An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

Whole-School Evaluation
REPORT

Saint Mary’s High School, Midleton
County Cork
Roll number: 62380M

Date of inspection: 27 November 2009
WHOLE-SCHOOL EVALUATION

A whole-school evaluation of St Mary’s High School was undertaken in November, 2009. This report presents the findings of the evaluation and makes recommendations for improvement. During the evaluation, the quality of teaching and learning in five subjects was evaluated in detail, and separate reports are available on these subjects/programmes. (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 Mary’s High School, Midleton was established in 1902 by the Presentation Sisters. It is East Cork’s oldest girl’s voluntary secondary school.

There has been a significant expansion in student numbers since the school’s first enrolment which incorporated a student body of sixty girls. Since the 1950s in particular student numbers have expanded steadily, a move which has been reflected in a number of major building extensions which took place at various points between 1960 and 2003. Indeed, a further extension incorporating a science laboratory, two general classrooms and a school oratory was nearing completion during the period of this whole-school evaluation.

The continuing building work underlines a key issue facing St Mary’s over the coming years. Due to significant increases in the population of the area which it serves there will be increasing pressure placed on the school with regard to the admission of new students. There are currently 592 students in the school. Space for the further development of the school presents a major challenge now and in the future.

The school draws its students from a wide range of primary schools in both Midleton itself and in the greater East Cork area. The school has an inclusive atmosphere and incorporates a diverse student population.

The school currently offers the Junior Certificate Programme, the Leaving Certificate (established), the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP) and an optional Transition Year (TY). The TY programme was first offered in 1994 and the LCVP was first offered in 1996. As well as these programmes, the Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) programme has been offered in the past.

For much of its history St Mary’s High School operated under the trusteeship of the Presentation Sisters. In the recent past this has changed and the school is now under the trusteeship of CEIST (Catholic Education An Irish Schools Trust).

1. QUALITY OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT

1.1 Characteristic spirit of the school
St Mary’s mission statement highlights that it was ‘founded to care for the poor and disadvantaged … and to give priority to religious and moral education’. The mission statement is well encapsulated in the school’s motto which simply states ‘let your light shine’.

The school strives to successfully fulfil its mission statement. There is a continuing sense of connection to its Presentation heritage. This is emphasised through the presence at the main
school entrance of the school motto and logo, both of which hearken to Nano Nagle, foundress of the Presentation Sisters and the ‘Lady of the Lamp’. But beyond this, the display looks towards the current and future character of the school as an multicultural institution, including the flags of the countries of origin of all of the nationalities that are a part of the present student body. The character of the school is further emphasised by religious iconography on display throughout the school building, as well as photographs of activities linked to the local parish and to various social causes and charities.

The school’s rich history is embodied in other elements of the overall environment. Photographs of a visit by the President of Ireland on the occasion of the school’s centenary are prominently displayed, along with photographs of award winners, of sporting achievements and of the school’s impressive record of fundraising for a variety of causes connected to world development and human rights. Artwork completed by different TY groups is also found in different locations, while the library presents a space which encourages a high status being afforded to reading and associated pursuits among the student body.

During the evaluation, students displayed a strong affinity with and pride in their school. They commented on the positive relationships between students and teachers. Parents noted that the school was welcoming and communicated well with the parent body. Parents also highlighted the quality of care afforded to students by the school, along with the fairness and respect shown to students in St Mary’s.

There is a strong sense that St Mary’s High School is a caring school which seeks to celebrate students’ achievements and to inculcate students with a keen social conscience. School management and staff are commended for maintaining this school culture.

1.2 School ownership and management
The present board of management was formed in 2007. The board is properly constituted according to the Education Act (1998) and the Articles of Management. Some initial training for members of the board was provided by the principal. However, the main training for the board is provided by the Joint Managerial Body (JMB), the Association of Management of Catholic Secondary Schools (AMCSS) and CEIST. The trustee body is also involved in providing other training opportunities for members of the school community during the year. In addition, CEIST representatives visit the school on a regular basis and the trustees are provided with the minutes of board meetings, copies of school newsletters, as well as an annual report dealing with the operation of the school. This latter report is also distributed to the various partners. It is recommended that, as a means of extending this good practice, the annual report could, in future, be published on the school web site. Such an approach would be consistent with Section 20 of the Education Act (1998).

The board meets at regular intervals during the school year. All members of the board have accessed the available training regarding their roles and have also been provided with a publication dealing with their responsibilities. An agreed report of board meetings is distributed to parents and teachers and a report is also given to the students’ council, where relevant. A finance subcommittee has been formed which reports to the board at each of its meetings.

The board is involved in the school development planning process. All policy documents are discussed at board level, with changes being recommended and agreed on a consensus basis. In this context it is recommended that adoption and review dates should, in future, be attached to all policy documents. These could also be usefully included in the index at the beginning of the school plan folder. The board has identified appropriate priorities with
regard to the school-development-planning process at this point. These include the provision of accommodation for the school’s increasing enrolment, maintaining the curriculum and ethos of the school, the continuing refurbishment of the school plant and the promotion of a focus on teaching and learning through continuing professional development (CPD) for members of the teaching staff. The board views itself as a support for senior management and for teachers. The board is engaged and effective in its role.

1.3 In-school management

There is a strong and effective senior management team. The principal has significant experience in his role. The deputy principal has been in her current role for three years and is an experienced member of staff. There are good relationships between the members of the senior management team. The principal and the deputy principal possess a shared vision for the school. The senior management team meets regularly at different points in the school day. As well as this, the team meets at the beginning of the school day and at the end, an arrangement which is worthwhile, particularly as the school continues to grow in size. Senior management displays a very significant commitment to the school and its continued development.

Senior management expressed appreciation for the work of postholders during the course of the evaluation. The middle management team currently consists of seven assistant principals and thirteen special-duties teachers. There are currently no formal, timetabled meetings between senior management and members of the middle management team. Informal meetings are held with some post-holders. A number of postholders and other teachers have engaged with in-service education from the Leadership Development for Schools (LDS) initiative. This is very positive. Currently, the post structure includes two year heads for first year and TY respectively. Postholders have reviewed their own duties and there has been a recent move towards reviewing the post structure. This met with limited success. There are imbalances in the current post structure and as previously identified by the school, the current post structure is in need of review.

The school is currently working well, thanks in no small part to much informal work undertaken by staff which is a key factor in the very good support offered to students across many domains of school life. This work is worthy of great praise. The board and, indeed, the entire school community has noted the significant increase in student numbers in recent years and the anticipated continuing expansion of the school’s student body in the near future. The board has placed a commendable emphasis on dealing with accommodation pressures which have arisen due to this change. However, organisational change to cope with the pressures of increasing student numbers will also be necessary. The school has similarly noted an increased level of diversity in its student cohort with more incidence of students with special educational needs and of students with English as an additional language (EAL) making the transition from local primary schools. In this context, it is also useful to note two aspirations of the school’s mission statement which calls for the school community to ‘help each student achieve their full potential … and to provide for pastoral care and learning support education as required’. Beyond this, the statement suggests the school community should ‘foster the personal and professional growth of staff reflecting change in society’.

Arising from both of these aspirations and from the school’s changing context, it is recommended that the role of middle management should be further developed. This should incorporate a significant review of the current post schedule. Key roles which should be addressed in any review of the post structure include the expansion of the number of postholders adopting the position of year head and the allocation to a post-holder of responsibility for the coordination of school development planning. In particular, the former priority should be addressed as a key element needed to complete the school’s,
already good, pastoral care structure. This statement is made, notwithstanding the very good work already undertaken on a voluntary basis through the class-teacher structure, which would be supported through the creation of more year-head posts. The increasing number of students in St Mary’s makes imperative the need for year heads to complete the pastoral care structures. Beyond this, the creation of year heads, a school-development-planning co-ordinator and other new roles through the post structure will raise the experience levels and expertise of staff involved, thus encouraging professional development on the part of teachers. Opportunities to formalise meetings with post-holders should be pursued. A weekly meeting between senior management and the year heads, including a representative of the care team, should comprise one of these meetings. Other meetings with postholders should be organised as appropriate, although not necessarily on as regular a basis, in order to communicate with and provide support for each post-holder in their efforts to fulfil their assigned roles.

A number of communication structures are in place. These include four staff meetings per year. The principal states that more may be scheduled if important issues arise during the course of the year. Members of the teaching staff are facilitated in including items for the agenda of each staff meeting. All staff meetings include an opportunity for input from the special educational needs department and from the student-council-liason teacher. Other modes of communication include a range of noticeboards in the staff room which display, variously, notices from the Department of Education and Skills, class information, notices from CEIST and details regarding special educational needs and the students’ council. The publication of a number of newsletters each year further facilitates the school in maintaining clear communication with parents and with all of the school partners. A school website has been created and is comprehensive in scope. This is very worthwhile and it is recommended that the school should advance the further development and updating of material on the website in order to ensure the impact of this technology is maximised in terms of communicating key school information and events to the different partners. The publication of all relevant school policies on the website would be very worthwhile. It is worth noting that a project on communication has been undertaken in the school which is connected to the LDS initiative. A number of staff is involved in the project which has also had some input from CEIST. All of this is positive.

The school is supportive of teachers’ engaging in CPD. The school has engaged with a number of external agencies including the School Development Planning Initiative (SDPI), the Special Education Support Service (SESS) and, as previously outlined, the LDS. A number of teachers have undertaken postgraduate studies. In addition, there is evidence of considerable commitment on the part of teachers to in-service education. Of particular note is the newly developing practice whereby staff members may present to their colleagues during whole-staff training sessions. This is appropriate and should continue to be developed. Such an approach recognises the skills and talents present in the school itself, along with the fact that this is combined with a knowledge of students and school context which cannot be replicated externally.

There is an inclusive atmosphere in the school. The school has a written admissions policy. The policy contains the statement that ‘St Mary’s High School welcomes pupils with special educational needs who fulfil the regular enrolment requirements’. This is positive. However, a number of adjustments should be made to the policy in order to ensure that it reflects the mission statement and professed ethos of the school, as well as the good practice which exists ‘on the ground’. The policy’s statements regarding the circumstances surrounding refusal to accept the transfer of a student should be adjusted to ensure that the criteria informing such decisions are clear and transparent. The policy should also be revised in light of statements around the refusal to enrol students with special educational needs. The current policy suggests that this may be done on the basis of the school’s view of whether it is in a position to meet the needs of a student with special educational needs.
It also suggests that admission may be predicated on the basis of the nature and degree of the needs of the relevant student. It is therefore recommended that the admissions policy be adjusted to fully reflect the inclusive atmosphere and practice of the school and to ensure compliance with the Education Act (1998) and the Equal Status Acts (2000 to 2008). Beyond these concerns, some school documents make reference to a ‘non-refundable registration fee’ to be paid prior to students’ entry. While it is accepted that the voluntary nature of this fee is communicated through visits to students’ primary schools, it is nevertheless recommended that the voluntary nature of the contribution should be made clear in all documentation where it is mentioned. As well as this, it is recommended that reference to such voluntary contributions should be ‘decoupled’ from documentation relating to enrolment, thus ensuring that it is clear to all partners that the admission of students is not reliant on the payment of any form of financial contribution.

Inspectors commented favourably on the behaviour of students, and on the good relationships which were evident between teachers and students both in lessons and throughout the school environs. Great praise is due to senior management, teachers and all partners for the creation and maintenance of these relationships. There is a code of behaviour, along with a document setting out the role of the principal and other partners in the event of a student being suspended or expelled. The code of behaviour is currently under review in light of the guidelines issued by the National Education Welfare Board (NEWB). This review incorporates a move towards including positive discipline strategies in the new code of behaviour. This is worthwhile and this review should continue to be advanced. A draft code of behaviour based on a template has been used to begin this process. A worthwhile feature of the template currently being used is the delineation of a clear, limited number of rules which are explained for the benefit of all members of the school community. It is important that reference should be explicitly made in the code of behaviour and in other documents related to the suspension or expulsion of students to the right of parents or students over the age of 18 years to appeal a decision of the board with regard to suspension or expulsion under the terms of section 29 of the Education Act (1998).

An anti-bullying policy has been adopted which is impressive in scope and is well laid out. The policy makes reference to electronic forms of bullying. This is worthwhile and it is suggested that the inclusion of an explicit reference to social networking sites may also be advisable, alongside the current commentary regarding the use of e-mails and text messaging. Currently, the policy makes reference to the role of year heads in dealing with incidents of bullying although the position of year head is not common across all year groups at present. There is a need for the policy to accurately reflect current practice in the school. The policy should be adjusted accordingly. It is important that all school policies should reflect current practice accurately.

There is an active students’ council. The council was established over thirty years ago. It meets regularly and minutes of these meetings are recorded. Minutes of meetings are placed on a noticeboard in the school so that members of the school community can find out about the activities of the council. A suggestion box is placed outside the principal’s office to enable the wider student population to raise issues for the council to consider. Students may also approach their representatives with issues they wish to be raised. In addition, representatives on the council ask for time from class teachers to report to their year groups. Students’ council badges easily identify members of the council. A post-holder acts as the staff liaison with the council. The staff-council-liason teacher reports on the activities of the council at all staff meetings and meetings between the principal and representatives of the council may also be arranged. The staff liaison may also bring issues to the board, where relevant. This focus on communicating the activities of the council to the school community is positive. As a further extension of these endeavours, it is suggested that the
council should seek to establish an area on the school’s website which reports on its activities throughout the year.

A constitution for the council has been created. All year groups are represented on the council and are democratically elected. A number of officers are also elected each year. The council has been involved in a number of projects in the last number of years including the provision of benches, a fountain and the painting of a ‘millennium wall’. The council has also been involved in the development of school policies in areas such as homework, healthy eating and behaviour. In addition, some work has been undertaken in the area of addressing the disposal of litter. This is commendable and it is recommended that the council should pursue further involvement in the area of environmental policy. This should involve initiating and co-ordinating a Green School Initiative as a means of pursuing the very worthwhile ideals expressed by the students’ council. Support in this endeavour can be accessed at [www.greenschoolsireland.org](http://www.greenschoolsireland.org). Input to the board from the students’ council on this and other policy initiatives would be worthwhile. The council might also take note of the desire on the part of the parents’ council, expressed during the evaluation, for stronger links between the students’ council and the parents’ council. The very good work undertaken by the council is greatly praised.

A school-attendance policy has been developed. The key role of the deputy principal in implementing the attendance policy is indicated in the document. The attendance policy also highlights positive reinforcement practices that the school has adopted to encourage good levels of attendance on the part of students. It is suggested that the current, worthwhile practice of appointing students as attendance representatives for their classes should also be noted in the policy. As with other areas of the school, the increased incorporation of ICT into the school’s attendance systems should continue to be advanced.

The parents’ council has been active since 1972. The council holds regular meetings and has organised information sessions for parents in the recent past on social networking sites and drug awareness. The council has also been a powerful support for the school through its fundraising activities. Of particular note in this regard is its key role in funding the recent extension to the school building. The council particularly sought the establishment of an oratory as a support for the pastoral-care system as well as the religious ethos of St Mary’s. It is also involved in the policy-development process. The council is currently seeking to create a website to further facilitate communication with the parent body. The principal attends all meetings of the council and council members reported that there are very good links between the council and senior management. The council has a constitution. This is worthwhile and it is suggested that the constitution could usefully be revised to reflect some of the very good practice which has developed in the school such as the delivery of agreed reports from the board to the council following each of its meetings. In addition, it is recommended that the council should advance its plans to affiliate itself with a national body.

The school communicates with the general parent body through a variety of modes, and overall, communication between the school and parents is well organised. Communication modes include the publication of newsletters informing parents of school events, the parents’ council, open evenings and information evenings regarding transition points for students and students’ choices regarding programmes or subjects. In this context, the school’s focus on the development of the school website is a further important and commendable initiative. New technologies have also begun to be harnessed in this area through the adoption of a text-messaging system to notify parents of items of interest regarding the school. The possibility of communicating with parents through their e-mail addresses is also being investigated. Parents may make appointments when they wish and there is an open policy in this regard. There is one parent-teacher meeting per year group per year. This is worthwhile. Reports regarding students’ progress are sent to parents at set
points in the year following formal examinations. At present these comprise handwritten reports. While acknowledging the personalised nature of these reports, it is recommended that the school should now consider moving to a report system which is supported through the appropriate use of ICT. The use of IT does not necessitate a lack of personalised commentary by teachers in students’ reports. There are clear advantages to be found in adopting an electronic system of reporting. Such a system will greatly increase the school’s ability to access and integrate different strands of information about a student’s pastoral, academic and personal needs. It will also serve to streamline communication between teachers and parents. Finally, both of these comments should be considered in light of the rapidly increasing student population and the inevitable pressures this will bring to bear on the current mode of reportage and the ability of all partners to use information to support students’ achievement and their welfare.

There are strong links with the wider community. Students are brought to the local church for an annual mass and TY students help with various local charity events. Beyond this, both LCVP students and TY students are supported in a number of their endeavours by local businesses. The school’s curriculum has been enhanced through contact with University College Cork which has facilitated an introduction to the Chinese language and culture in TY. The annual school show is an especially powerful tool in reaching out to and involving the local community in the life of St Mary’s. The involvement of TY students in the Log on and Learn initiative whereby they meet and instruct older members of the Midleton community in the use of ICT was a most positive feature of school life seen during the evaluation. Links with a variety of outside support agencies, including the National Education Psychological Service (NEPS), the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) and the Health Service Executive (HSE) are also undertaken, as is appropriate.

1.4 Management of resources
There is a current staff allocation of thirty-one permanent whole-time (PWT) teaching positions, four regular part-time (RPT) positions, six teachers with contracts of indefinite duration (CID) and one temporary whole-time (TWT) position. In addition, two further members of staff are privately funded by the school. There are also a number of student teachers engaged in the postgraduate diploma in education (PGDE). The teaching staff is generally deployed appropriately. Subject-specific commentary and advice on this area may be accessed through the individual subject inspection reports appended to this report. From a whole-school perspective a number of recommendations arise with regard to the future staffing needs of the school. Significant changes in teaching personnel may be anticipated over the coming years due to student and staff demographics. Therefore, it is recommended that great care should be taken in the future to ensure that the qualifications and specialisms of teachers employed meet the specific needs of the school. There is currently a staff handbook to aid teacher induction. Beyond this, it is recommended that, in order to develop and maintain the very positive school ethos and teaching culture, clear, formal induction procedures should be established. These should incorporate not only induction with regard to the whole-school organisation, but should also include subject-specific induction for new teachers. This latter area could usefully include peer observation, where practicable.

There is a wide range of facilities available to teachers and students. As well as general classrooms, the school environs include a Physical Education (PE) hall (incorporating a small gym), two resource rooms for learning support, a guidance office and library, two science laboratories and a demonstration room, an EAL support room, a school library and two ICT rooms, one of which is used as a language laboratory. The soon-to-be-opened extension includes an additional science laboratory, two general classrooms and an oratory.

While acknowledging the central and continuing challenge presented by accommodation constraints in the face of a rapidly expanding school population, the proactive stance taken
by the board and by senior management towards the development of the school plant, in co-
operation with other partners is laudable. The current extension work is most impressive. In
addition, senior management highlighted the demands of the upkeep of already existing
school buildings.

An extensive ICT infrastructure has been developed. As well as the two ICT rooms, the
entire school is networked and there is internet access available throughout. Portable
laptops and data projectors are available in subject base rooms. A number of teachers are
involved in the development of ICT and an acceptable-use policy has been created. The
work undertaken by teachers involved in the development of ICT was also evident through
an ICT folder which was made available to inspectors during the evaluation. Presently, TY,
fifth-year and sixth-year students have timetabled ICT lessons and a significant number of
TY students are undertaking the European Computer Driving Licence (ECDL) course. All
of this is commendable. It is in this context that it is recommended that an e-learning
committee be established. This committee should focus, not alone on the continued
development of the ICT infrastructure, but also on the incorporation of ICT in teaching and
learning. It is important that this committee should have a number of staff who have
expertise in the area of ICT, but also that there should be a mix of subject departments
represented as well as staff who are more reluctant users of ICT. Very useful advice in this
area can be accessed in the recent National Centre for Technology in Education (NCTE)
publication Planning and Implementing e-Learning in Your School: Handbook for
Principals and ICT Co-ordinating Teachers which can be accessed at www.ncte.ie.

A safety statement has been created. A health and safety officer has been appointed, as well
as a staff health and safety representative. Informal health and safety committee meetings
take place, as well as informal audits of health and safety. In addition, maintenance books
facilitate class teachers and student representatives in reporting any health and safety issues
which may arise. It is recommended that the safety statement should be adjusted so that
specific rooms are identified. In particular, one general classroom should be identified in
the statement as well as each specialist room, the relevant hazards, risks and controls, and
the person responsible for that room. Relevant staff members should inform this element of
the statement. It is further recommended that other arrangements around health and safety
should be formalised, such as the meeting of the health and safety committee and audits of
health and safety, which should include documented inputs from staff.

2. Quality of School Planning

2.1 The school plan

The school has links with the SDPI. Senior management takes a lead role in the planning
process. Both the deputy principal and various members of staff attend cluster meetings
organised by the SDPI. Records of planning meetings and of inputs from the SDPI are
maintained. ‘Open-space technology’ is utilised to advance the planning process whereby
interested staff members may become involved depending on the issue or policy being
pursued or developed. As a means of building on existing good practice, whereby de facto
planning committees have been formed, it is recommended that a school development
planning co-ordination committee should be organised which would oversee the planning
process in the future, while maintaining current opportunities for all staff to be involved in
the planning process.

All stakeholders are involved in the planning process, with senior management, staff, the
parents’ council, the board and the students’ council contributing to the development of
policies. When developing a new policy, a practice has arisen in the past whereby a well-
organised template of such a policy is used as a means of guiding and supporting the
planning process. While recognising the practical advantages of such an arrangement it is
recommended that care should be taken with the use of such templates in the future in order to ensure consistency between school policies and actual practice on the ground.

Significant work has been undertaken in the development of a permanent section of the school plan. This work has been collated in a school planning folder. A wide range of policies may be found in the permanent section of the plan including policies related to admissions, anti-bullying, attendance, Relationships and Sexuality Education and many others. In addition drafts of other policies are being advanced including the previously mentioned code of behaviour, a trauma-response plan and a data-protection policy. The development of all of these policies is very worthwhile.

During analysis of documentation provided by the school it was found that responses by staff to a questionnaire distributed by the SDPI suggested that teachers were eager to explore opportunities to share methodologies with each other and to explore new approaches in their teaching. It is therefore appropriate that recent moves in the school development planning process have been towards an explicit focus on teaching and learning. These moves are strongly endorsed. It is therefore recommended that the school should select an overall aim or theme for school development planning in the medium-term. In particular, this theme should include a focus on an aspect of teaching and learning which is to be approached over time through regular subject departmental engagement with the area selected. This should include engagement with external facilitators, but also with internally generated CPD. Opportunities for different subject departments to present their engagement with the topic identified should also be facilitated. This approach should be adopted in order to ensure the embedding of good practice and the building of capacity throughout the teaching staff. Clear action plans within subject departments will be important in this regard, as will specifically selected ‘teaching-and-learning days’ where staff can feed back to their own and other subject departments regarding their experiences with the new strategies they have employed. As previously outlined, the use of e-learning should be advanced through the development of an e-learning policy and engagement with new technology by all teachers. Advances in e-learning can also complement the communications project upon which the school is currently engaged.

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. It is recommended that a hardcopy of the Child Protection Guidelines for Post-primary Schools should be included in the permanent school plan. It is further recommended that the school should formally record the provision of a copy of the Guidelines to new staff, as well as the familiarisation of these staff with the Guidelines by senior management.

3. Quality of Curriculum Provision

3.1 Curriculum planning and organisation

The curriculum offered in St Mary’s High School is broad and balanced. The school offers a number of different programmes that include the Junior Certificate, the Leaving Certificate established, the LCVP and the TY programme, which is optional. In the past the school has also offered the LCA programme. The school has displayed a willingness and desire to adapt aspects of curriculum in the service of its students’ needs in the past and continues to maintain this as an element in school culture. This can be seen through a
number of changes which have recently been incorporated in its current range of programmes. This is a very positive feature of the school culture and it is in this context that it is recommended that vigilance should be maintained with regard to the possibility of offering the LCA programme to students again at some point in the future. This recommendation is particularly relevant given the larger and more diverse student cohort which the school expects to emerge in the short term. A very worthwhile feature of the current curricular provision is the school’s commitment to the study of languages, with students being able to choose to study both French and German in junior cycle. This support for the study of languages and for curricular innovation is further emphasised through students being facilitated in encountering both *ab initio* Spanish and Chinese language and culture during their senior cycle studies. St Mary’s has also entered into occasional arrangements with other schools in the locality to allow its students to study minority subjects which the school itself may not offer. All of this is commendable.

Students in first year study all subjects. This ‘taster system’ ensures that students are facilitated in making truly informed choices for their junior cycle course. The school is deserving of praise for this arrangement which conforms to best practice. Subjects studied in first year include the core subjects of Irish, English and Mathematics as well as French, German, History, Geography, Science, Religious Education, Business Studies, Home Economics, Art, Music, Choir, Civic, Social and Political Education (CSPE), PE, Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) and Speech and Drama. Prior to entering second year, students choose any four of eight optional subjects.

Students have access to all subjects in a manner which is supportive of their needs. Classes in first year are of mixed ability. Following first year, classes are of mixed ability in junior cycle, apart from the core subjects of Irish, English and Mathematics. In these latter subjects classes are banded. A similar arrangement obtains in fifth year and in sixth year. The concurrent timetabling of Irish, English and Mathematics in second year, third year, fifth year and sixth year is very positive in this context, allowing ease of movement between levels and classes for students, should this prove to be necessary. Classes are of mixed ability in TY, apart from Mathematics which is banded.

The amount of time allocated for subjects in junior cycle and in senior cycle is generally satisfactory. CSPE and SPHE are allocated one lesson per week, as is required in the relevant circular letters. The provision of a triple lesson for PE in TY is commendable. Beyond this, the school provides for a number of other activities in different year groups which emphasise its commitment to a holistic education for its students. These include, as previously mentioned, Speech and Drama (leading to certification through the London Academy of Music and Dramatic Art) and Choir. It must be noted, however, that provision for PE for students in fifth year and in sixth year is somewhat more limited than might be expected, as it is provided as part of an option block. It is acknowledged that the school’s significant provision for extra-curricular sport alleviates this criticism somewhat, as does the inclusion of a dance module for students in senior cycle. Nevertheless, it is recommended that provision for Physical Education lessons in fifth year and in sixth year be increased as set out in the *Rules and Programmes for Secondary Schools* (Department of Education and Skills). Beyond this, timetabled provision for LCVP link modules in fifth year and in sixth year is very generous at present. Guidelines published by the Department recommend that provision for link modules should be three periods per week in the first year of the programme and two periods per week in the second year. With this in mind it is recommended that the school should review the current very generous timetabling allocation for the LCVP.

The TY programme is optional in the school. The programme has been very successful, as is clear from the number of students who opt to join the programme in third year. A TY co-ordinator and the school’s programme co-ordinator share responsibility for the programme.
There are regular meetings of teachers involved in the delivery of the TY programme and minutes of these meetings are kept. There is significant planning documentation in place dealing with the organisation of the programme. Significant review and evaluation procedures have been initiated, facilitating feedback from students, parents and teachers. This reflective approach to the programme’s continued development is also evident in the range of subjects which is offered and continues to evolve. These include subjects such as Tourism, Enterprise, Speech Training, Developmental Studies and Young Social Innovators (YSI). In addition, there is a ‘calendar layer’ which includes a work experience module, Road Safety and Learner Driver Education, Public Access to Law and Gaisce. As already outlined, recent innovations include a ‘Log on and Learn’ initiative where TY students meet with the elderly in their community after school to provide instruction in ICT.

A very positive feature of the programme is the well-planned induction process for new TY students. External certification of student achievement is also a key element, leading to the creation of a ‘portfolio of certificates’ by the end of the year. Portfolio assessment also forms an important element of the assessment of students’ work during the year. There are regular assemblies of the TY group, with individual class groups taking responsibility for each of these in turn. These are most worthwhile, serving to highlight their achievements to students throughout the year. A graduation ceremony is also very important in this regard. Overall, the TY programme is a very well-organised and effective part of the school’s curricular provision.

In fifth year and in sixth year all students study Irish, English and Mathematics, as well as Religious Education. Beyond these, students choose any four of twelve option subjects. In addition, a number of students are currently studying Applied Mathematics, a subject the school seeks to facilitate in co-operation with other schools in the area. There is an additional option block provided for students in making choices with regard to fifth year and sixth year and this incorporates Physical Education, Speech and Drama, ab initio Spanish and ICT. In addition, fifth-year students participate in a one-week work experience placement during the year.

There is a significant commitment on the part of the school to the LCVP. All students participate in the LCVP in fifth year, although some may not, ultimately, participate in this element of the certificate examinations. Information regarding the LCVP is provided at subject-choice evenings for parents and at information sessions for students. An LCVP co-ordinator is appointed on a rotational basis and there are regular meetings of the LCVP team. Minutes are kept of these meetings. LCVP teachers have engaged with CPD. There is good access to ICT for LCVP students. Visiting speakers and work experience also form part of the programme. All of this is commendable.

3.2 Arrangements for students’ choice of subjects and programmes
Subject choice is provided on the basis of an open-choice system in all relevant year groups. This is excellent practice.

Students entering first year are provided with a taster system through which they encounter all subjects and thus make their subject choice for the Junior Certificate examination on the basis of experience. Their choices are therefore genuinely well-informed. At the end of first year, students make a choice of four out of eight subjects that include Science, French, Home Economics, Art, Business Studies, Music, German and Religion (for certificate examination). The guidance counsellor provides subject-option information for first-year students, with the co-operation of class teachers, and there is an information evening for parents of first-year students with regard to subject choice.
The guidance counsellor is also involved in providing information for students in third year with regard to subject and programme choice. There is a TY information evening for parents of third-year students. The involvement of TY students in this evening is commendable. An afternoon information session is organised for third-year students regarding TY and, again, TY students provide some of the input for this session. Students moving into fifth year, either directly from third year or having completed TY, choose any four subjects of twelve. Option subjects offered include Art, Accounting, Biology, Business, Chemistry, French, Geography, German, History, Home Economics, Music and Physics. For parents of students in third year and in TY who are moving into fifth year, an information evening is organised regarding subject choice. All of these arrangements are worthwhile.

3.3 Co-curricular and extra-curricular provision
St Mary’s provides a very wide range of co-curricular and extracurricular activities for students’ benefit. In the sporting arena, the school has a proud and long-standing tradition in team sports. These include basketball, volleyball, camogie and football. Beyond these activities, a major annual school event is the school musical which requires significant commitment on the part of staff. The musical is a strong means of communicating positive messages about the school community. It also ensures that the school links strongly to all its partners in the Midleton area.

Beyond sporting activities and the school musical, there is also a commendable emphasis on cultural activities and on activities which encourage students in the development of a strong social conscience. The long list of cultural activities includes school tours, language exchanges, visits to concerts and art galleries, book club, public speaking and visits to the theatre. Alongside these ventures the school supports the St Vincent de Paul, the ISPCC, Gorta and Trocaire, and has an elderly awareness programme and a Human Rights group. Further co-curricular activities include religious retreats, visiting speakers and the involvement of TY students in the Gaisce awards scheme. The school’s commitment to encouraging the engagement of students as citizens is particularly noteworthy. The commitment of teachers to this area of school life must simply be applauded.

4. QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN SUBJECTS

4.1 Planning and preparation
Subject co-ordinators are in place in subject departments. The school has adopted the positive practice of having the subject co-ordinator’s role carried out by different members of the team, on a rotational basis. In many instances, a clear role and clear areas of responsibility for the co-ordinator have been laid down. This approach supports the development of wider leadership experience across subject departments.

Subject-department meetings are held regularly, both formally and informally, across all subject areas, to progress subject-department plans. Minutes are kept of formal meetings. These form a comprehensive record of decisions taken. This is good practice. The continued use of ICT to record and store these minutes is advised. The current positive use and future potential use of departmental meetings to focus on developmental issues, to discuss elements of teaching and learning, as a way of sharing resources and to provide feedback from CPD activities was highlighted in a number of subject inspection reports.

In all subject areas, long-term plans were presented in the course of the evaluation. These plans indicate that an extensive amount of collaborative work has been undertaken in subjects which were evaluated. It is recommended that planning should now move towards a focus on learning-goal based, skills-based, time-linked plans and on teaching and learning strategies. It is further recommended that strategies for differentiation to meet the individual needs of learners be included in the long-term plans. Over time, it is suggested
that, since the support of students is at the core of effective learning and teaching, individual subject department plans should outline the manner and means by which the school’s mission to care for and support students are implemented by those subject departments.

There are subject-specific TY programmes for almost all subjects in the TY folder. As has been recommended with regard to general subject planning, the TY plans should be revised to incorporate a learning-goal, time-linked structure incorporating more emphasis on topics that are not related to Leaving Certificate syllabuses. This would help to make it relevant to the interests and needs of each individual cohort of TY students. It would also cater for differentiation in the classroom through providing a more detailed account of the projects and individual and group activities to be undertaken during the year.

Individual levels of short-term planning and preparation by teachers were good in lessons visited. The prior preparation of handouts, worksheets and the organisation of materials and equipment facilitated the smooth progression of lessons.

There is evidence of good communication among staff regarding planning for provision for students with special educational needs. Teachers are given information regarding students with special educational needs at a staff meeting at the beginning of the year. This in turn informs planning. The development of individual education plans has also begun, and their use as a further aid to communication between the special educational needs department and mainstream teachers is encouraged.

4.2 Learning and teaching
Overall, the quality of teaching and learning was very good. The pace and structure of lessons observed was often very good. This was most evident where there was a smooth transition from one activity to the next and where resources were at hand and effectively employed. In a number of instances learning outcomes for the lesson were shared with students. This is good practice as it enables the teacher and the students to focus on the key work of the lesson and facilitates the monitoring of students’ learning. The delineation of the learning intentions at the beginning of all lessons is recommended. Core learning intentions could also be placed on the board and left there for the lesson duration as reinforcement and as a focus for the recapitulation of students’ learning. In a minority of instances, an increased structuring of lessons to consolidate learning is recommended. Lessons were well planned in the main.

The use of differentiated teaching methods in order to meet the learning needs of students is highly commended. In some lessons, an appropriate focus on new terminology assisted in the development of students’ literacy and understanding of subject-related terms. This is praiseworthy.

In some lessons observed during the evaluation, the focus on learning by doing was emphasised to a high degree. Independent, group and whole-class activities took place. Where group work was used, it was well organised with designated tasks, aims and times. Teachers’ instructions were clear and students followed such instructions very well. Following some lessons inspectors advised that greater direction in the makeup of student groups should be employed. In a small number of instances, a greater balance between teacher talk and student activity was suggested. Students engaged well with independent and small group work and these activities were integrated well with whole-class teaching.

Very good teacher-student rapport was observed in lessons. Classroom management was effective and discipline was sensitively maintained. Teachers were universally affirming to students. Students were interested and attentive in lessons.
Questioning featured prominently in all lessons as a means of assessing students’ knowledge and to advance learning. Higher-order questions were used effectively to stimulate thought and discussion. It is good to note that sufficient ‘wait time’ was provided for the development of students’ answers. In some lessons questioning was also successfully used to draw on students’ previous knowledge of a topic and to aid the introduction and subsequent broadening of that topic. This practice of ascertaining and utilising students’ prior knowledge should be employed in all instances when introducing a new topic. There was evidence that teachers supported students as they further developed their answers where necessary and requests for clarification were dealt with immediately and affirmatively. This is very good practice.

A wide range of resources was used. These included ICT, the whiteboard, the overhead projector, flashcards and printed resources. Subject departments are to be praised for utilising concrete and other resources to scaffold students’ learning and are encouraged to maintain this approach. In particular, it is recommended that visual resources should be utilised to support student learning wherever possible.

The use of visual or written material in the form of handouts was particularly beneficial as it allowed the teacher to provide support for students with learning difficulties and occasionally allowed both ordinary-level and higher-level students to work together for a portion of the lesson.

Students’ responses to questions revealed a thorough grasp of the material and an interest in its further exploration and in enhancing understanding. Students’ written, oral and practical work generally indicated good progress, appropriate to their abilities. In the main, students demonstrated clear knowledge and understanding of topics under study.

4.3 Assessment

In general, very good levels of informal assessment have been noted across the range of subjects evaluated. Homework was assigned in all classes and was well monitored by teachers. The homework tasks were in keeping with what had been covered in the lessons. These tasks sought to integrate different skills based upon the lesson themes, and were appropriate in all instances to the levels and year groups involved. Students’ copybooks, workbooks and practical notebooks were maintained to a good standard. In some instances, more use of formative assessment of students’ written homework, or of writing frames to guide students of differing ability, have been recommended, but in general the level of teacher support for informal assessment was very good. Some very good use of drawing tasks, illustrations, graphic organisers and templates to scaffold students’ homework was observed, supporting the different learning styles and abilities of students. Some subjects have taken cognisance of a whole-school training on multiple intelligences in adapting the school’s generic homework policy to individual subject needs and this is commended.

Significant moves towards common assessment in more formal school examinations are commended. Subject departments in recent years have developed examination papers for Christmas and summer to be given to all mixed-ability groups in junior classes in particular. This is good practice. Some subjects are already allocating assessment marks for practical or oral components, including continuous assessment tasks completed during the term, in order to reach a combined overall mark at end-of-term assessment. This is also commended. Plans to include a form of project reporting in junior assessment instruments are also worthwhile and should be pursued, as should the incorporation of practical work into the overall assessment marks given. Some further suggestions are offered in relation to broadening some language assessment modes in TY to include possible portfolio work. In addition, the incorporation of the multiple-intelligences work evident in informal assessment into elements of the school’s examinations, especially where such variety is reflected in certificate examinations, is advocated.
Whole-school support for assessment is very good. Induction-related assessment processes are thorough, where the school is commended for its consideration of moving to more recently standardised instruments. Ideally, such testing ought to be carried out prior to entry if possible, although commendable levels of teacher collaboration in the analysis of such test results have been evident. In addition to the provision of multiple-intelligence training and facilitation of continuous assessment, the school holds formal examinations in summer for non-certificate examination classes and at strategic points within the school year. Certificate examination classes have formal examinations prior to Christmas and also in the spring when they sit pre-examinations. All classes have parent-teacher meetings annually and progress reports can be sent home informally via the student journal or more formally through written reports after the aforementioned examinations.

5. Quality of Support for Students

5.1 Inclusion of students with additional educational needs

The school has an inclusive atmosphere, and a significant number of students with special educational needs are enrolled. There is a comprehensive learning-support policy in place. This clearly sets out school policies in the area of special educational needs and this approach is echoed in a range of documentation which has been developed in this area. The role of special needs assistants (SNAs) is noted in the document. It is suggested that there may be some scope to expand on this role a little more in the policy document, basing such an explanation on relevant Department documentation. There is a committed special educational needs co-ordinator and a number of staff have recognised qualifications. Beyond this, documentation provided during the inspection highlighted significant commitment to CPD on the part of teachers for special educational needs. The number of teachers involved in the special educational needs team is appropriately limited, thus facilitating communication and concentrating the development of this area of expertise within the team.

The special educational needs team provides regular inputs at staff meetings and the names of students who are in receipt of support are clearly communicated to staff. There is good communication between the team and mainstream teachers in general, with specific documents highlighting links with the English, Mathematics and modern languages departments. Whole-staff training in the area of special educational needs has taken place, supported by the SESS. The involvement of mainstream teachers in a very comprehensive, systematic and well co-ordinated approach to the enrolment of first-year students, and the identification of students with needs, is also worthwhile. Education plans are also in place for students and these are reviewed at regular intervals. This is good practice.

A very positive feature of current practice is the acknowledgement in the learning-support folder of the need for links to be sustained between the special educational needs team and the EAL team, while acknowledging the distinct roles of each team. During the evaluation the issue of EAL students who may also have a learning difficulty was raised and advice was offered on this point. Further links between special educational needs personnel and the guidance department are also outlined in the learning-support folder. These are very worthwhile. A requirement for the formal agreement of parents where a student with special educational needs is advised to study a reduced curriculum is outlined at one point in the learning-support folder. This good practice of seeking a formal, written agreement should also be outlined in the learning-support policy.

The school has an additional allocation for learning support and for special educational needs of approximately sixty-three hours. The majority of these hours are used to facilitate individual and small group withdrawal from mainstream classes for the provision of
support. The remainder of the allocation is used to facilitate smaller class sizes as a means of aiding differentiation and care for students with special educational needs in mainstream classes. While acknowledging the relevance of this latter approach, it is recommended that a move towards greater utilisation of these hours to support literacy and numeracy should be examined. This could, for example, involve the creation of an additional support class group in junior cycle years to provide for a flexible model of support where such intervention is needed. The adoption of team-teaching as a further addition to the menu of supports offered to students is in its early stages. It is recommended that the school should continue with this move to adopt team-teaching as a further element in the menu of possible supports which it provides for students.

Beyond this, it is recommended that the school should establish an electronic register of students with special educational needs. This should be done in order to further aid, already good, links between mainstream teachers and support teachers. Furthermore, it will add to transparency and accountability with regard to the use of resource hours and will create a permanent record of the use of these hours which delineates an explicit link with the relevant student’s assessed needs. Such a register should not be viewed as an overly long document and should be easily accessed and understood by all parties.

There has been a significant commitment on the part of the school to the provision of resources to support students with special educational needs. This includes the provision of two resource rooms which are equipped with ICT. Beyond this, students who require Reasonable Accommodations in the Certificate Examinations (RACE), are facilitated during house examinations whenever possible. This good practice is to be praised. Links with relevant external agencies have also been established, and these include NEPS, the NCSE, Enable Ireland, the HSE and a number of other relevant bodies.

St Mary’s is welcoming to students with a minority ethnic / minority language background. The school has a number of students studying EAL. There is an additional allocation of twenty-two teaching hours for EAL. Allocations for EAL are deployed appropriately. Senior school management has identified EAL as an area for development, but this should not take from the significant support the school has already provided in this area. An EAL room has been assigned to support the practice of the EAL team. This is very positive as such a base can take from some of the inevitable anxiety EAL students may feel in a new environment, while also offering opportunities for the creation of a text-rich and print-rich environment which is vital to the development of good practice in EAL. The value of students’ home languages is also recognised in the school environment. The EAL team has moved to incorporate the Post-Primary Assessment Kit into its practice and members of the team have been facilitated in attending Second Level Support Service (SLSS) training on EAL. There are regular meetings of the EAL team, of which minutes are kept. Beyond this, a language-support policy is being developed and an intercultural group has been formed.

It is, therefore, in the context of this very good work that the following recommendations are made. Given the progress which has already been achieved, it is recommended that the school should maintain a strong focus on building capacity which can be maintained over time in the area of EAL. An increased enrolment of EAL students can be anticipated, as part of the overall increase in student numbers. The possibility of a whole-staff in-service education session on EAL should be considered. Such in-service education can be accessed through the SLSS. Finally, in developing the language-support policy, the importance and value of students’ home languages should be explicitly highlighted, along with the relevance of DARTS (Directed Activities Related to Texts) as a means of facilitating access to the curriculum for these students in mainstream classes. The admissions process should also incorporate an element in the future which would seek to clarify whether students entering the school have been provided with language support in their primary schools. The website www.elsp.ie provides useful resources for mainstream teachers to support EAL.
students. All involved are commended for the good work they have undertaken to date in supporting EAL students’ social and academic needs.

5.2 Guidance and student support in the whole-school context

The supports provided for students at St Mary’s High School are well founded in the personal and professional approaches of staff and are a reflection of the staff’s commitment to fulfil the mission to help each student to achieve her full potential in academic, personal, social and moral development and to provide for Pastoral Care and Remedial Education as required. In addition to the special educational needs department already referred to above, a number of formal and informal structures are in place to cater for the varied needs of students. These include the guidance department, the pastoral-care team and RE department in conjunction with members of the local clergy. It is noted that these, and the care and guidance provided by individual members of staff, form an effective system of supports that combine formal and informal procedures and practices.

The ex-quota allocation for Guidance by the Department is twenty-four hours per week. This is used effectively by two staff members who provide for the guidance needs of students in a balanced programme that encompasses all year groups and comprises inputs to students in class groups, small groups and individually. This is achieved by commendable collaboration with staff and with senior management. The facilities for Guidance are of a high standard and include a well-appointed office and access to ICT on an individual and on a group basis.

Guidance, as delivered by the school, is broadly based and in keeping with the view that students should have access to personal, educational and vocational guidance. Its provision is facilitated by a clear understanding of its range by senior management, good relationships among staff and a positive attitude to Guidance, and to student support in general. It is clear that such a positive climate extends to the local and regional community. Parental involvement in the school, which ranges from participation in the board of management to consultation with staff about the individual needs of students, is reciprocated by the school in its provision of information sessions on topics such as study skills and career choice. At community level, the school is supported across the range of subjects and programmes by local employers and institutions who, for example, provide information through visits to the school and who provide employment through the school’s work-experience programme. In addition, links have been established with supports external to the school such as NEPS and local health and counselling services to which referrals may be made in collaboration with senior management. The principal highlights counselling as a key resource in the school.

Although the school does not have the services of a full-time chaplain, a member of the local clergy attends regularly and provides some chaplaincy services. In his absence, the RE department collaborates with the other supports of the school in the identification of students’ needs and in their support, and arranges the annual cycle of liturgical celebrations. The ethos of the school is supportive of this work and of the pastoral care of students. To this end, a system of class teachers is in place, which adds to the personal supports available. The commitment of staff involved in this role is strongly praised. In addition, a post-holder has duties in the area of pastoral care. The development of a trauma-response plan is currently underway and this move is very worthwhile. Beyond this, a buddy system between fifth-year students and first-year students is an important support for students making the transition from primary school. Consideration is being given to the addition of a year head for each year group, whose responsibilities might include the general care and welfare of the year group in accordance with the guidelines of the Irish Association for Pastoral Care in Education. This move is strongly endorsed and it is suggested that if such a
system is proposed it should be introduced and integrated in the context of whole-school planning of supports for students recommended below.

Collaborative work among the key student-support departments is ongoing and commended. The administration of standardised test instruments is achieved, for example, by the special educational needs department in collaboration with the guidance department and components of the curricular elements of Guidance are delivered by teachers of SPHE. Similarly, the senior management team works closely with the departments in the identification of the needs of students and in decisions regarding the appropriate actions to be taken. It is a recommendation of this report that, because the school is growing and in order to maximise the effectiveness of available resources, these supports be enhanced by application of some standard planning procedures. These should facilitate the clarification of roles and responsibilities in an integrated system of supports, including the curricular supports available through subjects and programmes. It is particularly recommended that the resources available to those engaged in whole-school guidance planning be used to achieve this aim. The formation of a small task force to manage the development of the whole-school guidance plan is recommended. In making these recommendations, it is recognised that current good practice in support of students is an essential factor in the school’s ongoing effectiveness in learning and teaching.

6. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT

The following are the main strengths identified in the evaluation:

- St Mary’s High School is a caring school which seeks to celebrate students’ achievements and to inculcate students with a keen social conscience.
- The board of management is engaged and effective in its role.
- There is a strong and effective senior management team.
- There is an inclusive atmosphere in the school.
- A good relationship was evident between teachers and students.
- There is an active students’ council.
- The parents’ council has been active since 1972. The council holds regular meetings and has organised information sessions for parents in the recent past.
- The proactive stance taken by the board and by senior management towards the development of the school plant, in co-operation with other partners is laudable.
- A safety statement has been created. A health and safety officer has been appointed, as well as a staff health and safety representative.
- 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).
- The curriculum offered in St Mary’s High School is broad and balanced.
- All stakeholders are involved in the planning process, with senior management, staff, the parents’ council, the board and the students’ council contributing to the development of policies.
- Subject choice is provided on the basis of an open-choice system in all relevant year groups.
- St Mary’s provides a very wide range of co-curricular and extracurricular activities for students’ benefit.
- Overall, the quality of teaching and learning is very good.
- Differentiated teaching methods are used in order to meet the learning needs of students.
• The special educational needs team has developed a range of effective supports for students.
• Guidance, as delivered by the school, is broadly based and in keeping with the view that students should have access to personal, educational and vocational guidance. A system of class teachers is in place, which adds to the personal supports available. The commitment of staff involved in this role is strongly praised.

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

• The role of middle management should be further developed. This should incorporate a significant review of the current post schedule.
• The admissions policy should be adjusted to fully reflect the inclusive atmosphere and practice of the school and to ensure compliance with the Education Act (1998) and the Equal Status Acts (2000 to 2008). The voluntary nature of student contributions should be clear in all documentation where it is referred to.
• A hardcopy of the Child Protection Guidelines for Post-primary Schools should be included in the permanent school plan. The school should formally record the provision of a copy of the Guidelines to new staff, as well as the familiarisation of these staff with the Guidelines by senior management.
• The school should select an overall aim or theme for school development planning in the medium-term. In particular, this theme should incorporate a teaching and learning element.
• The students’ council should pursue further involvement in the area of environmental policy.
• The safety statement should be adjusted so that specific rooms are identified. The arrangements around meetings dealing with health and safety should be formalised.
• The current, very generous, timetabling allocation for the LCVP should be reviewed.
• Greater utilisation of resource teaching and learning-support hours to support literacy and numeracy should be examined.
• An electronic register of students with special educational needs should be established.
• The school should maintain a strong focus on building capacity which can be maintained over time in the area of EAL.
• In order to maximise the effectiveness of available resources, supports in the area of guidance and care should be enhanced by application of some standard planning procedures.

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 – 2 April 2009
• Subject Inspection of Civic, Social and Political Education – 20 November 2009
• Subject Inspection of Science and Chemistry – 23 November 2009
• Subject Inspection of Guidance – 25 November 2009
• Subject Inspection of French – 27 November 2009

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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

Admissions Policy/Refusal to enrol students with special educational needs.
St.Mary’s high school has an inclusive and welcoming atmosphere in the school. Statements in the admissions policy around the refusal to enrol students with special educational needs is based on guidelines received from the joint managerial body (J.M.B.) which in turn is based on legal advice received from their (J.M.B.) legal advisors. The Board of Management would be guided by recommendations/advice received from the J.M.B. The secretary has passed on your recommendations to the J.M.B. and again the B.O.M. will be guided by their recommendations/advice (if any).