

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Whole-School Evaluation
REPORT

Saint Patrick's Cathedral Grammar School
Dublin 8
Roll number: 60660I

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AN ROINN | DEPARTMENT
OIDEACHAIS | OF EDUCATION
AGUS SCILEANNA | AND SKILLS

WHOLE-SCHOOL EVALUATION

A whole-school evaluation of St Patrick's Cathedral Grammar School was undertaken in March 2010. This report presents the findings of the evaluation and makes recommendations for improvement. During the evaluation, the quality of teaching and learning in two subjects and in the Transition Year programme were evaluated in detail, and separate reports are available on these subjects/programmes. An evaluation of English was conducted in October 2009, and its findings have contributed to the evidence base for this report. (See section 7 for details of related reports). 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 Patrick's Cathedral Grammar School was founded in 1547 and is Ireland's oldest post-primary school, with a current enrolment of 134 students, 84 male and 50 female. From its foundation it has been linked to the neighbouring St Patrick's Cathedral and the Cathedral Choir School (now a primary school), which pre-date it. The school's original purpose, to provide grammar school education for the cathedral's choristers, continues to the present day, but has expanded over the years to include the education of non-choristers. The school became co-educational in 1969, and a girls' cathedral choir now flourishes. It is one of very few co-educational schools in this area, and the only one with a Church of Ireland ethos.

Historically, the school had a widely dispersed enrolment, drawn by its links to the cathedral and music education. While retaining these links, it is now much more a local school serving the diverse population living between the canals. The school charges fees, but endeavours to keep these at a relatively modest level. Almost 20% of its students receive grant aid through the Secondary Education Committee. School management has recently compiled a report on the school, giving its context, student profile and present financial situation following changes to funding in the 2008 Budget. It outlines a range of measures to secure the school's future, including measures to increase enrolment.

1. QUALITY OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT

1.1 Characteristic spirit of the school

The school has always been small and has a strong sense of its unique character. Students, parents and teachers used the words 'family' and 'community' when describing the school atmosphere. They all referred to friendships between students in different years as evidence of the school's homeliness, and many teachers and students remarked that they knew everyone in the school. The wider school community views the school as unique in its history and location, but not exclusive, despite its fee-charging status. The observations of the inspection team support this view of the school as a close and inclusive community. Music, both sacred and secular, remains a defining aspect of school life and was seen especially by parents as greatly contributing to its characteristic spirit.

The school's ethos statement, given on the school web site and in some policies, commits it to being ecumenical, open and welcoming, in the tradition of the Church of Ireland. It affirms the moral and educational value of interacting with others of a different background, race or creed. It also commits the school to developing responsibility and self-motivation in students. This aim should be retained in the 'ethos and mission statement' currently being developed, which emphasises the school's mission as a caring and inclusive community and its role in supporting students to educate their conscience and make informed decisions. The process of reviewing the ethos statement is valuable and, while it

has originated from senior management, it will now be considered by the whole school community. It would be useful at the conclusion of this process to ensure that the statement is highly visible on the school's website, policy documents and elsewhere, and its eventual display in whole or part on the school premises is suggested.

1.2 School ownership and management

A board of governors, which is chaired by the Dean of St Patrick's Cathedral, is the owner and trustee body of the school, and fulfils the role of patron as set out in The Education Act (1998). Historically, the board of governors devolved the direct management of the school to a principal/manager, who had a significant role as employer and financial manager. In 2003, a board of management was established and articles of management were drawn up. These reserve some functions to the board of governors, including the appointment of the principal of the school. The role of principal/manager ceased in 2009 with the appointment of the present principal. The board of governors meets three or four times a year. It has good links with the board of management and the principal, and the school management values its members' expertise. The present trustee nominees to the board of management are all male, and the trustees should bear in mind the matter of gender balance when next making appointments to the board.

The articles of management clearly set out the composition, functions and responsibilities of the board of management (hereafter referred to as 'the board'). Much of their content follows standard practice, as set out in the *Manual for Boards of Management of Voluntary Secondary Schools*, published by the Joint Managerial Body (JMB). However, there are some significant differences. The board has ten members, rather than eight, five of whom are nominated by the trustees; the principal is a voting member; no term of office for the board as a whole is given; and the annual resignation of one parent and one teacher member is stipulated, although they may stand for re-election. The school's present management structures are relatively new, and the adjustment to new roles and responsibilities takes time. However, the board has not yet taken sufficient cognisance of the move from principal/manager to principal, and the resulting implications for its role and remit. In addressing these changes, the board should examine the rationale for aspects of the articles of management and their continuing validity. Specifically, the board's composition and the absence of a defined three-year term of office for the whole board should be reconsidered at this point.

The board works conscientiously to protect the school's ethos and to support the principal in managing the school. It generally meets five times a year, although meetings occurred more frequently in 2008/9 to consider the impact of national budgetary measures on the school. Its members increasingly serve on interview boards for school appointments, for which there are clear procedures in the articles of management. The board has ensured that statutory policies are in place, and has been involved in policy development, initiating and refining policies as well as dealing with ratification and review. The board, through the principal, has consulted with the school community in developing policies, in particular the code of behaviour, which is undergoing a major review following the publication of the National Education Welfare Board (NEWB) *Guidelines*. The principal and teacher nominees discuss an agreed report to the teaching staff after each board meeting, and the principal and parent nominees inform the parents' association committee of all non-confidential matters.

The board has been occupied of late with the school finances, and over a longer time it has been pursuing the school building project. Commendably, it has identified educational priorities including curricular development and the broadening of extracurricular activities, for which it has sanctioned funding. It has also identified the need to increase enrolment, and it would be useful to consider in particular how the intake of girls might be increased.

The inspection team singled out two other significant areas for action that relate to the board's educational concerns. One of these is the need to encourage in the student body a consistently high level of expectation and attainment, as the evaluation team noted evidence of some underachievement and of uneven patterns of attainment when considering student outcomes in the certificate examinations. The second, and related, area is the issue of widespread and persistent lateness and poor attendance, which is of particular concern in the senior cycle and which needs to be addressed as a matter of urgency. In order to deal effectively with these issues, the school management should draw up an action plan that includes specific targets so that progress can be measured. To this end, the board may need to meet more frequently. In addition, while members of the board have attended courses in specific areas such as child protection, further in-service training, especially in the educational leadership role of boards, would be helpful and should be undertaken.

1.3 In-school management

The present senior management team has been in place only since September 2009. The principal was formerly the deputy principal, and is the school's first female principal and the first to come to the post as principal rather than principal/manager. The deputy principal has taught in the school for many years and was formerly the programme co-ordinator. As a team, they share a pride in the school's unique character and an awareness of the challenges it faces. They are also aware that this is a transformational period in the management of the school, and they have demonstrated an ability to bring about change, with the principal appropriately taking the lead role. The principal has a sense of vision and direction for the school, and valuable organisational skills. The deputy principal provides strong moral and practical support to the principal, while continuing to work collegially with the teaching staff as the post is not *ex quota* and involves fifteen hours of teaching. The principal teaches fifth and sixth year, thereby maintaining a link with the classroom and ensuring the provision of a subject specialism. They have separately attended management and leadership in-service training, and recognise its value.

The principal and deputy principal have appropriate areas of responsibility. Broadly speaking, the principal liaises with the Department and its agencies, the board, the parents' association and feeder schools; has responsibility for staff deployment and the school timetable; and oversees capital projects and maintenance. The deputy principal organises supervision and substitution, runs all internal examinations, organises staff development days, and has a significant role in the discipline system. They meet every day to address immediate issues and to plan longer-term activities and initiatives. In shared reflection on their role to date, they said that they had instigated more change than they had foreseen, but felt that various initiatives had been managed successfully, for example the open day in December 2009. They have also made some changes to the format and content of staff meetings to facilitate greater participation and consensus, and to focus on teaching and learning practices. These praiseworthy initiatives deserve the continuing support of the board and teaching staff. The senior management team intends to evaluate the effectiveness of existing practices aimed at raising expectations and attainment among students, and to consider what other initiatives could be introduced. Since attendance and attainment are closely linked, this will also entail their taking a lead role in improving attendance.

The school has a small middle management structure, comprising three special duties teacher (SDT) posts and a programme co-ordinator. One SDT post and the programme co-ordinator post are vacant owing to the present moratorium on appointments to posts, meaning that two posts of responsibility are currently filled. One existing post incorporates state examination secretary duties and the organisation of musical events, and the other includes monitoring of attendance and punctuality and mentoring of new teaching staff. A teacher who has taken on some co-ordination responsibilities for TY is receiving the appropriate time allowance. As post-holders did not attend the scheduled meetings with the

inspection team, no evaluative comment on their collective contribution to in-school management can be made. However, there was evidence that specific duties are carried out assiduously, especially those that contribute to the management of students. Ways of developing and realigning areas of responsibility are currently being considered, so that the capacities of post-holders can be fully utilised to meet the needs of the school.

Separate from the post structure, the school has traditionally had a voluntary system of form teachers. There is one form in each year, so form teachers combine aspects of the roles of year head and class tutor, including areas of discipline, pastoral care and academic progress. Form teachers meet their forms for ten minutes each day before lessons begin. The role of the form teacher is outlined in the staff handbook and is described as both organisational and pastoral. The job description is clear on the tasks to be completed and on the place of the form teacher in the disciplinary ladder of referral. It would benefit perhaps from a greater emphasis on the potential of the role to offer teachers opportunities to develop relevant professional skills and to work closely with senior management.

The school's disciplinary structure contains a clear ladder of referral for students, and steps are being taken to ensure that the revised code of behaviour emphasises positive behaviour and reflects an input from students, parents, teachers and school management. Poor behaviour, leading to suspension, is very rare. However, the current systems have not been effective in improving attendance, and have had little impact on students who are persistently late for school. Latecomers are required to sign at the school office before going to class, but there was evidence that some do not do so. During the evaluation, instances were noted where latecomers were recorded as absent. While this has implications for the accuracy of the required returns to the NEWB, the very high rates of lateness and absence among senior cycle students are beyond doubt. Strenuous efforts have been made to apply sanctions such as lunchtime detentions to late-coming students, but the records kept show a high level of repeat offending. From observation of form time and from interviews with students, it was clear that senior cycle students do not view lateness for form time as serious. Measures to deal with poor attendance and punctuality were discussed with senior management and included changing the 'lates' system, beginning the day with lessons rather than form time, and recording attendance in all lessons. Senior management recognises that the authority of the school must be asserted in order to rectify this problem and has readily accepted the recommendation that students and their parents be required formally to agree to abide by the school's attendance regulations. The suggestion that this be part of a learning contract for senior cycle students in particular was also welcomed.

Students have an opportunity to develop leadership skills through the class captain's role, the student council and the prefect body. Both council and prefects were interviewed during the evaluation and presented as articulate and positive. The council, set up in 2005, has two elected members from each year and is assisted by a liaison teacher. Members of the council gave a presentation on their work to the inspectors and senior management during the evaluation. In its input to the code of behaviour review, it has identified consistency in implementation and the fostering of respect as crucial. In addition to this work, the council has successfully put the case for changing some school regulations and for extending extra-curricular activities, and has worked with the parents' association to get sports equipment. The council's ability to reflect on its work is commended, and should help it to act with even greater initiative in future.

Prefects, including head boy and girl, are nominated by the teaching staff from the rising sixth year group. They have supervision duties at lunchtime when they assist teachers on duty, and they also take the roll after the weekly school assembly. They report any concerns about student behaviour to form teachers, but said that bullying was very rare and they had no incidents to report so far this year. They were aware of poor attendance in the senior

years, as was the student council, but felt that relationships within the school were very good and that poor behaviour was not an issue. There is some scope to further develop the prefects' leadership roles, especially as role models for good attendance, punctuality and care for the school environment. A level of student involvement in the selection process for prefects could be considered in order to enhance their profile as leaders.

The parents' association assists with school events, represents the parents' voice and fundraises for specific purposes. It meets five times during the school year, and holds an annual general meeting in September, when volunteers for committee service are sought. The association is mentioned, with contact details, in the school journal, it has a page on the school website, and it is exploring other ways of using information and communication technology (ICT) to promote its activities to the wider parent body. Its officers spoke warmly of the school's ecumenical and caring spirit, and felt that school management and teachers were accessible to parents and kept them well informed. The association occasionally organises talks on matters of interest to parents, and it might consider inviting a suitable speaker to give practical advice to senior cycle parents on how they could assist in raising attendance and motivation.

1.4 Management of resources

The school timetable complies with the provisions of Circular Letter 29/95, *Time in School*, with forty-two class periods of forty minutes, and a forty-minute allocation to form time each week. However, a shortfall in tuition time occurs for many senior cycle students, arising from timetabling anomalies in Transition Year (TY), and in the option blocks in fifth and sixth year. These are discussed in Section 3 below, and should be addressed as soon as is practicable.

School management has ensured that the school retains a large teaching staff relative to its size. The Department's teacher allocation to the school is 9.9 whole-time teacher equivalents (WTEs), including *ex quota* allocations for the principal, and for guidance counselling and learning support. The school's weekly timetable involves 254 teaching hours, 98 of which are delivered by teachers who are privately paid by the school, so that it can offer as wide a range of subjects as possible. Concessionary hours have been granted by the Department to ensure continuity of curriculum delivery. There is some sharing of teachers with other schools in the area, and a willingness to expand this arrangement where practicable. Senior management has been proactive in considering future staffing needs, investigating how the range of subjects offered can be maintained and perhaps extended. It has also sought to ensure that all resource-teaching hours are used appropriately. Senior management supports teacher continuing professional development (CPD) and facilitates attendance at in-service courses and participation in subject associations. It is aware that many members of staff are at an early stage in their teaching careers, and seeks to provide opportunities for professional development within the school also. The post of school secretary is funded by the board and is carried out efficiently on a job-share basis.

The school site, though historically rich, is physically limited. The school trustees have long planned to extend into an adjoining site. An application for development is with the Department and is the subject of ongoing discussions with the local authority, which owns the site. The existing accommodation, comprising a 1988 classroom block and three much older buildings, is fully utilised throughout the school day, and the five classrooms, four specialist rooms, hall and music room (shared with the Choir School) accommodate a maximum of ten class groups at any one time. School management is improving the school's ICT capacity on an ongoing basis, and laptops and data-projectors are available in both general and specialist rooms.

The laboratory has recently been refurbished under the Summer Works programme and is in constant use. However, the separate chemical store is part of an escape route, and this conflict of use must be urgently addressed. Students' toilets are housed in two of the old buildings and the school has applied through the 2010 Summer Works programme to have these refurbished in line with good health and safety standards. A Green Schools' committee has been formed and is a welcome initiative. In addition to its focus on recycling and energy saving, it is recommended that it raise awareness among students of the desirability of a litter-free environment and the need to support the conscientious work of the school cleaners.

2. QUALITY OF SCHOOL PLANNING

2.1 The school plan

A process for developing school policies is well established in the school. School management leads the development of statutory policies, and ensures their regular review. The board has recently undertaken a review of the admissions policy, for example, and a policy on Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) is in train, in response to a recommendation in a previous inspection report. Senior management plays a lead role in identifying the need for other policies, inviting teachers to participate in working groups that define the task, develop a draft and bring it to the whole staff. There was evidence of good levels of participation by parents and students in the ongoing development of a new code of behaviour, and this is commended as likely to lead to successful implementation. The attendance policy is close to ratification but may benefit from further consultation with parents and students, to encourage high levels of awareness and co-operation. Section 22 of the Education (Welfare) Act of 2000 deals with attendance strategies and should prove helpful to ongoing development of policy and practices in this area.

In all, fourteen policies were presented in the permanent section of the school plan. It was evident that the process of developing these policies had been informed by relevant legislation, and input and guidelines from the JMB and School Development Planning Initiative (SDPI), particularly in the case of statutory policies. Some minor amendments to existing policies were suggested, and the senior management team was receptive to these. More substantive amendments were recommended in the case of the enrolment policy, and these would involve ranking the criteria for enrolment and removing the reference to English language competence.

Confirmation was provided that, in compliance with Post-primary Circulars M44/05 and 0062/2006, the board of management formally adopted the *Child Protection Guidelines for Post-primary Schools* (Department of Education and Science, September 2004) in 2006. 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 members of staff are familiar with the procedures to be followed. The school has drawn up an accompanying document giving relevant details for the school, including the names of the designated liaison person (DLP) and deputy DLP. It is advisable that this document state clearly that the *Guidelines* have been adopted as the school's policy on child protection.

A number of policies, including a completed homework policy and a draft assessment policy, relate to teaching and learning practices. School management intends to lead further initiatives in these core areas, and this is desirable. Varied practice and varied levels of engagement with subject planning were noted by the inspection team. The developmental aspect of school planning should therefore focus on effective subject and programme

planning, and on the development of teaching and learning practices that would be of benefit to students across all areas of the curriculum. Given the school's size and the number of small and single-teacher subject departments, a high level of interdisciplinary and whole-staff planning with regard to effective teaching and learning practices would be productive and sensible. Areas where subject departments have shared good practice, for example in fostering good organisation for learning among students, were favourably commented on by the inspection team. Such collaborative approaches merit wider application. It would be especially productive for all teachers of first year to agree on approaches to organisation for learning, which could then be implemented consistently in order to support students making the transition from primary to post-primary school.

3. QUALITY OF CURRICULUM PROVISION

3.1 Curriculum planning and organisation

The school offers the Junior Certificate, TY and established Leaving Certificate programmes. Although the TY programme is described as optional, in fact students are permitted to skip the year only in exceptional circumstances. It would better reflect the actual situation to describe the year as an integral and mandatory part of the school's curriculum and to treat it accordingly in the admissions policy and the TY programme plan.

Within the constraints imposed by its small size, the school offers a broad and balanced range of subjects in the junior cycle. All students take eight core examination subjects, including Science and a modern European language (French). All students take Physical Education (PE), Religious Education (RE) and Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE). A choir lesson is also offered in each year. First-year students sample four optional subjects: Art, Home Economics, Music, and ICT; they then choose two of these in second year. However, ICT is not a Junior Certificate subject, and students taking this option work towards the ECDL. The current placing of ICT is undesirable for two reasons: firstly, it goes against the principle that all optional subjects should be on an equal footing; and secondly, it creates practical difficulties for the delivery of ICT in TY, where considerable time is appropriately devoted to it. Therefore, it is strongly recommended that the placing of ICT among the options be discontinued, although it is desirable to continue giving all students timetabled ICT instruction in first year. The introduction of a business or technology subject in its stead would add further breadth to the range of subjects offered and may be deliverable through the teaching resource already available in the school.

Further observations on the first-year timetable are made in 3.2. below. The timetable in second and third year makes generally good provision for subjects, although the distribution of lessons over the week in some subjects is less than satisfactory. There may be an opportunity to address this issue as part of an overall review of junior cycle provision.

Senior management fosters a whole-school approach to TY and plays an active part in the planning, development and promotion of TY in the school. It deploys teachers appropriately to the programme and utilises teachers' skills effectively in its design and implementation. The benefits of the programme are communicated successfully to students and parents. However, a more concerted whole-staff approach should be adopted to writing the TY programme, using the relevant templates. To this end, CPD pertaining to planning, designing, implementing, and evaluating the TY programme would be productive. Aspects of TY timetabling, including ICT lessons and time allocated to community service, should also be reconsidered to protect the integrity of the school year. A separate report on the TY programme is available (see Section 7 below).

The school is commended on many aspects of its Leaving Certificate provision. There are four core subjects, including a modern European language (French), and a range of nine other subjects from which students may choose. The options include a good representation of arts and science subjects, and reflect the school's preparedness to offer subjects even where uptake is low. However, a greater alignment between junior and senior cycle subject options is advisable in the interests of continuity. In addition to the examination subjects offered, students also have one period of PE and one of RE, and a timetabled period rotating between Career Guidance and RSE has been introduced this year in both fifth and sixth year. An increase to two periods of PE is planned for next year, and parents and students welcome this. The fifth and sixth year timetables are, however, based on the possibility that students will choose four optional subjects, whereas in reality the vast majority choose three. This gives rise to a shortfall in these students' statutory tuition time, which must be addressed as soon as is practicable. A review of present arrangements should also seek to increase the time allocated to some optional subjects.

3.2 Arrangements for students' choice of subjects and programmes

Within the junior cycle, sampling is the method used to offer students a choice of subjects. At present, the taster programme runs for all of first year. It is the view of the inspection team that this is too long, as it limits the amount of teaching time available to each optional subject in first year, thus compromising the development of essential skills in the case of practical subjects. The process of introducing a shorter taster programme would also provide an opportunity to review the placing of ICT within the subject options. Senior management showed a commendable readiness to address these issues.

Third-year parents are invited to a TY information evening following which students apply for entry to the programme. It is recommended that a TY admissions policy be developed, that would set out the criteria for admission, including the requirement that all TY applicants and their parents sign a contract of learning. This would further strengthen the commitment of students and parents to a successful TY programme. One aim of the guidance plan for TY is to assist students in choosing appropriate subjects for senior cycle. It is very praiseworthy that students undergo differential aptitude testing (DATs) to help direct them to appropriate subjects for Leaving Certificate. However, testing should be scheduled for an earlier period in the school year.

Up to 2009/10, optional Leaving Certificate subjects were placed in pre-set blocks that had remained largely unchanged for a number of years. Senior management changed this to a 'best fit' model for the present fifth year but, because almost all students made choices along the traditional lines, it reverted to the old option blocks this year. At the time of the evaluation, TY students were engaged in choosing their options and voiced dissatisfaction with the preset blocks as presented. Senior management responded readily and creditably, reintroduced an open choice and managed a 'best fit' arrangement. This model should be used in future as far as is practicable. Written information is available to students and their parents on the Leaving Certificate subjects offered, with some guidelines on how to make choices, including availing of the school's guidance service. To further support informed choice, a timely information event for students and parents is recommended, with input from Leaving Certificate students, teachers and the guidance counsellor, as well as senior management.

3.3 Co-curricular and extracurricular provision

The school makes very good use of its central location to provide activities that support and enhance learning. Visits to the museums, historic sites, galleries and theatres nearby are regularly arranged, and such activities are well integrated into the school curriculum. Knowledge of the political system is fostered through visits to Leinster House, and Garda personnel stationed close by have visited the school to raise awareness of issues of personal

safety. Fruitful links have been forged with the music faculty of the neighbouring Dublin Institute of Technology (DIT), through which students receive individual tuition on the school premises from DIT personnel. Many co-curricular and extracurricular activities relate to music and include participation in local and national competitions, as well as performances of sacred and secular music. A sizable number of students are regularly involved in cathedral services, and present and past pupils have joined forces in musical productions.

Senior management has made a particular effort to establish extracurricular activities that will appeal to students and encourage them to remain after school. These include junior football on a nearby mini-pitch, junior girls' basketball, and debating and drama. Participating students spoke of their enjoyment of these activities, and senior management was satisfied that participation rates remained at a viable level. The possibility of extending the sports activities into TY could perhaps be explored, as TY students expressed an interest in after-school football. The board of management has supported these activities through remunerating the teachers involved, and the parents' association has purchased sports equipment. The school avails of nearby sports facilities, including the swimming pool in DIT, to deliver aspects of PE and also for extracurricular sport.

In an effort to ensure that organised activities outside of school are productive and affordable, senior management has reviewed practice with regard to school trips and is instituting an outing day for the whole school, with a range of appropriate activities for different year groups. This is a commendable initiative.

4. QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN SUBJECTS

4.1 Planning and Preparation

Teachers' preparation for lessons was good. Where a good level of advance planning for lessons was evident, it led to effective student learning. Handouts, materials and practical and ICT equipment were ready in advance of many lessons. Planning for the integration of ICT was good for some subjects and included an emphasis on visual stimulus materials, which is worthy of further development. However, there is scope to explore the potential of ICT to support teaching and learning in many subjects. A more formalised departmental approach to subject planning is desirable for many subjects. For example programme plans that demonstrate a balanced, coherent, integrated and incremental approach to teaching and learning should be developed. In the context of one-teacher departments it is recommended that senior management give consideration to facilitating multi-disciplinary planning meetings.

In planning for teaching and learning resources, teachers could consider developing further the planned use of suitable visual and audio resources, which would benefit students learning English as an additional language (EAL). As withdrawal in small groups or on a one-to-one basis is the main support mechanism used, it is recommended that subject departments and the learning support department consider more integrated forms of support as part of their medium-term planning. To optimise inclusive practice and support students' learning it is recommended that communication between subject departments and the EAL department be strengthened to facilitate the integration into lessons of strategies that effectively meet the additional educational needs of EAL students.

There is no designated subject co-ordinator for some departments and subject-related meetings are held informally. This situation requires review and therefore consideration should be given to the creation of subject co-ordinators, on a rotating basis where appropriate. Areas for development in some subject departments include the drawing up of

common course plans, the pooling of resources for junior classes, the sharing of ideas in TY planning and the good practice of taking minutes at meetings. In addition, over-arching subject plans should be developed in many areas. Planning for Leaving Certificate course coverage requires immediate attention in some specific areas. In further developing the written plans for some subjects, the desired learning outcomes should be clearly stated in terms of the skills and knowledge to be acquired. Planning for practical lessons should be reviewed to support the development of high quality procedural and practical skills. When guest speakers facilitate lessons, better advance planning by teachers is necessary to ensure that all students achieve valuable learning experiences.

The school does not have a current TY plan in place in the form required by the Department. A TY plan should be developed as outlined in Department guidelines on writing the TY programme and as summarised in circular M1/00. Individual subject plans examined are inconsistent in their adherence to the subject plan template for TY. Some TY subjects are not included in the current plan while others lack sufficient detail. Therefore, a whole-staff approach to writing the TY programme should be adopted. In particular, each subject department should meet to review its TY planning and should develop an appropriate subject plan using the common template outlined in the guidelines.

4.2 Teaching and Learning

Lesson pace varied to suit the context and was generally brisk and purposeful. Where appropriate, teachers should increase pace and tighten structure to maintain a desirable level of challenge. Many lessons observed concluded with a review and consolidation of learning. This good practice contributed to a sense of purpose and progression and should be extended to all lessons. Classroom management was effective in the vast majority of lessons.

Relationships in the classroom were in the main good and student learning was enhanced as a result. Teacher inputs were generally short, clear and concise. Where teacher expectations were high, students responded positively. Differentiated teaching practices were in evidence for some lessons with individual and group help and support as needed. However, these should be complemented by differentiated learning outcomes based on what students must, should and could accomplish. All learning outcomes should be clearly aligned to syllabus requirements.

Key skills were developed in some lessons through the assigning of appropriate tasks to students. However, other tasks assigned could have been more challenging and it is recommended that strategies be enacted to enable students to reach their potential in line with the school's mission. Greater emphasis on student self-direction, source work and reading is recommended. A more in-depth and differentiated approach to course coverage with senior students is also recommended.

In many lessons, teaching was of a very competent standard, and the teaching and learning methods observed encouraged students to participate and take responsibility for their own learning. Students were generally very responsive and willing to participate and to voice opinions. However, in many other lessons observed there was a need to extend the range of teaching strategies used to accommodate the various student learning styles evident, as well as to support students with particular educational needs. A greater emphasis needs to be placed on ensuring lesson activities support an incremental approach to the acquisition of knowledge.

Teacher-student interaction was an important feature of all lessons observed, and was dominated by the use of oral questioning. In some lessons, teachers modelled responses to higher-order questions very effectively, and encouraged students to express, listen to and

engage with a range of responses. In other instances, students should have been afforded the opportunity for enhanced participation at various stages of the lesson. Student learning was consolidated where a wide variety of activities, interactions and teaching methodologies was used. The board was used effectively to highlight key words and ideas and this practice should be extended. While ICT was used effectively in many lessons, its wider use is recommended to aid student learning and consolidate the learning process. Worksheets and other teaching aids were used to reinforce learning and to engage students as active learners. In addition, the attention to students' social and personal education was very good as evidenced in TY lessons visited during the evaluation.

In classroom interactions and activities, and in responding to the inspectors, students demonstrated a good level of knowledge and relevant skills, and some very accomplished work and perceptive comments were noted in some subject areas during the evaluation. Students in some subjects achieve very creditable results in the certificate examinations. The level at which lesson content was pitched was, in the main, appropriate to the class groups concerned. More use of visual stimulus materials could assist learning in the mixed-ability junior cycle lessons.

4.3 Assessment

There is ongoing assessment through class work and project work and a system of continuous assessment operates throughout the academic year. Students sit examinations at Christmas and summer and reports are sent to parents following these examinations. Good records of students' progress and attainment are kept for some subjects. A more in-depth analysis of student attainment in the in-house and certificate examinations should be conducted to provide an opportunity to recognise positive trends and identify areas where targeted interventions would judiciously increase student aspirations and attainment. TY students maintain a portfolio of work completed. To strengthen the assessment process and to introduce a balance to the TY examination process, it is recommended that a portfolio interview form part of students' overall end-of-year assessment.

Monitoring of students' class work and progress was evident in all the lessons observed. Homework is a regular feature of assessment, with homework consisting of a variety of formats conducive to the associated subject, module or activity. Where homework was given, it frequently arose from the work of the lesson and was often discussed so that the assignment was clear. A review of students' copybooks and folders indicated that homework is set regularly and is frequently substantial for some subjects. However, in some cases the range of homework assigned to classes should be reviewed. In the case of some notebooks reviewed there was an over-reliance on lower-order style questions or note-making exercises as homework activities. Therefore the range of activities assigned in each year group should be reviewed to ensure that students complete a range of long-answer and short-answer style questions, stimulus-driven questions, as well as research activities. In addition to assessing recall and understanding of information, the work assigned should support the development of the higher-order thinking skills such as the analysis, synthesis and critical appraisal of information.

In many instances, helpful feedback on homework is given with regard to strengths and areas for development. Formative assessment practices are commended and should be further integrated into the school's assessment policy. High standards of work and presentation have been established and are reinforced in teachers' written comments for some subjects. Worksheets, mainly focusing on short-answer questions, were generally well used. Parents receive meaningful feedback on student progress by means of parent teacher meetings, the student journal and through school reports sent home following examinations. Good links are maintained with parents by senior management throughout the year.

5. QUALITY OF SUPPORT FOR STUDENTS

5.1 Inclusion of students with additional educational needs

The school is inclusive of students with additional educational needs, for example those with a physical disability or learning difficulty. Senior management reported that some students who find school stressful come to the school because it is a small and manageable community in which they can settle more easily. A brief learning support policy affirms the school's commitment to a whole-school approach. Parents are consulted with regard to arrangements for support, and profiles and plans relating to individual students are carefully and securely maintained. There is a dedicated learning support room and an adjacent language support room, and school management has been supportive in providing teaching and learning resources.

The school has appropriate personnel in place to support students with additional educational needs. The allocation for learning support is eleven hours per week, and a qualified learning support teacher who is a long-time member of staff currently delivers this support to around fifteen students. In addition, the Department has allocated resource hours to a small number of students with specific identified needs. It has also allocated ten hours per week for language support to EAL students, and an established and experienced language teacher is delivering this support. The learning support and language support teachers work collaboratively and also have good links with the guidance counsellor. It would be constructive to formalise this co-operation by establishing an education support team.

Support is currently delivered almost exclusively through withdrawal of students from mainstream lessons, and the inspection team found evidence only in some subject areas of planning and practice that integrated support for students with additional needs. For example, support for EAL students in the mainstream classroom was not consistently built into teaching and learning practices, although EAL students are well supported through withdrawal EAL lessons. There was also evidence of very good links between support and mainstream teaching in Mathematics and English, for students with numeracy and literacy difficulties. Therefore, to extend the good practice observed and to utilise fully the available expertise, the school should develop more structured links between the support and the mainstream classrooms. Suggested approaches include in-house CPD to share effective strategies, a focus in subject planning on practical means of supporting students with additional educational needs, and an openness to models of support other than withdrawal, including in-class support. To assist the successful introduction of the in-class support model, whole-school CPD is advisable, and work with other schools where the practice is established would be beneficial. In-class support would also help to address the reported reluctance of some students with resource hours to avail of withdrawal support, because it separates them from their peers. The Department post-primary guidelines, *Inclusion of students with special educational needs*, should be consulted for a range of possible approaches.

As part of its enrolment procedure, the school seeks information about students' additional educational needs, especially where resource hours have previously been granted. A group reading test and a test of mathematical competency are carried out in September. Consideration could be given to using cognitive aptitude tests in addition to these, so that an assessment of both attainment and ability can be made. A list of tests for various purposes is given on the website of the Special Education Support Service (SESS). Students requiring additional support are identified also through teacher referral and in some instances students seek additional support themselves. Where teachers refer students, a

referral form on which they can note particulars of the student's difficulties would be useful, as it would help the support and mainstream teachers to plan jointly to meet the student's needs. Similarly, a record of student progress could also be devised and shared.

5.2 Guidance and student support in the whole-school context

The school has an allocation of eight hours for guidance. Up to 2009/10, this was shared between two teachers, with a division of the counselling and guidance functions. Following staff changes, a new guidance counsellor was appointed in November 2009 to deliver personal, educational and vocational guidance. Senior management and the guidance counsellor are aware of the need to develop a whole-school approach to guidance, and the development of a whole-school guidance plan has been identified as a priority. The guidance counsellor has a room with a good range of printed material on courses and careers. Students are encouraged to research for themselves, although the ICT resources available in the guidance room are limited by unreliable broadband connections. The guidance counsellor was conscious that the structures and interventions through which the guidance service is delivered are still in an early stage, but progress to date is satisfactory and the planning of a more complete and timely programme for next year is underway.

The guidance counsellor's timetable covers three days a week, and includes a class period with fifth and sixth years, five slots for careers appointments and four for personal counselling, as well as time for administration and planning. The guidance counsellor is also involved in delivering resource hours and is working with senior management to devise effective means of assisting students with specific difficulties. The year plan for guidance outlines guidance inputs for each year group. These are designed to meet the likely needs of students at various stages, and include, for example, coping skills and organisation for learning with first-year students, and time management and revision skills in third year. These inputs are delivered by arrangement with individual teachers, using SPHE and other lessons. A more co-ordinated approach with the SPHE department is being developed, and planning for both areas should reflect the way in which aspects of guidance feed into SPHE modules.

Guidance is not timetabled in TY, although DATs are carried out and the outcomes are discussed individually with students. Consideration could be given to a timetabled period of guidance, as both educational and vocational guidance are of particular relevance to this year. The guidance service played a helpful role in the successful management of the 'best fit' model of subject choice this year, and it is intended that the DATs and the choosing of options will be managed in a more timely manner next year. Fifth and sixth year have a half-year of guidance periods. If the recommended timetable modifications permit, a full year of well-planned guidance lessons could be very beneficial for both year groups.

6. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT

The following are the main strengths identified in the evaluation:

- The school is a close, caring and inclusive community, and is valued as such by school management, students and parents.
- The principal has a sense of vision and direction for the school, and valuable organisational skills. The deputy principal provides strong moral and practical support. As a team, they have demonstrated an ability to lead change.
- Within the constraints imposed by its small size, the school offers a broad and balanced range of subjects, and school management has ensured the retention of a relatively large teaching staff.

- The school makes very good use of its central location to provide activities that support and enhance learning.
- In many lessons, teaching was of a very competent standard, and the teaching and learning methods observed encouraged students to participate and to take responsibility for their own learning.
- Interactions between teachers and students were very positive, and learning was taking place in a warm and supportive atmosphere.

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

- The board of management's composition and term of office should be reconsidered and its training needs should be identified and addressed.
- Effective action to address high levels of student lateness and poor attendance must be taken as a matter of urgency.
- Appropriately and consistently high expectations with regard to student application and attainment should be established in all subjects and programmes offered.
- The developmental aspect of school planning should focus on effective subject and programme planning, and on the development of teaching and learning practices that will benefit the full range of students in all areas of the curriculum.

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 English – 1 October 2009
- Subject Inspection of History – 25 March 2010
- Subject Inspection of Home Economics – 23 March 2010
- Programme Inspection of Transition Year – 23 and 24 March 2010

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Appendix

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 welcomes the WSE report and thanks the Inspection Team for their courtesy and professionalism during the evaluation process.

The Board is pleased to note that many areas of strength are acknowledged in the report including the clear vision shared by the senior management team who work co-operatively for the benefit of the school, the broadly based curriculum on offer to students, the competent standard of teaching and the close and caring community spirit that so characterises the Grammar School.

The WSE was a valuable and insightful exercise.

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

The ethos and mission statement and admissions policy have been updated taking cognisance of recommendations by the Inspectors.

A new attendance system has been introduced with daily monitoring by senior management.

ICT was removed as a junior cycle subject and is replaced by Business.

The taster period of subjects in form one has been reduced to a single term.

Subject and Departmental planning has been expanded and formalised with a number of inter-departmental meetings included.

All other key recommendations are being addressed and are central to the on-going development of the school plan.