Whole-School Evaluation
REPORT

Our Lady’s Bower
Athlone,
County Westmeath

Roll number: 63210P

Date of inspection: 26 February 2010
WHOLE-SCHOOL EVALUATION

A whole-school evaluation of Our Lady’s Bower was undertaken in February, 2010. This report presents the findings of the evaluation and makes recommendations for improvement. During the evaluation, the quality of teaching and learning in four subjects was evaluated in detail, and separate reports are available on these subjects. (See section 7 for details). The board of management of the school 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. The board of management of the school 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

Our Lady’s Bower is an all-girls voluntary secondary school situated on the eastern side of Athlone. The sisters of La Sainte Union des Sacré Coeurs established the school in 1884 and have made a significant contribution to the education of girls over their one hundred and twenty six-year history in Athlone. In this time the order has also supported a number of building developments. Most significant of these were in the early 1900s, 1960, 1971, 1984 and in recent years when they contributed to the new facility which was officially opened in October 2008. The school comprises two campuses the new facility and the convent, which accommodates first-year students. Total enrolment at the time of the WSE was 703 students, including 130 boarders.

Day students attending the school come from a large catchment area surrounding the town of Athlone. Residential students come from many parts of Ireland and abroad. Students attending the school come from a range of socio-economic backgrounds and the school’s admissions statement welcomes girls of all faiths. Students with special educational needs (SEN), students for whom English is an additional language and Traveller students are accommodated in the school.

1. QUALITY OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT

1.1 Characteristic spirit of the school

The characteristic spirit of the school as outlined in its mission statement espouses the provision of an education which is firmly Christian and inculcates maturity in preparation for the responsibilities of life. The school places emphasis on high scholastic achievement, yet equal provision is given to personal development and self discipline. The stated aims of the school acknowledge the uniqueness of each individual and of developing students’ capacity and personality to the full. The school’s motto ‘Each for all and all for God’ provides the framework within which the mission statement and associated aims are articulated. It is recommended that a review of the mission statement and how it influences the day-to-day life of the school should be conducted by all school partners, including the trustees, to provide a cohesive overarching guide for the future development of the school community. Within this framework, it is recommended that the board of management oversee the process of developing a five-year strategic plan in order to guide the development of the key areas of school life. The aims attaching to the revised mission statement should provide the context within which policies, procedures, systems and structures are developed and implemented. These aims will also provide suitable evaluation criteria for use in regular review.
The revised mission statement should be clearly visible throughout both school buildings and should be included in the school journal. Other means of increasing awareness of the school’s mission and its implementation should be explored.

1.2 School ownership and management

The unitary management structure of the school was replaced by a board of management structure in 2004. The current board is in the third year of its term and is appropriately constituted with representatives from trustees, teacher and parent bodies. The chairperson was elected in September 2009 and is the first lay person to hold this position. The school principal acts as secretary to the board. The composition of the board demonstrates a gender balance. Continuity with the previous board has been maintained by the membership of a number of representatives from the first board.

The board of management is clearly aware of its statutory obligations and members have availed of opportunities to receive training for their role from the respective management and union bodies. Board members are dedicated in their service to the school and committed to its future development. There are regular scheduled lengthy meetings of the board, as well as numerous emergency meetings. While it was reported that agenda items are discussed in a comprehensive and conscientious manner, board members reported that priorities they had identified had not been progressed nor implemented. Board members reported that they had not been consulted about a range of management issues and that they were not involved in decision making. This suggests that a productive working relationship has not yet been established between the principal and the board. As a result the board has not yet developed a proactive leadership role nor has it been able to execute its responsibilities to guide the current management of the school and lead it into the future. It is recommended that the board be facilitated in formulating and implementing a collective vision in order to provide an overarching and cohesive framework within which the school development planning process can be executed. The role of the principal as secretary to the board should be clearly delineated and it should be carried out in line with the Education Act 1998. It is important that the secretary of the board remains in attendance for the duration of board meetings and that all board members be issued with a copy of the minutes and agenda prior to board meetings. This procedure should allow for a more expedient adoption of the agreed minutes by the board.

Board discussions have been dominated by a single issue for a considerable period of time. It is evident that lack of pertinent school policies and procedures has contributed to the delay in reaching a satisfactory resolution of this issue. The agenda for board meetings should include a broader range of relevant school issues, practices and procedures, including reporting on financial matters, policy discussion, adoption and review, planning for the strategic development of the school, curricular provision, management of resources, continuous professional development (CPD) for staff and supports for students. The structure and format of board meetings should be reorganised to ensure this. It is recommended that reasonable time limits are set for meetings to sustain the voluntary attendance of board members.

The finance sub-committee of the board consists of the secretary and one of the trustee nominees. The school fund, which comprises the parents’ voluntary contribution, has not been included in the financial statements provided to the board since 2004. The minutes of board meetings document the board’s request that these accounts be made available. In the interests of transparency, the accounts pertaining to this fund should be regularly audited and made available to the board.

Structures for effective and collaborative lines of communication between all members of the school community are in need of improvement. Following board meetings an agreed
oral report is issued to staff and parents through their representatives on the board and communication between the board and the trustees is maintained through the trustee nominees on the board. The parents’ association expressed a wish for clearer lines of communication with the board to enhance the effectiveness of their working relationship in relation to school development. It is also evident that there is a strong need to develop professional and respectful working relationships between the principal and the board of management and across the school community. The board should take a proactive role in addressing these fundamental difficulties and put in place a cohesive framework within which communication and relationships can be improved and a sense of ownership and partnership be inculcated within the school. A draft health and safety statement was developed by an external agency in April 2009 and contains a comprehensive dignity at work charter which espouses a work environment free from bullying, intimidation and victimisation for all students and employees. This policy outlines clear procedures for dealing with bullying and harassment. However it has not been ratified by the board. It is advised that this policy be considered by the board as a matter of urgency and be used to improve professional working relationships.

Although the school’s planning process has been initiated, an adequate school plan does not exist. The board is aware of the need to develop a range of school policies including those required by legislation and expressed an aspiration to initiate the incremental process of strategic whole-school planning. Given the knowledge and insight that the current board members have gained of the school, it is advised that some continuity of membership be maintained on the next board to provide leadership in meeting the needs of the school community. This will also ensure the timely implementation of the articulated developmental priorities of the current board.

### 1.3 In-school management

The senior management team, comprising the principal and deputy principal, is complimented for its strong vision and commitment in acquiring the new school building and facilities. This modern and well equipped school has benefited from ongoing improvement under the summer works scheme and contributions from the trustees and parents. The principal has driven the development of an extensive information and communication technology (ICT) infrastructure throughout the new school and is currently planning to equip the first-year campus with ICT. The time and energy invested in this planning is highly commended.

The principal and deputy principal meet regularly on an informal basis to discuss issues that arise during the school day. These meetings should be established on a formal basis to assign responsibilities where appropriate to one member and where necessary to agree a team approach. This will help to eliminate duplication in their work. Agreed procedures for meeting with members of the school community should be established to eliminate overlap and reduce overload.

Evidence gathered during the course of the evaluation indicates that the leadership style adopted by the principal is characterised by close control and supervision of all aspects of school life. This creates a sense of top-down management that hinders the development of leadership capacity within the school and has caused a level of disempowerment and low morale. It is recommended that a more democratic and participative style of management be developed so as to build effective lines of communication and a culture of ownership among all school partners.

While a number of duties are attached to the role of deputy principal, the duties of each member of the senior management team should be formally defined and documented. More
use should also be made of the expertise and talents of other members of the in-school management team. The consequent devolvement of responsibilities should afford the senior management team the time to manage and lead in a more effective and progressive way and should build a greater sense of partnership across the school community.

The in-school management structure comprises six assistant principals and fifteen special duties teachers. Reviews of the post structures were carried out in 1998 and again in 2008, facilitated by the School Development Planning Initiative (SDPI). The needs of the school were identified and a review task group was established to prioritise them. However this work was not brought to completion. Since then, the principal has subsumed the roles of four assistant principal posts vacated due to retirements, in addition to retaining responsibility for a wide range of management and leadership issues, and administrative and day-to-day duties. It is timely therefore that a root and branch review of the post structure be initiated immediately so that the current needs of the school can be identified and addressed. Overlap that exists in current posts should be reduced and some responsibilities should be consolidated to facilitate the inclusion of new duties. The post of planning co-ordinator, which is included in the post structure on a temporary basis, should become a permanent post to ensure that school development planning is sustained. Any imbalance in the duties attaching to posts should also be addressed.

The principal, three assistant principals and six special duties teachers carry out the role of year heads or assistant year heads. There are variations in the duties attaching to the year head and assistant year head for the different year groups. In the interests of equity for the post-holders and clarity for the students the same duties should be assigned to the post of year head and assistant year heads. It is good practice that weekly meetings of the year heads take place with the principal. However assistant year heads are not facilitated to attend these scheduled meetings. It is recommended that all staff involved in the duties attaching to year heads be included at this forum.

Staff meetings are held infrequently. In consequence the extensive range of items to be covered results in little time for adequate discussion and consultation. It is recommended that meetings are arranged on a more regular basis and that a realistic number of items be included on the agenda. This will allow for meaningful input from staff and adequate discussion leading to agreed conclusions.

The school is inclusive and welcomes students of all faiths. A very short admissions statement outlines this. However a comprehensive admissions policy has not been developed. It is recommended: that the statement be reviewed and developed into a policy that complies with current legislation; that the procedures and criteria for admission to the school be detailed; and that arrangements for appeal of decisions by the board of management to refuse enrolment under section 29 of the Education Act be documented in the policy.

The school’s code of behaviour plays a key role in the management of student discipline. The code outlines a graded procedure for dealing with disciplinary issues involving the class teacher, the year head, the deputy principal and the principal. The decision on the sanction to be imposed for serious misbehaviour is taken by the principal. It is recommended that all relevant staff members be consulted on the sanction to be imposed. The school’s code of behaviour was reviewed in 2009 without appropriate consultation with parents and students. Once the draft dignity at work charter is adopted by the board it is recommended that the code of behaviour be reviewed again in line with this document. A statement of changes to the anti-bullying statement in the code of behaviour was recently agreed at board level. It is recommended that these changes requested by the board be circulated to staff, parents and students and be accordingly included in the code and in the school’s draft dignity at work charter. The students interviewed expressed a need for an
anti-disruption class policy to address misbehaviours that militate against the teaching and learning environment. This issue should be considered in the review of the code. Overall parents and students consider the code of behaviour to be fair. However, during the evaluation period concerns were expressed about the extent to which the code is uniformly and consistently applied across the student body. Such concerns should be addressed.

The accuracy of current methods of recording attendance in the school is a cause of concern. In May 2009 the school changed from the Anseo system to e-portal as a means of recording and reporting on student attendance at a whole-school level in the main campus. However there have been persistent difficulties with this new system and no linkage occurs between in-class records maintained by teachers and school-level records. No evidence was provided on how first-year attendance in the convent building is monitored. There appear to be discrepancies between the returns made by the school to the National Education Welfare Board (NEWB) and those maintained within the school. These issues should be addressed so that accurate records of students’ attendance are available. Such records will facilitate closer monitoring of students’ attendance.

School attendance documentation also revealed that there is significant absenteeism of twenty days and over among particular students, especially among EAL students. It is recommended that the school develop attendance strategies to address issues pertaining to student attendance. Tracking of attendance on a year to year basis within each particular year group should be carried out in order to ensure that the strategies developed are reducing non-attendance. The problem with in-school truancy, where some students are present in school but do not attend particular classes, reported to inspectors, should be addressed through a greater visible presence of management in the school.

The current student council was elected in October 2009. Two students from each class are nominated onto the year council by the students in their year group. These nominations are given to the student council liaison teacher and from this the student council is elected. It is recommended that more formal procedures are put in place for the election of members to the student council in accordance with the election procedures outlined in the student council constitution. The inspection team met with eight members of the student council, six of whom were residential students. It is recommended that there is a more balanced representation of day students on the council. Meetings of the council occur on a regular basis usually once a month and it is good practice that minutes of these meetings are maintained. Such meetings should take place outside of class time so that all members are facilitated to attend, in particular the sixth-year students. The student council has developed a comprehensive constitution and the roles of all officers are clearly outlined. This is in line with best practice. Notwithstanding the fact that there are year council notice boards in each designated area there is no dedicated student council notice board. A dedicated notice board in a central area of the school should be made available to the student council as a vehicle of communication with the student body.

The student council’s main role is involvement in fundraising activities to support a variety of causes. The work of the council in this regard has been very successful and they are lauded for this commitment. The school’s litter roster is organised and co-ordinated by the student council. The litter-free environment evident in the school and on the grounds is testimony to the good progress achieved with this project.

The role of liaison teacher, which is a post of responsibility, is effectively undertaken and is very supportive of the work of the student council. The student council has regular contact with the principal who also attends some meetings. To date the student council has had no involvement in policy development. It is recommended that the role of the student council in relation to policy development and review should be developed. The members of the student council spoke very highly of their teachers, fellow-students and the general
atmosphere in the school. They were also very satisfied with the range of subjects, of co-
curricular and extra-curricular activities on offer and of the very good facilities in the
school.

Parents are involved in the school through the active and representative parents’
association, which makes a very significant and positive contribution to all areas of school
life. It is involved in extensive fundraising to support a broad range of school activities and
has contributed significantly to developments that improve life in the school. The PA is an
activity-driven group which organises an impressive array of calendar events on an annual
basis. Monthly meetings are held and a very comprehensive constitution has been
developed. Minutes of meetings are well detailed and a financial report forms part of the
procedure at these meetings. This open and transparent approach to accountability is very
good practice. The principal attends all PA meetings and two members of the PA are also
members of the board. The PA met with the board last year for the first time and would like
arrangements to be put in place to facilitate further meetings. It is recommended that this,
as well as a meeting with the student council, be facilitated.

The PA is committed to disseminating information to the general parent body. They have
compiled an information pamphlet on the operation of the PA within the school
community. They regularly issue a newsletter to all parents which is posted on the school
website. A text messaging service between the school and the parents also has been
initiated by the PA.

Parent-teacher meetings are held on an annual basis for each year group and reports are
issued to homes following formal examinations. The parents expressed a high level of
satisfaction with the accessibility of teachers in relation to students’ progress. However the
parents articulated concern in relation to the difficulty pertaining to arranging meetings
with the principal.

1.4 Management of resources

One of the most important resources that is available to the school is the personnel. The
school is in receipt of 48.59 whole time equivalents in terms of teaching posts. Evidence
from a review of individual teacher timetables indicate that they are deployed for the
appropriate number of hours each week. No evidence was provided of whole-staff
continuous professional development (CPD). A programme of professional development
for staff should be devised to support teaching and learning across all subjects and
programmes. This programme of CPD should include the sharing of expertise that exists
within the staff, in particular in the areas of ICT, SEN and EAL.

In addition to the timetabled Religion programme seventy-five minutes are timetabled
weekly for assemblies before morning class begins. In the vast majority of cases the
checking of attendance and uniform are also carried out during this time. Notwithstanding
the benefit of these assemblies and in the context of a shortfall in time allocation to some
subjects, it is recommended that this provision be reviewed to ensure that students receive
28 hours of instruction per week in line with Circular letter M29/95. This review should
result in further time being available for curricular provision.

The caretaking team maintains the school plant and grounds to a high standard. However
following discussions with students, it is suggested that there is a need for more careful
monitoring of sanitary facilities and that such facilities in different areas of the school are
open and available to students throughout the school day.
The school has three secretaries, one full-time and two who are job sharing. They carry out their work efficiently and effectively and make a very valuable contribution to the administration of the school. In order to maximise the benefits of the administrative staff it is recommended that each is provided with a contract with clearly defined roles and an agreed job description. This would eliminate ambiguities in relation to duties and responsibilities, would facilitate self-evaluation on completion of assigned work and enable each individual to develop key areas of expertise to support the administrative management of the school.

Classrooms are predominantly teacher-based in the main campus and in some cases are well decorated with subject-specific posters and students work. Such stimulating learning environments are recommended in all rooms. In the first-year building, classrooms are student based and it is recommended that these are developed as print-rich and motivational learning environments. The new building is in very good condition, is bright and spacious and the corridors have commendable displays of artwork and pictures celebrating students’ achievement. The school has a broad range of specialist rooms. Under the summer work scheme the refurbishment of the home economics rooms in the older part of the new facility has been recently completed. The facilities in one of the science laboratories have also been upgraded. The school benefits from the services of a full-time laboratory assistant and the laboratories are maintained to a very high standard. It is important that the equipment in all specialist rooms is functioning and that mechanisms are put in place to deal promptly with any problems arising.

The school has very good sporting facilities which include an all-weather hockey pitch, basketball and tennis courts and a new full sized gymnasium and fitness suite.

The school has an extensive information and communication technology (ICT) infrastructure and all classrooms in the main campus are equipped with a networked computer, an integrated DVD and CD player, an audio amplifier and speakers, ceiling-mounted data projector and projection screen. There are also interactive whiteboards in a number of classrooms. Each student is provided with a username, password and an allocated server space for file storage. Senior management is highly commended for these provisions which have enabled all teachers to integrate the use of ICT in the classroom to support teaching and learning. In addition the school has one computer room with thirty computers available to all year groups on a booking basis, a technical graphics (TG) room, a senior computer room available to TY and LCVP students and a bank of PCs in the shared area outside the home economics rooms. In the first-year building there are no ICT facilities. However it was reported by the principal that plans are underway to equip this building with ICT. It is recommended that an ICT plan should be developed in order to create the conditions for ICT to be thoroughly integrated into the curriculum with staff and students becoming autonomous users of the available systems and ICT resources.

The school’s health and safety statement has not yet been adopted by the board. The health and safety statement does not reflect the current context of the school and there is no designated safety officer. The role and responsibility of safety officer should be immediately assigned and the school’s procedures in relation to health and safety should be reviewed to ensure compliance with current legislation. A detailed hazard analysis and risk assessment of all areas of the school should be included in this review and the results should be documented. This recommendation was made as part of an evaluation of Home Economics in October 2008 and has not yet been addressed. The procedures developed by some subject departments and contained in subject plans will inform this process. There is currently a disconnect between the draft health and safety statement and the policies outlined in the student journal in particular in relation to evacuation procedures and the bullying statement. It is recommended that these anomalies are addressed. The draft health and safety statement should then be presented to the board for adoption and thereafter be
reviewed and updated annually. This whole-school document should provide a framework within which procedures and practices in relation to health and safety can be developed in a consistent manner across departments. Concerns were expressed during the evaluation about the infrequency of fire drills. It is recommended that fire drills take place regularly and that evacuation procedures are posted in all classrooms.

Awareness of environmental issues is led by the student council and year council members. A programme of recycling is in place and groups of students are assigned on a rotational basis to ensure that year-specific areas within the school are free of litter and clean. This work is highly commended. The school had a Green Schools committee and although progress was made this initiative is no longer in operation. It is recommended that this be reviewed so that the enthusiasm of students for this project is harnessed and the school seeks to attain a Green Flag.

2. QUALITY OF SCHOOL PLANNING

2.1 The school plan

The formal process of school planning was initiated in 2006 with an input from SDPI on whole-school planning and subject department planning. The school has had limited engagement with whole-school planning to date. Only a small number of policies exist and these include the code of behaviour, a general admissions statement, an admission statement for inclusion of students to the special needs class and a draft health and safety statement which includes a bullying and harassment policy. There is a guidance plan in place: however it does not encompass a whole-school approach to guidance provision. Some of the policies are in need of review and updating so that they can be developed into comprehensive and robust working documents. The board and senior management should now prioritise the development of the school plan and should identify the policy areas that need to be progressed to ensure compliance with current legislation. All policies developed should be streamlined to reflect the school’s context, should be dated on adoption by the board and should indicate a review date. All school partners should be consulted in relation to policy development from an early stage.

The current structures that exist within the school to support planning include the provision of three planning days at the beginning of the school year and a special duties post of responsibility which is associated with school development planning. It is recommended that the staff as a collective body discuss and identify developmental priorities within the framework devised by the board. The senior management team should work with identified post holders to facilitate the formation of sub-committees to plan the actions required to achieve key developmental priorities as well as to engage in policy formulation. This approach to strategic planning and review should ensure a collective direction for the school community to meet the needs of students, to enhance curricular provision for all students and to ensure efficiency, consistency and effectiveness in structures and procedures in the school. It will also provide the support structure necessary to assist the planning co-ordinator in carrying out the duties attached to the post.

The principal reported that in compliance with Post-primary Circulars M45/05 and 0062/2006, the board of management had formally adopted the Child Protection Guidelines for Post-primary Schools (Department of Education and Science, September 2004). However written evidence was not provided to verify this. Confirmation was not 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 not been appointed in line with the requirements of the guidelines. The board of management should address this issue as a matter of urgency.

3. QUALITY OF CURRICULUM PROVISION

3.1 Curriculum planning and organisation

Our Lady’s Bower offers a broad and balanced curriculum including the Junior Certificate (JC), a junior-cycle course based on a Further Education Training Awards Council (FETAC) programme, Transition Year (TY), the established Leaving Certificate (LC), the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP) and the Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA). The school provides a very wide range of subjects in both cycles. The PA and students expressed a high level of satisfaction with this provision.

Junior cycle classes are mixed-ability in nature for the most part and a combination of mixed-ability and streaming pertains at senior cycle. Concurrent timetabling arrangements are in place for the delivery of core subjects in all year groups thus enabling students to move between the levels. This is commended as good practice. At senior cycle students can only access available subjects on offer at higher level on the condition that a minimum of a grade C at higher level in the Junior Certificate examination has been achieved. This restriction should be reviewed in the interest of equity of opportunity being afforded to all students. Decisions in relation to subject choice should be decided upon following consultation between the students, parents, subject teachers and the guidance counsellor.

A comprehensive master timetable was not available to the inspection team. An analysis of class group timetables indicated that there are some issues that need to be addressed. Timetabled provision for the core subjects of Irish, English and Mathematics should be reviewed to allow for greater equity in provision. Whilst Physical Education (PE) is provided to all year groups, it was noted that for most year groups only a single period of either thirty-five or forty minutes is offered. It is recommended that the school review the current provision for PE to ensure that it is in line with the recommendations outlined in the Rules and Programmes for Secondary Schools in terms of time allocation and blocking of class periods. The number of subjects offered throughout the junior cycle should be reviewed to ensure that there is an adequate class period allocation for the delivery of all subjects.

Class periods are generally well distributed across the week. However there are a number of subjects in both cycles where class periods are timetabled on consecutive days and as a result a significant period of time elapses before students have contact again with the material being studied. Whilst acknowledging timetable constraints, it is recommended that this provision be reviewed to ensure more frequent exposure to subjects. In senior cycle French and German are part of the optional curriculum and are assigned some double class periods on the optional subject blocks. In line with best practice there should be daily timetabled provision for languages where possible.

There is a high uptake of the school’s optional TY programme. The TY programme was introduced in 1984 and has been running successfully since that time. The four layers of the TY programmes including core, sampling, modular and calendar events are included in the programme’s curriculum. Students follow eight core subjects and the overall class period allocation to this layer absorbs 63% of the available time on a weekly basis. The modular and sampling areas of study comprise 27% of weekly timetable periods with the remained assigned to calendar events. Although the modules provide for some sampling of Leaving Certificate subjects a distinct sampling layer should be developed. In line with the bridging
aims of TY this should enable students to sample in a balanced manner all of the optional
subjects offered by the school as part of the Leaving Certificate curriculum. The students
participate in an extensive range of calendar events some of which take place outside
timetabled classes. Whilst this range is highly commended in promoting the holistic
development of students it necessitates the borrowing of classes and compromises the
delivery of the planned curriculum and the integrity of the timetable. To minimise these
disruptions it is recommended that a time slot such as a dedicated afternoon be timetabled
throughout the year for these activities.

It was clearly evident from school documentation that student non-attendance in school and
in specific classes is a significant problem in TY. Given the importance of attendance for
student learning, structures should be put in place to address this issue. It is recommended
that a year head be assigned to the TY cohort and that the close monitoring of attendance
and communication with parents in relation to this be part of the year head’s remit.
Strategies to enhance attendance should be developed and these should be consistently
applied.

The TY programme plan is a comprehensive document that includes the organisational
details of the programme and effective instruments of evaluation. This work is highly
commended. There are curricular plans for all areas of study and these are at different
stages of development. There is a general need to review all curricular plans for TY in line
with the national aims for TY, in particular in relation to the development of meaningful
cross-curricular links. This review could further develop the variety of assessment modes
used to evaluate student progress and to raise expectations for learning. The home
economics plan could be used as a template to support this work.

The TY programme is evaluated and teacher and student feedback informs planning for the
introduction of new modules. This is very good practice and should be extended to include
the views of parents.

In senior cycle students choose between LCVP, Applied Mathematics and choir. Currently
there is a high uptake of the LCVP in both years of the programme, which reflects a steady
increase in student participation in the programme since its inception. The link modules are
timetabled appropriately in line with the LCVP guidelines. It was noted that there is a need
for greater liaison between the LCVP team and the learning-support team and teachers who
support students for whom English is an additional language. In this regard formal
procedures should be put in place to allow for the sharing of information in relation to the
needs of these students so as to enhance the delivery of the link modules. The LCVP plan
states that there is a need for an ab-initio language provision for those students who do not
choose a language for senior cycle. If such a cohort of students exists such language
provision should be made available. It is also recommended that there be timetabled
guidance provision for LCVP students and that this be delivered by the guidance
counsellor.

The LCVP plan is comprehensive and includes the organisational details of the programme.
The co-ordinator of programmes who also acts as the LCVP co-ordinator has attended in-
service on LCVP. It is recommended that the teachers who play a key role in the delivery of
the programme be also facilitated to attend in-service.

The LCA programme was introduced in September 2007 in response to the needs of a
cohort of students identified by the learning-support department. This is commended.
Currently there are six students following the programme in sixth year only. In order to
promote the programme it has been decided to include an input on LCA at the fifth-year
options evening for parents. Such an input on both LCA and LCVP should be included to
enhance students’ and parents’ awareness of these programmes.
The co-ordinator of programmes has a weekly timetabled meeting with the principal about TY. This is good practice. However this meeting should also include an input on other programmes including LCA. To facilitate this, a core team representing all the programmes should be put in place and this team should have regular contact with the co-ordinator of programmes. In the interest of building expertise and capacity across the programmes, membership of the core team should rotate among key personnel involved in the delivery of each of the programmes.

3.2 Arrangements for students’ choice of subjects and programmes

Students and parents are informed in a timely fashion about the programmes and subjects on offer in the school, both on entry and following third year. First-year students and their parents attend an enrolment afternoon and receive a school prospectus in the second term of the academic year prior to entry to the school. This enrolment afternoon includes an overview of all subjects given by the principal, along with information about the code of behaviour and the general operation of the school. At this time decisions are made in relation to subject choice and the school principal is available to discuss the various options with parents on an individual basis. In supporting the transfer of students to post-primary education a number of recommendations are made. It is recommended that a sampling programme is put in place so that students are better informed when making subject choice decisions. In the interest of using the available expertise in the school, the guidance counsellor should have a central role in advising students and parents on subject choice. The learning-support co-ordinator should take responsibility for dealing with all documentation pertaining to students with identified special educational needs. The devolvement of responsibility to qualified key personnel in these areas will leave more time available to the principal to concentrate on providing leadership to the school community.

At senior cycle there is an open choice of subjects and this student-centred approach is highly commended. The school hosts a fifth-year options and TY information night which includes some input on LCVP. It is recommended that parents receive information on all programmes available in the school. The deputy principal currently co-ordinates the fifth-year options and the co-ordinator of programmes provides an input on TY. It is advised that the guidance counsellor should be central to this process.

3.3 Co-curricular and extra-curricular provision

A broad range of extra-curricular and co-curricular activities is available in the school which enhances the artistic, cultural, aesthetic, sporting and social development of students. The menu of activities ranges from a variety of sports such as hockey, football, basketball, Gaelic football, to drama, musical activities, public speaking, debating, Gaisce awards and art projects. The school has developed an enviable reputation, for instance, in the BT Young Scientist and the Chemistry and Mathematics Olympiads. The display of accolades on the school corridors bears testimony to the students’ many achievements and to the school’s sense of pride in these.

Members of staff are commended for their energy and commitment in providing all of the co-curricular and extra-curricular activities available to students in the school. Much of the co-curricular and extra-curricular activity is provided outside of normal school hours. Teachers and school management deserve the highest praise for providing such a range of activities which offers opportunities for many students to develop their talents and interests across a broad spectrum.
4. QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN SUBJECTS

4.1 Planning and preparation

Subject department structures are in place in the school. In the case of some subject and programme areas, regular meetings take place. It is recommended that more regular formal meetings be facilitated to allow for collaborative planning at subject department level across all departments. The main points and key decisions taken at meetings should be documented as a record of the work of the department and to support continuity in the planning process. The role of coordinator should be rotated so as to build leadership among the teaching team and distribute responsibility appropriately.

The subject and programme planning documentation made available to inspectors show a significant variation between departments in the level of engagement with subject planning. Subject plans range from rudimentary plans to some very thorough and comprehensive documents. Best practice was observed where programmes of work detailed the content to be delivered within specified timeframes, the corresponding learning outcomes to be achieved, the particular resources to be used, the suggested methodologies and assessment modes. It is recommended that this good practice be employed in all departments in line with recommendations made in previous subject inspection reports and in the subject inspection reports attached. Good practice in relation to the sharing of resources in electronic form was noted in the history department and in respect of senior cycle Geography. In some cases these resources are on the school’s intranet system. This good practice should be extended to other subject areas.

Curricular plans for the delivery of subjects within programmes are at various stages of development. In History a very innovative programme has been developed in line with the underpinning ethos of TY. Whilst there is good provision in Geography for the development of skills in the TY programme, a fieldwork investigation is recommended to further enhance these skills. Both the Irish and Mathematics plans should be reviewed to provide students with a different learning experience that has a broader cross-curricular focus as is envisaged in the TY guidelines and in the case of Mathematics to reflect the mixed-ability class organisation system in place. Subject and programme plans that could be used as templates to guide the future development of subject and programme planning include Home Economics, Chemistry, Business and LCVP.

Across the subject and programme plans reviewed, two recurring themes emerged: the need for formal procedures to be put in place for the communication of information; and the sharing of resources between subject teachers and the learning-support department. Many subject plans also indicated language difficulties for EAL students across subjects and programmes. Planning at whole-school level should focus on developing practices and procedures to support the delivery of curricula for these students.

There was evidence of very good individual preparation and planning for the lessons observed.

4.2 Learning and teaching

The quality of teaching and learning in the subjects evaluated was very good. The lesson objectives were presented to the students at the outset of almost all lessons. Best practice
was observed where the expected learning outcomes were shared with the students and where they were given an opportunity at the end of the lesson to reflect on their learning and how and what was achieved. This practice which fosters a greater level of understanding and thereby ownership of their learning and of themselves as learners among students should be extended to all lessons.

A range of methodologies for teaching and learning was used in all of the lessons observed. Best practice was observed where the methodologies and strategies employed stimulated each student’s active participation, where they provided for a good balance between teacher exposition and student participation and where the techniques facilitated effective differentiation of learning and supported the integrated development of language skills. Some very good examples of group work were observed in almost all subject areas. Those in which the task was clearly defined, where members of the group had a clear role, where time limits were set and adhered to, and in which feedback took place were most effective.

Suitable resources presented in various media were integrated into many of the lessons observed to support learning. These included worksheets, maps, documents, soundtracks, *PowerPoint* slides and art work. The use of authentic texts and the selection of a variety of resources which addressed the different learning styles of students represent very good practice. An over reliance on the textbook was noted in a small number cases. In these instances a more judicious use of textbooks is recommended. The use of ICT in a number of subject areas was exemplary. It was most effective in those instances in which it was used as a learning tool rather than solely to present content. ICT was imaginatively used for instance to aid students when checking prior learning, to demonstrate complex mathematical concepts and to help students understand the theme in a poem and identify with the poet. It is recommended that the expertise already evident in the use of ICT as a learning tool be shared across subject departments and the curriculum and that the very good level of ICT resources available in the school be fully exploited to support learning.

Some very good examples of the use of questioning were observed. Questioning strategies were most effective where they supported differentiation thereby fostering student engagement, providing challenges appropriate to the students’ different levels of ability and where they supported the development of higher order thinking skills.

Classroom management was very good in all instances and a very positive rapport was apparent between students and teachers. Students were praised and affirmed for their efforts. Most lessons were appropriately paced and transitions between activities were seamlessly managed. With reference to a minority of cases however, it is recommended that more effective use be made of the class contact time available to benefit learning. Tasks which could, for instance, be completed independently by students as homework should be assigned as such.

There was a very strong work ethic in evidence among students in all lessons observed. Students displayed confidence when responding to questions in class and in interactions with the inspectors. It was evident that teachers generally set high expectations of students and this is also reflected in analyses of student achievement in the state examinations.

### 4.3 Assessment

Practices in relation to the assignment and correction of homework are very good. A homework policy is in place and is being implemented. Homework is regularly assigned and corrected. Homework copies are appropriately monitored and best practice was evident in instances where the correction of homework reflected the principles of assessment for learning and where it provided opportunities for shared learning and reinforced the
students’ understanding of the material in hand. This very good practice should be more widely adopted as standard practice across all subject departments.

The school has not yet developed a whole-school assessment policy. However, formal examinations are held for non-examination classes at Christmas and just prior to the summer holidays. Common papers are set within year groups in the different subject areas and are diligently corrected using agreed marking schemes. Examination classes sit mock examinations early in the second term. Parents are appropriately informed of students’ progress through school reports, annual parent-teacher meetings for each year group and the student journal.

A range of assessment instruments is used to assess ongoing student learning. These include written class tests, teacher questioning in class and project work. The use of project work is particularly commendable as it facilitates a practical and independent approach to learning and the materials produced can be used to enhance the learning environment. The value of small-scale project work as a mode of assessment in all subject areas should be explored and should form an integral part of ongoing subject department planning.

In order to capture the existing good practice and to facilitate a whole-school approach to assessment, it is recommended that a policy detailing an integrated approach to assessment, homework and attainment be developed as a central part of ongoing school development planning.

5. Quality of Support for Students

5.1 Inclusion of students with additional educational needs

There are significant weaknesses in the quality of supports provided to students and limited documentation was provided on support for students in the school. A draft learning-support plan has been developed according to the Learning-Support Guidelines for primary schools (2000). The plan outlines the role of all stakeholders involved in the provision for additional educational needs, and makes reference in a general manner to intervention strategies, assessment and monitoring of students. It is recommended that this draft plan be reviewed and that a special educational needs (SEN) policy and plan be developed in line with the advice set out in the guidelines on Inclusion of Students with Special Educational Needs Post-Primary Guidelines (2007). This plan should detail all practices and procedures in place to support students with additional educational needs and should also include a whole-school approach to the development of literacy and numeracy.

In supporting students with additional educational needs, the school has accessed all the hours to which it is entitled. Based on the information provided by the school, not all of these hours are being used for their intended purpose. It is recommended that all resources are used for their intended purpose. The current models of provision for additional support include the formation of small class groups primarily in English, Mathematics and Science, with some support provided in Religion and Home Economics across all year groups. One-to-one support is also provided to a very small number of students. There is a special class in the junior-certificate year and students in this class follow a reduced curriculum that is based on a FETAC programme. The curricular programme in place for them, the length of time students remain in the class and the extent to which the progress of students is assessed is not clearly documented. A revised SEN policy should address these issues. Procedures for transfer to senior cycle programmes should ensure that all students have access to all programmes and that a particular junior cycle placement does not restrict the programme choice at senior cycle. It is also advised that appropriate certification arrangements are in place for this cohort of students.
There are approximately thirty teachers involved in the provision of additional support. The main criteria used for the allocation of teachers to ‘special tuition’, is the topping up of individual teachers’ timetables. It is recommended that school management identify a smaller core team of teachers to support students with SEN. This will enable more effective planning, monitoring and evaluation of support for those students. It will reduce instances where different teachers in the same subject area provide SEN support to the same student. It will provide the opportunity for school management to build the professional expertise of a core group of teachers in this area. This smaller team should include members of staff with SEN qualifications, the guidance counsellor and personnel with experience and interest in the area.

A formal SEN communication network should be established within the school to provide a forum for feedback on student progress and for sharing resource materials and professional expertise on differentiated methodologies. The SEN team should develop links with the Irish Learning Support Association (ILSA) and the Irish Association of Teachers in Special Education (IATSE), and should seek support from the Second Level Support Service (SLSS) and the Special Education Support Service (SESS) to assist the school in effectively supporting students with SEN. Information acquired could be shared with all members of staff as a means of fostering a whole-school approach to the inclusion of students with additional educational needs.

Students are identified for extra support through communication with feeder national schools, the personal details form completed by parents on entry to the school, psychometric testing by the guidance counsellor and the observations of class teachers. The outcomes of diagnostic testing are furnished to the principal. This work should be undertaken by the SEN co-ordinator and the guidance counsellor. In addition to testing of students on entry, there should be regular re-assessment and monitoring of the effectiveness of the supporting interventions in meeting students’ identified needs.

The school has an allocation of .91 whole-time teacher equivalents to provide support for students with EAL. Documentation provided to the inspection team did not provide evidence of an appropriate and cohesive model of provision in terms of assessment procedures, or of providing support in English to enable students to access the curriculum or to socially integrate into school life. It is recommended that the general provision for EAL be reviewed, and that planning for teaching and learning and for assessment be undertaken. As a first step, a designated role of EAL co-ordinator with a clearly defined brief should be re-established. The capacity of the EAL teaching staff to support students should be developed, through facilitating teachers to avail of the in-service training available through the Second Level Support Service (SLSS). Appropriate assessment procedures should be put in place using the English as an Additional Language Post-primary Assessment Kit issued by the Department. Membership of the professional association, the English Language Support Teachers’ Association (ELSTA) should be encouraged. Relevant information should be disseminated to all teachers so that English language support is available across all curriculum areas.

The school has .89 whole-time teacher equivalents to support Traveller students, however the school did not provide any information on these students.

5.2 Guidance and student support in the whole-school context

Our Lady’s Bower has an ex-quota allocation of 1.27 whole-time teacher equivalents for guidance. The school has one qualified guidance counsellor. It is recommended that the
total allocation be utilised for its intended purpose and that teachers be deployed to the optimum level for guidance provision across the full student body.

The quality of guidance provision and, the structures and facilities to support the service at a whole-school level are not satisfactory. Guidance provision is targeted primarily in the senior cycle. In TY there is one class of timetabled guidance throughout the year for each of the four class groups. In addition there is one weekly designated class period for guidance co-timetabled with LCVP and Applied Mathematics in sixth-year to facilitate input from guest speakers. The guidance counsellor also meets with fifth-year and sixth-year students on a one-to-one basis and there is occasional borrowing of classes to disseminate information at pertinent times. A careers newsletter is issued to sixth-year students on a regular basis to facilitate ongoing communication with them. It is recommended that the school reviews the current timetabling arrangement for Guidance to ensure the optimal and equitable deployment of the guidance resources. The new provision should include timetabled classes for all fifth-year and sixth-year students. This provision will give a greater standing and visibility to Guidance within the school and will facilitate the guidance counsellor to carry out the role in a more cohesive manner.

The guidance counsellor has no formal class contact with junior cycle students. Access to first-year and second-year students is organised through the borrowing of classes and occurs approximately four times a year by arrangement with individual teachers. Third-year students are facilitated to arrange individual sessions by appointment with the guidance counsellor in agreement with the year head. As there is an overlap between many of the objectives of the Guidance and Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) programmes it is recommended that there should be collaboration between the guidance counsellor and the SPHE co-ordinator in planning the guidance and SPHE programmes for junior cycle students.

The guidance counsellor is available on enrolment day to meet with parents of in-coming first year students. Formal input on the guidance service, the role of the guidance counsellor and information on the importance of subject choice and level should be provided on that day. This will enhance the status and visibility of Guidance. Third-year students are supported by the guidance counsellor in selecting programmes and subjects for study to Leaving Certificate. However much of the consultation on senior-cycle options is part of the remit of the deputy principal. It is recommended that the guidance counsellor be facilitated to play a more integral role in supporting student choice for senior cycle.

Referrals to the guidance counselling service can be made from many sources within the school. The procedures for referrals should be formalised and documented so that they are clear to all stakeholders and to support the delivery of the service in a systematic manner. The guidance counsellor should also attend the weekly meetings between junior and senior year heads and the principal to help build a cohesive network of communication.

The guidance counsellor has developed a guidance plan to support the delivery of the service. This work is commended. The further development of a comprehensive guidance plan, incorporating a whole-school approach to guidance provision, should be prioritised. To this end the formation of a guidance team is suggested. This plan should clearly define the role of the guidance counsellor and the role of staff members in relation to guidance. It should outline the linkages between Guidance and the school’s curricular programmes, student support structures and external agencies. The following documents should be consulted: Planning a School Guidance Programme, (National Centre for Guidance in Education 2004) and Guidelines for Second Level Schools on the implications of Section 9 (c) of the Education Act 1998, relating to students’ access to appropriate guidance (2006). In addition the policy template for the development of a guidance plan available on www.education.ie may prove useful. There are long-term programmes of work in guidance
for TY and senior cycle year groups which outline the content covered with these students. It is recommended that programmes are developed for all year groups to include the three separate but interlinked areas of personal and social development, educational guidance and career guidance in line with Circular Letter PPT12/05. All programmes should be dated and provide a facility for review.

The facilities provided for guidance in the school require upgrading. There is one small office which is equipped with a phone, computer and printer. A number of health and safety concerns in relation to the guidance area, including the level of noise from a downpipe, the quality of the air, dampness and the condition of the adjoining toilet, should be addressed as a matter of priority. In the context of the recommended timetabled provision of guidance for class groups and the current available space in the school, a designated guidance room, that could accommodate a careers library and ICT facilities, should be developed. The careers’ notice board should be more centrally located so that it is readily accessible to all students. There is no formal budget for guidance. The parents’ association has made funds available to support the purchase of resource materials and to cover some expenses. It is recommended that an agreed budget is made available at the start of the year to defray the costs incurred for the delivery of all aspects of the programme.

The guidance counsellor is a member of the Institute of Guidance Counsellors (IGC) and attends the annual conference. Professional development opportunities for the guidance counsellor should be supported by senior management including the payment of membership fees and facilitating the guidance counsellor’s attendance at counselling supervision.

Good links have been established with outside agencies and third level colleges. Student attendance at the Higher Options Conference is organised by the guidance counsellor and students are encouraged to attend college open days in their own time. In order to support students in benefiting from these visits, students should be accompanied to the main colleges to which students from the school transfer. The guidance counsellor co-ordinates the Higher Education Access Route (HEAR) programme through which our Lady’s Bower is linked to National University of Galway (NUIG). Tracking of students’ destinations is carried out by the guidance counsellor and some past pupils are invited back to the school to speak with students. This is commended as it provides a source of information and motivation for current students.

The pastoral care system in the school consists largely of the year head and assistant year head support structure. The role of the year head and the assistant year head as documented are general in manner and include mainly disciplinary, academic and administrative functions. The year head also has a role in fostering and shaping good behaviour and is centrally involved in the ladder of procedures for dealing with misbehaviour. Weekly meetings of the year heads with the principal allows for the communication of pastoral issues. This is good practice. Senior management are also available to students who may be experiencing difficulties and the deputy principal plays an important role in supporting and debriefing students who display patterns of persistent misbehaviour. Each class is further supported by a class tutor who frequently moves with the group from year to year. This effort to provide for sustained contact is commended as it helps to build strong relationships.

In order to strengthen and formalise the pastoral care system in the school, the pastoral responsibilities’ attaching to the posts of year head and assistant year heads should be clearly defined and accordingly assigned. This would help to put in place clearly recognisable structures that students and parents can identify. It would also remove the over-reliance on the principal as the main point of contact for pastoral care. The role of
class tutor should be delineated in terms of its functions in the support of students and in supporting the work of the year head.

It is recommended that a student support team or care team is established to ensure that support for the welfare of students is further augmented. This team could consist of the deputy principal, guidance personnel, learning-support personnel, SPHE and RE teachers and the EAL co-ordinator. A pastoral care policy should be developed in consultation with all stakeholders to formalise pastoral care provision within the school. This policy should document the roles and responsibilities of the relevant personnel and should be formulated within the framework of the school’s mission statement and ethos. It should reflect the principles of respect, care and justice espoused in the draft dignity in the workplace charter. Once in existence the policy will facilitate meaningful evaluation of the school’s care structures.

The school organises an awards ceremony each year to acknowledge and celebrate students’ efforts and achievements across a range of areas. Various displays of academic, sporting and other achievements were visible in the school environment. The ceremony and displays are testimony of the school’s pride in its students.

6. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT

The following are the main strengths identified in the evaluation:

- The board of management has a very strong interest in the school, is clearly aware of its statutory obligations and has availed of training.
- The senior management team is complimented for its strong commitment to acquiring the new school building and facilities. The new building enables teachers to provide a stimulating learning environment in classrooms and management is committed to the development of an extensive information and communication technology (ICT) infrastructure.
- The work of the school is supported by a committed parents’ association which communicates effectively with the parent body and by the valuable contribution made by efficient secretarial staff.
- Members of the student council are capable, enthusiastic and committed to social justice and environmental concerns.
- The school offers a broad and balanced curriculum and provides a very wide range of subjects in both cycles. This includes well-developed TY and LCVP programmes. A broad range of co-curricular and extracurricular activities is made available to the students by a number of dedicated teachers.
- The quality of teaching and learning in the subjects evaluated was very good. There was evidence of very good individual preparation and planning for the lessons observed. The use of ICT in a number of subject areas was exemplary.
- Classroom management was very good in all instances and a very positive rapport was apparent between students and teachers. There was a very strong work ethic in evidence among students in all lessons observed. It was evident that teachers generally set high expectations of students and this is also reflected in analyses of student achievement in state examinations.
- Practices in relation to the assignment and correction of homework are very good.
- Good links have been established between guidance and outside agencies and third level colleges. The school participates in the Higher Education Access Route (HEAR) programme.
As a means of building on these strengths and to address areas for development, the following key recommendations are made:

- It is recommended that structures are established to enable the school to move from its former unitary management structure to one where the board of management can function effectively. The role of principal as secretary to the board be should be clearly delineated and carried out in line with the Education Act 1998.
- A review of the mission statement and its influence on the day-to-day operation of the school should be led by the board and conducted by all school partners to provide a cohesive overarching vision for the future development of the school community. A five year strategic plan should be devised in order to guide the development of the key areas of school life and to provide the context within which school policies, including those required by legislation, and school procedures are formulated and implemented.
- The board should ensure that the Child Protection guidelines are formally ratified and that written verification is available to corroborate this. An immediate review of other policies, including the draft health and safety statement and the dignity at work charter contained therein is strongly advised. This will provide a framework to develop transparent professional and respectful working relationships across the school community.
- The style of management adopted and the responsibilities and duties undertaken by the principal should be reviewed to ensure that: a shared or distributed leadership style is assumed; that the leadership capacity of the in-school management team is developed; that the leadership of the principal empowers all teaching staff; and that whole-school priorities are appropriately addressed.
- It is recommended that structures for more effective and collaborative lines of communication between all members of the school community be established. These structures should allow for a greater degree of clarity and equity in terms of roles and responsibilities and should foster positive professional working relationships among all stakeholders.
- A programme of whole-school professional development for staff should be devised to support teaching and learning across all subjects and programmes. This programme should include the sharing of expertise that exists within the staff, in particular in the areas of ICT, SEN and EAL. More regular time for meetings should be provided to allow for collaborative planning and review at subject department and programme level and between related subject areas.
- It is recommended that management reorganises the school timetable to ensure a minimum of twenty-eight hours instruction time for all the students in line with Circular Letter M29/95. Effective procedures should be put in place to ensure that an accurate record of student attendance is available at any given point in the day.
- The current provision for SEN and EAL should be reviewed in terms of the use of the allocated resources, testing of students, the models of provision and planning, to ensure that expertise amongst a core group of staff is developed. The allocated hours for guidance and counselling should also be used for their intended purpose and a whole-school approach to guidance should be established.
- A pastoral care policy should be developed to formalise pastoral care provision within the school. This policy should document the roles and responsibilities of all the relevant personnel and should reflect the principles of respect, care and justice espoused in the draft dignity at work charter.

Post-evaluation meetings were held with the principal and a member of the teaching staff, and the 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 History          2 October 2009
- Subject Inspection of Maths          9 February 2010
- Subject Inspection of Geography 24 February 2010
- Subject Inspection of Art              25 February 2010
- Subject Inspection of Gaeilge 25 February 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 wishes to thank everybody who took part in the Whole School Evaluation.

The Board notes the union directive in operation at the time of Evaluation directing staff not to attend pre or post evaluation meetings or scheduled meetings during the time of the Evaluation.

The Board welcomes the affirmation afforded to the entire School Community, This was acknowledged by the Evaluation Team when they stated (Page 6) “The members of the Student Council spoke very highly of their teachers, fellow-students and the general atmosphere in the school. They were also very satisfied with the range of subjects, of co-curricular and extra curricular activities on offer and of the very good facilities in the school”. Also on page 19: the Evaluation Team recognised the high quality of Classroom Management and the very positive rapport between Students and Teachers. It was evident to the Inspectors that teachers set high expectations of students resulting in high student achievement in State Examinations.

The board also welcomes the affirmation

- Re the Vision and commitment of all school partners in acquiring the new school building and facilities.
- Re the Broad, balanced curriculum and very wide range of subjects available to students in both cycles.
- Re the commitment and energy of staff in providing extensive range of co-curricular and extra curricular activities much of which provided outside of normal school hours.
- Re the quality of teaching and learning in the subjects evaluated was very good.
- The use of ICT in a number of subject areas was exemplary
- Re that the school offers a broad and balanced curriculum and provides a very wide range of subjects in both cycles. This includes well developed Transition Year and Leaving Cert Vocational Programme (LCVP) programmes which is reflected in the very high uptake in both.

The dignity of the student is supported and affirmed, above all, in our school. The students of our school are imbued with the spirit and ethos of la Sainte Union and having acquired a holistic education, they are well prepared for adult life.

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

Having already implemented many of the recommendations in the report, the board of Management is determined to engage with all school partners in the ongoing process of full implementation thereof.