly established within the school and is well supported by management. Subject co-ordinators are in place and the main recommendations of previous subject inspection reports have been addressed. The quality of subject department plans and the various programmes provided indicates that teachers prepare well for teaching and learning.

A well researched and comprehensive school plan was provided in two folders. This includes a relatively permanent section detailing what has been achieved to date and a developmental section. The main areas concern management and organisation, staff and student welfare, curriculum provision, infrastructural development and maintenance,
student discipline, posts of responsibility, and school procedures and policies. This would benefit from the inclusion of a summary check list of policies and initiatives showing clearly the date of commencement or the date of ratification by the board of these documents as well as the date for review. The school prospectus that is properly included with the school plan documentation is a very well produced attractive brochure that gives an excellent summary of the aims and values of the school as well as the courses and facilities. This is an ideal document for expansion and development on the school website.

The records of the last five years indicate areas of endeavour separate from subject department planning. Policies or draft policies have emerged in most cases. A summary document of the school plan provides a useful guide to the work that has been achieved in the 2004-2010 period and would benefit from further collation into a more reader-friendly account of what has been achieved. The summary document also usefully summarises areas to be explored as priorities in the coming school year 2010/11. This provides a wide agenda. Among the areas identified are the completion of the review of the code of behaviour, the phasing out of the ten-lesson Wednesday timetable and the possible acquisition of a defibrillator. Curricular issues are also included, such as a major review of the TY programme, a review of Physical Education provision to sixth-year students and the planned introduction of Design and Communication Graphics as an additional subject.

The SDP process is managed exclusively by one member of the senior management team. The work is well co-ordinated and recorded but takes its impetus from management alone. The checklist above of possible priority areas indicates the level of engagement that will be required on an ongoing basis as many of these areas need revisiting. The improvements in the operation of the school attributable to SDP in recent years should be published in an accessible form as a matter of record and as a guide to moving the process forward.

Consideration of the direction of future planning should include input from key stakeholders beyond the teaching staff who are currently the main drivers of the planning agenda. A common vision of future priorities for the school would provide a better action plan than the current arrangement where the origin and onus for planning rests predominantly with a member of the senior management team for transmission to the staff. Consideration should be given to the appointment of a SDP steering group or a SDP co-ordinator to direct future school planning and review. Such a group might usefully include representatives of the other stakeholders and agree a focus for future direction.

Confirmation was provided that, in compliance with Post-primary Circulars M44/05 and 0062/2006, the board of management has formally adopted the Child Protection Guidelines for Post-primary Schools (Department of Education and Science, 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.

Despite confirmation of school management’s attention to this issue, not all of the parties interviewed were clear in their recollection of inputs on child protection guidelines to staff and the DLP was wrongly identified in some instances. Staff members should reacquaint themselves with the detail of the guidelines. School management should remind all staff members on an annual basis of the school’s child protection guidelines and procedures and ensure that newly appointed staff members receive adequate induction in this area.

3. **QUALITY OF CURRICULUM PROVISION**
3.1 Curriculum planning and organisation

The spiritual development of students is the first aim listed in the mission statement and is well addressed in practice. In line with this Religious Education (RE) forms a common thread that runs throughout the school curriculum. The subject is given prominence on the timetable for each class group in each year. It is among the core subjects studied for the Junior Certificate examination. This reflects the strongly expressed view of the board of management that RE plays a highly important role in enabling students derive benefit from both the formal curriculum and liturgical events.

The school provides a broad curriculum and there is attention to ongoing review to take account of the changing needs of students. The curricular programmes currently provided are: the Junior Certificate, the Junior Certificate School Programme (JCSP), the Transition Year (TY) programme, the Established Leaving Certificate (ELC) and the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP).

Evidence of a broad curriculum is found in the fourteen examination subjects that are provided at junior cycle and sixteen at senior cycle. Students sit examinations in the Junior Certificate in ten of these. Until the present school year 2009/10 this figure stood at eleven. The change has been brought about by the switch of Music from the core group of subjects for second year and third year to the optional subjects group from the start of second year. Music continues to have a strong profile on the school curriculum and in co-curricular and extracurricular activities that are central to the major events in the life of the school and in the experience of the students. Additionally, choir remains a core area on the curriculum in all year groups.

The switch of Music to the optional group of subjects at junior cycle, where students have an open choice, indicates the school’s willingness to address curriculum overload for students over the claims of tradition. Similarly the switch of Home Economics to equal placement among the optional subjects in the junior cycle is a move in keeping with providing students with access to a broader curriculum. Further comment on this move is available in the accompanying subject inspection report on Home Economics.

Following careful consideration, the school introduced mixed-ability classes to first year in September 2005 and has reviewed its operation since then. The outcome of the review has strongly endorsed the adoption of the new model of class formation as one that has been beneficial to students’ learning. Year heads’ representatives are at one in attributing a huge improvement in discipline to the introduction of mixed-ability classes. Teachers have accepted the consequential need to adapt teaching methodologies to the needs of more diverse class groupings. Management has welcomed the move and has provided support to teachers with continuing professional development activities in this area. The inclusive move to mixed-ability classes fits well with the aims of the school mission statement.

While not obviously connected, the move to teacher-based classrooms which was introduced in September 2006 permits teachers to have ready access to resources to cater for a more differentiated profile of learners. The assiduous collation of results in the certificate examinations by school management is a very worthwhile exercise that will inform the school community on a further key aspect of the outcomes of the move to mixed ability.

The question of curriculum overload appears to arise in the present arrangements for first year. All students follow a programme of eighteen subjects for the full duration of the year except in the case of certain students who may study a fewer number by reason of learning difficulties. As part of the eighteen-subject curriculum in first year, the students are required to study all of the seven optional subjects, from which students ultimately choose
three. Time provision for all of the subjects on the first year timetable is necessarily limited. This falls to two class periods per week in some instances for examination subjects. There is a requirement for all students to study two modern languages, again unless specifically exempted. There are more considerations, not least of which is the physical and financial burden that such a curriculum appears to impose on students and parents. The possible disincentive to enrolment that a year-long curriculum of eighteen subjects might pose to students with special educational needs is another consideration.

The provision of JCSP and the manner of its operation provides reassurance on the last point. It is provided as an integrated model. Rather than withdrawing students with literacy and numeracy needs the support is provided by deploying additional teachers of English and Mathematics to create smaller class groups. The co-ordinating team of special educational needs operates a thorough and ongoing review of student needs. This includes the facility to study a reduced curriculum for JCSP students and to receive support teaching in the time freed up as a consequence. The implications of this are fully explained to parents. The JCSP model is currently provided to some twenty students in the junior cycle and is also well co-ordinated with SCP supports. Senior management works closely with the JCSP team and ensures its status as a core programme on the school curriculum.

The school has carried out a review of the eighteen-subject arrangement in first-year through a curriculum committee of staff members. They have approached the issue with an open mind to recommendations. Parents’ views were canvassed and included in the review. The present arrangements have been endorsed by the findings of this review and remain in place. The deciding factor in favour of retaining the present arrangement has been that students are afforded an experience of the full curriculum and make informed choices of the three optional subjects. Student council members who participated in this evaluation spoke approvingly of the arrangement. While the evaluation team is satisfied that the school has given fair consideration to all of the above potential shortcomings in the eighteen subject first-year curriculum it is recommended that the situation be kept under review. Particular attention should be given to the views of parents and students in view of the inherent drawbacks that such a heavily loaded curriculum carries for students still in transition from primary to secondary school and especially in the case of academically weaker students. The unavoidable reduction in total teaching time available for individual subjects during the three years of the junior cycle is another consideration.

At senior cycle the optional TY programme provides a valuable experience for students to develop as independent learners and to explore career paths through the work experience opportunities. One class group is accommodated in TY. It is a popular programme with students and remains fully subscribed. The high quality TY planning documentation provided indicated all of the features of an effective and successfully operated programme that is true to its aims and objectives of developing students as independent learners. The procedures for annual review of the programme are appropriately thorough and inclusive. In line with the good practice in other programmes offered there is a co-ordinator and a core group of teachers.

The impact of the LCVP within the senior cycle curriculum is marginal, at best, due to the low numbers of students attracted to the programme. Planning documentation is well researched and presented and the combinations of subjects required for the vocational subject groupings of the programme are available. As a further support for the programme a post of responsibility is attached to the duties of LCVP co-ordinator. Yet the uptake of the programme has been consistently low over its fourteen years on the curriculum. The programme currently attracts fewer than ten per cent of the sixth-year student cohort and only a slightly higher percentage in fifth year.
This low level of uptake of the LCVP is due to an identification of the programme with academically weaker students. The school has been unsuccessful to date in its efforts to dispel this perception. Providing the LCVP link modules as one of the seven subjects normally presented for the Leaving Certificate limits the attraction of the programme however. On a national basis, LCVP students tend to take seven Leaving Certificate subjects plus the link modules. A review is recommended of all the circumstances that combine to produce a consistent pattern of low uptake of LCVP. This should include consultation with the Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST) and with other schools known to have a high uptake of LCVP with a view to the re-launch of the programme. A two-tiered provision should be investigated, both as a seventh subject and as an eight subject.

The Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) programme has not been offered on the school curriculum to date. School management has confirmed that the programme has been considered and that the reason for not adopting it is due to there being too few a number of students for whom LCA would be an appropriate course of study. A small number of students leave the school after the Junior Certificate examination who might otherwise choose LCA. The SCP initiative operates a ‘managed exit’ strategy that ensures alternative school placement is confirmed prior to leaving St Joseph’s Secondary School.

The development of ICT skills is reflected in the curriculum, particularly at senior cycle, and in the appointment of two teachers to ICT co-ordinating roles within the posts-of-responsibility structure. First-year students receive one period per week ICT instruction. TY students are allocated three periods weekly, a double period is provided in fifth year and two periods are also provided in sixth year. The European Computer Driving Licence (ECDL) qualification is provided at senior cycle. Evidence of financial support for parents with a difficulty in meeting the course fee was provided. Currently some two thirds of senior cycle students are pursuing the ECDL qualification. These figures indicate there is a very high proportion of students at St Joseph’s Secondary School who have the opportunity to become very computer literate.

School management has made plans to expand the senior cycle curriculum to include Design and Communication Graphics (DCG) as a Leaving Certificate subject. Relevant start-up grants have been availed of to equip the school with all ICT resources necessary for the delivery of the subject. These facilities have been augmented by the donation of further ICT resources. The adjustments to staffing allocations have forced a reconsideration of recruiting a specialist-trained teacher. As an initial step the school has relied on its internal staffing capacity to phase in the subject through the introduction of Technical Graphics to TY in the current year. Despite the staffing difficulty the facilities have been provided to introduce both subjects.

3.2 Arrangements for students’ choice of subjects and programmes

The school has good arrangements in place to inform students and parents of subjects and programmes and these arrangements have been improved. A post-of-responsibility has been allocated to administer all aspects of subject choice. Information sessions to parents, an information booklet on subject and programme choice, ongoing advice to students in school and monitoring of aptitudes are all well administered.

The first information on subjects is given to pupils in the feeder primary schools in advance of the open night which is a major event in the school calendar. The open night for parents of potential first years held in the first term features a promotion of all of the subjects in the school and information on the JCSP is provided. The school practice of eighteen subjects in first year is fully explained. Towards the end of first year students are well acquainted with all of the optional subjects but are again advised on their choice of three subjects from the
seven they have studied to date. The guidance counsellor visits all first-year classes separately and explains the implications of subject choice and the connections to careers. Individual appointments are provided to students with difficulty in choosing. The seven subjects are French, German, Music, Art, Business Studies, Science and Home Economics. An open menu is provided from which subject bands are created. Teachers and management are consulted on the emerging bands and efforts are made to accommodate students in class groups with the same teacher, as far as possible, as they had in first year. The procedures are rigorous and thorough and the role of the guidance counsellor is central to them all.

The good procedures outlined above are replicated and expanded upon for senior cycle. An information evening for parents is organised. The co-ordinators of TY and LCVP both make presentations. Parents are accommodated with individual appointments with the guidance counsellor as required. The procedures for subject choice are provided again to the students of outgoing TY who have availed of this in the previous year. An open menu of optional subjects is again provided at senior cycle. Aptitude tests are administered to third year students to provide additional information on the appropriateness of subject and programme choice. Subject teachers provide more detailed information on the optional subjects at senior cycle. Students choose four optional subjects from a list of thirteen. These are grouped by modern languages, business subjects, the sciences, three practical subjects and History and Geography. Provision for changing subject options is made but is well regulated and well explained in advance.

Students’ choices of optional subjects are well served by the open menu procedures. In the current second year, for example, students achieved their three preferred subjects from the list of seven in the case of 107 of the 108 students in the year group. At senior cycle students’ first choice of four subjects from the list of thirteen is satisfied in most cases.

3.3 Co-curricular and extracurricular provision

Co-curricular and extracurricular activities are well provided and include special attention to the school’s reputation in music and choir. A very wide range of provision is available to students in these areas and involves a very significant commitment of voluntary work by teachers. Parents’ representatives are very aware and appreciative of this contribution. In the course of the evaluation week the level of teacher input to the direction of the TY students’ production of Hamlet illustrated this commitment well. The production of school plays is an annual undertaking.

Choir, musicals, instrumental music, drama and sport are cornerstones of the school’s co-curricular and extracurricular provision. Examples of these activities which link to the community are the major choral and instrumental performances staged by the school’s music department in Catholic and Protestant churches in Navan and Drogheda. Interschools debating has been expanded to include German school teams in addition to the successes achieved by the Irish language school teams. An educational tour to Paris is listed on the current TY programme. The decision to have two foreign language assistants on the staff in the current year indicates the efforts made by the school to expose students to an authentic experience of modern languages. By special arrangement a small number of French and German students also attend the school for periods of between six and twelve months. They provide valuable exemplars of authentic modern language use among their own age profile. TY planning documentation provided evidence of the thorough research of language exchange programmes as a future possibility within the programme. The school has established links with local businesses that provide valuable help with interview skills in career preparation for senior students.
Most of the co-curricular and extracurricular activities provided for students are conducted during the hour-long lunchtime and after school. Inter-schools sporting activities also coincide with timetabled hours and are well celebrated in the end-of-year awards ceremony. The prominence of sporting activities has been recognised in two appointments to posts of responsibility for co-ordinating duties in this area. The recognition and celebration of cultural diversity in the school has been addressed by the assignment of part duties in a post-of-responsibility to this area.

Co-curricular and extracurricular activities appropriately include a social and spiritual dimension reflecting the influence of the school mission statement in the real life experience of students. This is best exhibited by the fundraising efforts of students for particular charities, links between the school and a local nursing home, and the TY visit in 2009 to the Mercy Order mission in Zambia. The appreciation of students for the efforts of teachers in providing these activities was evident in student representatives’ comments. The expectation of teacher involvement in such activities appears to be met by a willingness of staff to make this commitment and it is an indicator of the good relationships evident between teachers and students.

4. QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN SUBJECTS

4.1 Planning and preparation

Subject departments have been established in the school with co-ordinators in place in all cases. Good practice is evident where the position of co-ordinator is rotated among members of the subject department. This should be extended to all subject departments.

Planning meetings are held regularly and minutes of these meetings were made available during the inspections. There is also a high level of ongoing informal communication within subject departments.

Collaborative subject department plans have been drawn up. These plans include programmes of work for each year group. Best practice was observed where the content to be covered was expressed in terms of learning objectives which detail what students should know and be able to do in relation to each area. This very good approach ensures that the students are the focus of the planning process. The programmes also provide an outline of the methodologies and resources that might be used to help students attain the planned learning objectives. Homework activities and links to relevant syllabus areas are also included in the programmes of work.

Planning for TY was observed in a number of subject department plans. These showed that an interesting approach has been taken to the delivery of the programme. Good opportunities have also been included to maximise student involvement in the activities. The importance of providing material that is sufficiently challenging for students of all abilities is underlined by the recommendation made in some instances for more challenging material for students of higher ability.

Short-term planning was good with many teachers providing individual lesson plans. In many lessons visited, the resources had been prepared in advance and were ready for use. Evidence of collaborative planning work was observed where resources had been developed by the individual subject departments and made available to all members. These included handouts, worksheets, PowerPoint presentations and tests. The good practice of using ICT as a vehicle for the storage and dissemination of common resources and planning documentation has been introduced in some subject areas.
4.2 Learning and teaching

In almost all of the lessons observed, the teachers communicated the planned learning outcomes of the lesson to the students at the outset. In some instances the learning outcomes were revisited as the lesson progressed. These good practices should be extended to all lessons. Sharing the learning outcomes with the students provides them with a focus and a framework for the lesson and helps them take responsibility for their own learning.

Most lessons were well structured and presented at a pitch and a pace that were appropriate to the students in the various class groups. Good links were established with prior learning at the beginning of lessons and the strategies used provided a context for the introduction of new material. Teachers were enthusiastic in their presentation of material and huge efforts were made to ensure that students understood the content of the lessons. Instruction was clear and good attention was given to the use of subject-specific terminology. In some lessons there was evidence of differentiation.

A range of teaching styles, strategies and resources helped to stimulate and maintain student interest. These included the use of individual and pair work, brainstorming, mnemonics, handouts, worksheets, discussion, circle time, reflection, student-generated resources and teacher-generated resources, video clips, teacher demonstration, peer tutoring and practical activities. It was good to note the effective use of ICT in many of the lessons.

Very high quality teaching and learning was observed in a number of lessons. Learning was most successful where all students engaged with the task on hand and where the strategies chosen resulted in a good balance between teacher input and student activity. In some cases there was scope for development in relation to student participation in lessons. In order to facilitate the varying learning styles of students and to reduce the amount of teacher-led learning activities where students may remain passive, it is recommended that greater use be made of active learning methodologies. Such activities also support students in becoming independent learners. Subject departments should share good practices with regard to the effective use of active methodologies.

In the practical lessons observed students worked competently. They displayed good routines in terms of the practical activities and there was an appropriate regard for health and safety.

Some very effective oral questioning strategies were evident in a number of the lessons observed to check students’ understanding. In some of the lessons there was a very good emphasis on developing higher-order thinking skills. In such instances students were encouraged to reflect on their knowledge and through skilful questioning were challenged to offer explanations to the new ideas and concepts presented in the lessons. This style of questioning can help students to think analytically and apply their knowledge constructively. The further use of higher-order questions in both oral and written work is encouraged. It also provides a further means of differentiating in mixed-ability settings.

Classroom management was effective. Teaching and learning took place in a positive and supportive environment that was very conducive to learning. Students were encouraged and appropriately affirmed for their efforts. In many of the classrooms a print-rich learning environment has been created through the display of a range of well-chosen educational posters and students’ project work that also serve as resources to support learning.
4.3 Assessment

In-house examinations are held for all year groups at Christmas and summer. ‘Mock’ examinations are held in the spring for students sitting the certificate examinations. Reports are issued to parents following these assessments.

Most subject departments evaluated have developed an assessment policy and in these cases this has been implemented consistently. Where this has not yet been done it is important that all subject departments develop a policy regarding assessment practice. The development of an over-arching school assessment policy would facilitate subject departments in this regard.

Informal assessments are ongoing with many teachers giving class tests on completion of syllabus topics and practical work. Some subject departments use common assessments which allow students’ progress to be compared across all class groups. This is good practice. In some subjects, students are afforded opportunities to evaluate their own learning by engaging in self-assessment. This strategy is in keeping with the principles of Assessment for Learning and should be extended to other subject departments.

Homework is set regularly by all teachers. There were some examples of careful marking and monitoring of students’ written work using similar marking criteria to that used in certificate examinations; this was sometimes accompanied by very constructive teacher comments. It is important that students learn from their mistakes and that the quality of their work develops as a result. This pattern was not evident in all cases. As a matter of course, all students should be encouraged to follow up on teacher corrections and identify areas for improvement, where necessary. The provision of feedback by all teachers would benefit and support students in this work.

5. Quality of Support for Students

5.1 Inclusion of students with additional educational needs

The efforts of the school in the inclusion of students with additional educational needs, alongside a long-established focus on academic achievement, support a finding that the school shows a commitment to inclusiveness in its practices as well as in its mission statement. The number of students in receipt of allocations for both resource teaching and learning support throughout the school comprises a significant, though minority group of students. Greater capacity has been developed among the staff to provide for the needs of these students. An example of this is the encouragement of a core group of four permanent staff members to obtain formal qualifications in learning support and special educational needs. Mainstream teachers have also been provided with CPD to help ease the integration of students with additional educational needs into the life of the school and into mainstream classes. Links with outside agencies and with feeder primary schools are well developed.

The school policy on special educational needs resonates well with the school’s mission statement. The school has appointed a special educational needs co-ordinator and an Education Support Team (EST) has been established to monitor the progress of students with special educational needs. Communication between the EST and the general body of staff is good and the special educational needs co-ordinator has contributed to staff meetings. The role and duties of the three special needs assistants (SNA) are well defined and well understood and direction and affirmation is provided by the EST. Management remains fully acquainted with provision and a member of senior management is a member of the EST that convenes weekly to review students’ progress.
Special educational needs students have access to all programmes provided by the school. Testing procedures are well established and communication with parents is good. Learning plans for individual students have been created and confidentiality is observed in the maintenance of records. The parents’ association has provided funding for the purchase of support programmes in Mathematics to complement the resources that accrue from the various JCSP initiatives. These are positive indicators of a wide appreciation of and support for the school’s commitment to special educational needs.

Record keeping on the use of resources allocated for special educational needs is good and a detailed breakdown of the current year allocation for resource teaching and learning support was provided. This shows that in-class support is the main model provided. The inclusion of special educational needs students in mainstream classes is a whole-school commitment. A group of some fifteen teachers currently carry a particular brief for delivering learning support in literacy and numeracy in smaller classes that are formed for English and Mathematics in both the junior and senior cycles. The opportunity for this discrete learning support team to meet with the EST or with the special educational needs co-ordinator on a more formal basis in the course of the year is recommended. The development of more specific learning-support guidelines for those teachers who have a particular involvement in learning support is also an area for development. Consideration should also be given to providing the EST with an opportunity to make an input to the staff on the development and successes of special educational needs within the school. In such a reflective setting, a greater number of staff may be encouraged to become more involved of their own volition.

The school’s special educational needs policy provides a useful guide to an understanding of the issue and of the school’s aspirations in this area. It is quite dated as a document and does not present a clear picture of the school’s current provision for students in this category. The review of this policy, currently in progress, should aim to provide an accessible account of the supports that the school now operates. The concept of inclusion, which the current policy addresses, deserves greater prominence and the categories of students contemplated by the classification as special educational needs should be expanded. The Department of Education and Science Inspectorate’s 2007 publication Inclusion of Students with Special Educational Needs: Post-Primary provides useful direction in this regard.

Newcomer students, or students of newcomer families, now constitute approximately twenty-two per cent of the overall student enrolment, representing some twenty-eight different countries of origin. The school receives an allocation for English as an additional language (EAL) in respect of a number of these students. In the case of parents whose first language is not English procedures are in place to ensure communication of information. The full EAL allocation is used well, in a considered manner. It is merged with special educational needs allocation in a manner designed to spread this allocation in the most effective and efficient way among students with identified learning needs. Current year allocation details indicate that extra English and Mathematics classes, with fewer numbers of students in these classes, are the main supports provided from the merged allocations. These class groupings also include students with English language and numeracy needs beyond those with a specific EAL resource allocation. English through the additional subject of Home Economics is also provided at senior cycle from the EAL allocation to discrete groups of international students who are exempted from Irish. The accompanying subject inspection report on Home Economics includes a recommendation in respect of this arrangement.

The school has also provided EAL support through Art specifically to students with a deficit in English in the course of the year and at the end of the year. In addition to the fully qualified teachers of English, a number of the staff members who provide EAL support
hold qualifications in teaching English as a foreign language (TEFL). It is recommended that the expertise and capacity to deliver English as a second language (TESL) be further developed among the staff. Attention is also drawn to the resource books and assessment materials developed by Integrate Ireland Language and Learning (ILLT) that are now available on the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) website (www.ncca.ie).

The school has addressed the need to recognise cultural diversity. Increased efforts have been made to integrate newcomer students more fully into the life of the school through the organisation of at least one major celebration of aspects of these cultures in the year. A recently organised fashion show is reported to have been a very successful inaugural event. The issue of intercultural inclusion has also been recognised in the post-of-responsibility schedule of duties. The National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) publication *Intercultural Education in the Post-Primary School, Guidelines for Schools* will prove helpful in developing practices further in this area.

Integration is the focus of school policy in relation to students of the Traveller community and completion of the full cycle of education has been established as the norm within the school. The encouragement of students to complete their education is fully pursued by the school in its general policy and in the supports provided through the SCP interventions. Role models in continuation to third level have been established among students of the Travelling community who have attended the school. The school’s achievements in this regard are particularly noteworthy.

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

There is a very good quality of provision for Guidance in the school. Facilities for Guidance are very good in terms of office, ICT and storage facilities. The current allocation for Guidance is one full-time position and two additional hours. There is a whole-school awareness of the Guidance service and a widely-expressed appreciation of the quality of the service among all parties interviewed. There is a balance of career guidance, educational guidance and personal guidance. The two additional hours are used to provide a counselling service for students through the retention of an external professional counsellor.

The whole-school plan for Guidance, now at draft stage, is of a very high quality and provides excellent detail on all of the operations of Guidance within the school. The plan has been co-ordinated by a committee that includes teachers in positions heavily involved with student care, in addition to the guidance counsellor. The plan commendably includes the outcomes of whole-school surveys on guidance provision.

A student support system operates well through the year head and class teacher structure. Efforts are made to keep the same year head with the one year group throughout the three years of the junior cycle. Class teachers are in daily contact with their registration classes and year heads and class teachers work closely together. In the case of first-year students the student mentor system, described previously, adds a further support for students in adjusting to life at secondary school. Student representatives readily identified these roles as key figures in the student care structure.

Notwithstanding the structures outlined above the office of guidance counsellor is identified to first-year students as one with an open door policy. It is made clear to students that appointments may be made directly without reference to any other figure in the school. It is a positive signal from the outset that the guidance counsellor is a key support for students in negotiating their way through the challenges of secondary school.
For students in the category identified as potential early school leavers or under-achievers, the School Completion Programme (SCP) provides a raft of interventions. Among these are one-to-one assistance to improve class management and personal management skills, daily checks of attendance, home-school links, subsidised daily lunches, after-school homework club, lunchtime activities and holiday support initiatives. School management keeps fully acquainted with the operation and planning of the SCP. The number currently provided for under SCP is some fifty students throughout the school. The SCP supports are well integrated into the student care support structure in the school and the SCP worker plays a full role in the system. The SCP strategic plan indicated a high level of support and involvement with year heads, the special educational needs co-ordinator and school management. Records of attendance and retention indicate that the programme is well managed and effective in delivering on its key aims.

A friendship week is organised each year for the whole school as part of the anti-bullying programme guided by the Cool School Programme. The procedures are thorough. For bereaved students, within the extended meaning of that word, the Rainbows programme is offered. The school has a critical incident response plan and a team has been established to respond to critical incidents in the school. All of the elements of a good care structure for students are in place. In the interests of formalising the structure it is recommended that consideration should now be given to forming a care team. Such a team would have an over-arching role and responsibility for the identification of students with care needs and for the identification, implementation and review of such action plans.

6. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT

The following are the main strengths identified in the evaluation:

- The board of management operates effectively, meets regularly, and its operations are procedurally sound. Members are well informed of the board’s functions and the board is supportive of the principal in the management of the school. There is good communication with, and support from, the new trustee body CEIST.
- The principal and deputy principal provide a high quality day-to-day management of the school. They show considerable strengths in the management of staff and a positive work atmosphere obtains in the school.
- Students are encouraged and affirmed and they make a valuable contribution to the good order, good atmosphere and good environment that are evident throughout the school. The parents’ association plays a particularly active role in supporting and promoting the school.
- Considerable investment has been made in ICT as a tool for teaching and learning and the positive results are in evidence throughout the school. A high proportion of students have the opportunity to become computer literate to a high level of proficiency.
- The school grounds and buildings are clean and very well maintained and students are encouraged and well directed in contributing to the upkeep and care of the school.
- There is evidence of the involvement of staff on a wide scale in school development planning (SDP) through attendance at in-service activities and involvement in a number of committees with discrete tasks. A well-researched and comprehensive school plan document has been created.
- The optional Transition Year (TY) programme is well planned and co-ordinated and provides a valuable opportunity for students to develop as
independent learners and to explore career paths through the work experience opportunities.

- A very wide range of provision of co-curricular and extracurricular is available to students and involves a very significant commitment of voluntary work by teachers.
- Very high quality teaching and learning was observed in a number of lessons and in many cases there was effective use of ICT. Classroom management was effective. Teaching and learning took place in a positive and supportive environment that was very conducive to learning.
- There is a very good quality of provision for Guidance in the school. The whole-school plan for Guidance, now at draft stage, is of a very high quality and provides excellent detail on all of the operations of Guidance within the school.
- All of the elements of a good care structure for students are in place and among these the School Completion Programme makes an effective contribution to the students with greatest care needs and provides valuable home-school links.

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

- In the interests of providing leadership for the future direction of the school it is recommended that the senior management team set aside time, separate from their day-to-day management of the school, to develop a clear joint vision to that end.
- The post-of-responsibility schedule should be reviewed so as to broaden the contribution that middle management can make and to build leadership capacity at this level. Such a review should consider the establishment of a SDP steering group or the appointment of a SDP co-ordinator.
- The revised health and safety statement should be progressed for early ratification by the board of management as the current statement is twelve years old and predates recent legislation.
- Staff members should reacquaint themselves with the details and procedures of the school’s child protection guidelines. School management should remind all staff members on an annual basis of the guidelines and procedures and ensure that newly appointed staff members receive adequate induction in this area.
- It is recommended that the eighteen-subject all-year curriculum in first year be kept under review.
- A review should be conducted of all the circumstances that combine to produce a consistent pattern of low uptake of LCVP. The main aim of this should be the re-launch of the programme as one with appeal for a wider student cohort than at present.
- In order to facilitate the varying learning styles of students, greater use should be made of active learning methodologies. Such activities also support students in becoming independent learners.
- In the interests of formalising the elements of a good student care structure that are in place, it is recommended that consideration should now be given to forming a care team.

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 Home Economics – 21 January 2010
- Subject Inspection of Mathematics – 3 March 2009
- Subject Inspection of Science and Biology – 19 January 2010
- Subject Inspection of Social, Personal and Health Education – 20 January 2010

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Appendix

8. **School response to the report**

Submitted by the Board of Management
Area 1: Observations on the content of the inspection report

The Board of Management, staff and parents of St Joseph’s Secondary School welcome the very positive and affirming report from the Whole School Evaluation team. In particular the comments relating to our effective Board, our experienced management, our high quality teaching and learning, our positive work atmosphere, the good supports available to our students, the contribution of our prefects and student council, our active parents’ association and our wide range of extra curricular and co-curricular activities.

As a Board we would like to commend the hard work and efforts of all those who play their part in the school community of St Joseph’s Secondary School.

Area 2: Follow-up actions planned or undertaken since the completion of the inspection activity to implement the findings and recommendations of the inspection

Actions Undertaken since our WSE.

A member of the Board of Management attended the Award and Graduation ceremonies last May and this will now become a feature of those and similar ceremonies.

Mission Statement is presently being reviewed and all policies and relevant school documentation will be updated with the agreed Mission Statement.

Admissions Policy has been reviewed by the Board. Staff have received in-service time in relation to the legal background to an Admissions Policy.

The Code of Behaviour is currently under review and will be completed during this school year.

A school Development Planning steering group has been set up. One of its priorities is to aid with the production of a three Year developmental plan.

All staff have been reminded of the Child Protection Guidelines. All new staff members have been advised on the procedures in detail.

Work has begun on the introduction of a staff e-mailing system and this will be in place and working before the end of November this year.

Post of Responsibility Review has begun and will be completed during this school year.

The structure of the weekly timetable has changed. All five days now have nine periods.

Four new classrooms, an Art Room and a Study/Theatre have been built. A new school entrance with safe access for vehicles and pedestrians will be in place by January 2011.

700 trees have been planted and an energy audit has taken place.

The school website has been updated and a small group of staff members are working on this project.

In school In-service for teachers on AFL (Assessment for Learning) is ongoing, with one teacher from most of the main subjects participating. This will lead on to training in active teaching methodologies.
Actions Planned as a result of our WSE

The new Board starting its term of office in November 2010 will prioritise a three-year developmental plan.

The senior management team have begun the process of agreeing key developmental priorities and these will be shared with the Board, Staff and parents with a view to agreeing these priorities across the whole school community. Senior Management are also in the process of developing formal procedures for reviewing and affirming the performance of staff and post of responsibility duties.

A School Assessment Policy will be considered as a priority for this school year.

LCVP will be reviewed during this school year.

The Guidance Counsellor has begun the process of establishing a care team.

The review of the School’s Educational Needs policy is ongoing with a particular view to clarifying the student supports that the school now operates. In order to provide a more cohesive approach to Learning Support and planning, the Learning Support team met with all teachers of resource at the start of the school year, it is planned that this group will meet at the end of this term also.

The revised Health and Safety Statement will be prioritised this school year using the recent publication “Guidelines on Managing Safety and Health in Post-Primary Schools”.

Science Biology Response

- Resource Dept have been given a copy of Definitions, Formulae and Science experiments. These can now be used to help students who have difficulty with Science.
- 5% extra marks will be allocated to students at Summer and Christmas Examinations. All necessary Science Practicals must be up to date to qualify for this allocation of marks.
- Teacher from Science Dept is currently involved in Assessment for Learning In-service. This information and knowledge will be shared with other members of the Science Dept.
- Differentiation. Approximately 3% of Junior Cert Science students take Ordinary Level in the exam. Appropriate teaching methods, resources and tests are provided for this cohort of students.

Response: Home Economics

- Junior Certificate timetabling of Home Economics altered to give one double and three single classes per week
- The provision of Home Economics as an additional subject for some Senior students has been discontinued
- An additional kitchen unit and external emergency exit has been provided thus easing congestion and enhancing safety
- Health and Safety procedures in practical work in textiles and craftwork are currently under review and a policy reflecting same is under active consideration.
- Following review, scheduling of practical work at both Junior and Senior Cycle has been implemented
• Recommendations in the Chief Examiner’s report have been used to give more
   focus to practical work
• To gain further expertise in practical work it is planned to release a teacher to take
   part in the examining of the Practical Junior Cert Home Economics

Short Term Goals for Home Economics

• Homework to be geared towards enhanced student learning
• Enhanced use of Assessment for Learning

Longer Term Goals for Home Economics

• Health and Safety issues associated with practicals in textiles and
craftwork to be updated and kept under review
• Raising profile of Home Economics in the School

SPHE School Response

The Board of Management welcomes the many positive comments contained in our SPHE
subject inspection report.

The Board is pleased to state that the recommendations are being reviewed and changes
have already taken place:

• Assembly procedures have been changed
• Five periods of meditation have been reduced to two
• SPHE as a subject has been added to formal reports which are sent to parents at
Christmas and summer.

The Board and school management also wishes to acknowledge its support for all teachers
of the SPHE programme and recognises their dedication, commitment and the valuable
contribution they make to the holistic development of our students.