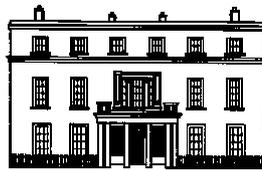


An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Whole-School Evaluation
REPORT

Christian Brothers Secondary School
New Ross, County Wexford
Roll number: 63600F

Date of inspection: 24 September 2010



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

WHOLE-SCHOOL EVALUATION

A whole-school evaluation of Christian Brothers Secondary school (CBS), New Ross, was undertaken in September 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 were evaluated in detail, and separate reports are available on these subjects. 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

CBS Secondary school was founded in 1849 to provide a Catholic education at both primary and secondary level to all boys living in the New Ross area. The student population which was 240 in 1975 increased to approximately 400 in the 1990s, but dipped to 162 in 2005. The fluctuation in numbers coincided with proposals for rationalising education provision by amalgamating some of the five existing post-primary schools in the town. These proposals were outlined in the Department of Education and Science (DES) commissioned McCarthy Report of 2002 and the DES School Planning Section report of 2004. However, no decision has yet been made regarding the amalgamation and the school continues to function as a discrete post-primary school. Numbers have increased to a student population of 239 in the current year. The school became co-educational in 1989 and is currently under the trusteeship of the Edmund Rice Schools' Trust (ERST).

1. QUALITY OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT

1.1 Characteristic spirit of the school

According to its mission statement, Christian Brothers' Secondary School New Ross is a Catholic, voluntary co-educational school where students, staff, management and parents offer a holistic and caring, learning environment. In the pursuit of excellence, the school offers a balanced education, where the dignity and uniqueness of each person is valued and respected.

Members of the school community support the implementation of the school's mission statement. According to the trustees, the charisma of Edmund Rice, founder of the Christian Brothers, is reflected in all school policies and his values underpin all that happens in the daily life of the school. Members of the board of management spoke of the sense of partnership that exists throughout the school and of the genuine care demonstrated by senior management and staff for the students. Members of the parents' association were positive in their appraisal of the broad education afforded to their children. Students highlighted the quality of care and support afforded to them during their time in the school and this was evident during the course of the evaluation.

Commitment to the overall vision for the school is reflected in the work carried out by the different members of the school community. CBS New Ross is an inclusive school, accepting all students irrespective of their needs and offering them a broad and comprehensive curriculum. The board of management works to ensure that the school is effectively managed as an educational establishment where quality teaching and learning can take place. The range of curricular, co-curricular and extra-curricular activities undertaken by teachers in the school contributes to supporting the holistic development of its students.

1.2 School ownership and management

The present board of management is properly constituted. The principal is secretary to the board. Members have received training from ERST. The full board meets approximately once a month and some of its subcommittees meet more frequently when the need arises. The relevant members of the board report back to the staff and the parents' association. To further the good practice of reporting back, it is recommended that the written reports to be drawn up for staff and for parents should be agreed at the end of each board meeting. The agreed reports should be included in the minutes.

Members of the board of management are fully cognisant of their roles and responsibilities and have been very proactive in carrying out the duties associated with their position. During its term of office the board has identified many challenges for the school and has worked to bring about change and improvement. A five-year plan was drawn up by the previous board of management in 2006 identifying a number of priorities for the school. These included the provision of a broad and well balanced curriculum underpinned by high quality teaching and learning; ensuring financial stability; and the promotion of the school's identity as a co-educational, multi-cultural voluntary secondary school. The current board has, through its work, experienced good success in progressing many of these priorities. The student cohort has increased from an intake of 162 students in 2005 to its current intake of 239 students. Furthermore, newcomer students now comprise a significant percentage of the school population. Considerable success has also been achieved in improving the school's financial stability and this has facilitated further investment in maintaining and upgrading the school plant.

The board has also been involved in the ratification of a number of school policies which have been developed in consultation with the entire school community. To bring this process to full fruition it is recommended that, upon ratification, all new and reviewed policies should be signed and dated by the chairperson of the board and filed in the school planning folder. A record of all school policies that have been completed, those that are ongoing and those that are planned should also be kept in the school planning folder along with the timeline indicating their status and date for review. All outdated policies should then be archived in a separate folder.

1.3 In-school management

Senior management presents as a united team and is effective in carrying out the day-to-day management of the school. The principal and deputy principal meet informally every morning and a formal meeting is timetabled every Monday for the purpose of forward planning. The principal described himself as having overall responsibility for the school plant and for the deployment of staff including the co-ordination of post-holders. He also has overall responsibility for leading the school community in terms of ongoing development and improvement and for discipline. The deputy principal carries out a range of administrative tasks including co-ordinating the smooth transfer of incoming first-year students, organising the in-house examinations and co-ordinating the appeals process for the certificate examinations. He is also head of junior cycle and is involved in promoting school planning and learning. In addition to their management duties both the principal and deputy principal are timetabled for a number of teaching hours and are involved in co-curricular duties. As part of their leadership role, members of senior management should delegate some of the tasks currently being undertaken by them to members of middle management or to the general body of teaching staff.

Middle management comprises three assistant principals (AP) and three special duties teachers (SDT). While one of the AP posts involves significant duties of a management and

curricular nature, the duties assigned to the other AP posts do not afford the incumbents opportunities to contribute in a similar meaningful way as members of a middle management team. It is recommended that these AP posts of responsibility be reviewed and that the duties assigned reflect the level of responsibility and workload commensurate with the category (circular PP29_02) in addition to responding to the management needs of the school.

SDT duties include tasks of both an administrative and pastoral nature including head of senior cycle, co-ordination of the free book scheme and the student welfare committee. However, the SDT post-holders do not consider themselves as part of a formal middle management structure. Senior management should look at ways of providing SDT post-holders with more opportunities to contribute to school development as a middle management team. Non post-holders are encouraged to take on roles such as class tutor and co-curricular activities. However, in order to further support senior management, it is recommended that these teachers also be invited to take on other responsibilities in the school. Affording all teachers the opportunity to take on more significant positions of responsibility will enhance teachers' professional development, promote collective ownership of all aspects of school development and will help build capacity for the future.

Positions of heads of junior and of senior cycle have been put in place to underpin the effective management of students. These positions have both pastoral and disciplinary duties. The head of senior cycle is a SDT post of responsibility, while the duties of the junior-cycle head are currently carried out by the deputy principal. In order to afford the deputy principal more time for his senior management duties, it is recommended that the position of head of junior cycle be allocated to another of the SDT posts. Otherwise a system could be considered whereby the work of these heads would be undertaken as a voluntary position.

The code of behaviour has recently been revised. The school has both a discipline and a welfare committee to deal with students presenting with behavioural difficulties. An effective ladder of referral is now in place moving from class tutor, to head of junior or senior cycle to the relevant committee. It was noted during the evaluation that the discipline committee did not include a female teacher. It is recommended that, as a co-educational school, the discipline committee should have an appropriate gender balance.

Strategies to support best practice in relation to classroom management and effective teaching and learning are included in a comprehensive staff handbook. The good practice of including guidelines to support consistency in the implementation of the code of behaviour was also noted. A description of the school's procedures relating to disciplinary sanctions and the ladder of referral should also be included in the staff handbook. The code of behaviour needs further revision to ensure that all sanctions are proportionate to the breaches in the code and to maintain due regard for the care and dignity of all students. It is also recommended that the use of bold print for some statements in the code of discipline be changed as the current format is open to misinterpretation.

Students have a school journal for the purpose of recording homework, absences and late slips. This is a good support for tracking student progress in school. Sanctions are in place for students who do not use the journal accordingly. Parents, in turn, are required to sign the journals each week and they are countersigned by class teachers.

The school has an attendance and participation strategy and all relevant absences and suspensions are reported to the NEWB. The school has recently introduced a texting system to manage student attendance and to inform parents of absences. This is welcome as the high number of absences, in particular absences of over twenty days, needs to be kept under constant review and addressed. Specific strategies for improving the attendance among girls

should also be instigated as it was noted that, for the month in which the evaluation took place, the number of absences among girls was greater than among boys.

There is good support for continuing professional development (CPD). A number of staff development days have taken place in the school to support teacher professional development. Teachers engaging in further study which is of relevance to their work in school are also supported in different ways.

There is an articulate and enthusiastic student council in place and elections are held annually. According to its members, issues raised at council meetings are passed on to senior management and every effort is made to accede to the students' requests. Members of the student council have also been consulted in relation to the recent review of the code of behaviour. Students have, in the past, been involved in *Dáil na nÓg*. The recent training afforded to its members by the Civic, Social and Political Education (CSPE) second-level support service will serve to further progress effective and dynamic student representation in the school.

There are good relationships between parents and senior management. There is an active and committed parents' association in place which engages in a range of fundraising activities to support the school. Members of the association spoke of senior management's willingness to listen to their views and indicated that they have been consulted in relation to a number of school policies. The text-messaging system recently introduced in the school is a useful support to good communications between school and home. Senior management was also reported to be very approachable when parents wish to discuss concerns of an individual nature. However, parents reported having little contact with the class tutors. Given the onerous nature of senior management duties it is recommended that systems be set up to facilitate parent contact with the heads or class tutors to discuss matters of individual concern.

Good relationships are also fostered with the local community. The school's sports pitches are made available to some of the local football clubs and students from the school also participate in local youth clubs and community programmes. Transition Year students' involvement with local centres for the elderly and for persons with disabilities also promotes good community spirit.

1.4 Management of resources

There are twenty members including the principal and deputy principal on the teaching staff. Fourteen are permanent whole-time teachers (PWT), two have contracts of indefinite duration (CID) and three are regular part-time (RPT) teachers. Due to the decline in the student population over a number of years, the school has currently a number of supernumerary positions.

The school operates a twenty-eight hour week, divided into forty-two lesson periods. This complies with the twenty-eight hours instruction time mandated by the *Time in School* circular (M29/95). The circular also sets out the minimum number of days that all students are required to be in school and it is essential that the integrity of the school year is maintained. A review of school documentation indicated that the Transition Year students are currently in breach of this circular as they began their current school year some days later than all other students. The Transition Year (TY) programme should be planned for the entire duration of the academic year. Furthermore a detailed school calendar should be issued at the beginning of the school year to staff and parents. The times for in-service days, parent-teacher and staff meetings should be included on the calendar and cognisance should be taken when arranging them of department circulars in relation to the integrity of the school year (M29/95) and staff and parent-teacher meetings (M34/03).

Teachers are deployed in accordance with their subject specialisms and most are timetabled to the maximum number of hours. However, the current practice whereby teachers can request and are granted timetabling concessions limits the opportunities for planning and other meetings to take place during teachers' non-class contact time. Any meetings or events that require teachers to be released from lessons compromise students' entitlement to the minimum twenty eight hours instruction time each week. Given these implications, the board of management should formulate a policy regarding timetabling requests to ensure that the volume of requests does not impact negatively on teaching and learning and the optimum functioning of the school. Furthermore, all such requests should be made to and approved by the board of management.

During the course of the evaluation it was noted that the school had not applied for all the resources to which it was entitled. These include the resources for students with English as an additional language and those for students who are members of the travelling community. Senior management should ensure that all resources to which the school is entitled to have been applied for and that the relevant students benefit from the supports available.

The school building and grounds are well maintained and an attractive outside environment has been created by students who have carried out gardening works and built picnic tables as part of their TY projects. The display of photographs on the corridor walls pays tribute to students' academic and sporting achievements in addition to acknowledging a range of successful school events. Classrooms are teacher based and this facilitates the upkeep of well-ordered rooms and the opportunity to create attractive learning environments. The school's health and safety statement has recently been updated. In the interests of health and safety, however, the current practice whereby students leave their bags on the corridors should be discontinued. Information and communication technology (ICT) facilities have recently been upgraded in the school and all rooms are now equipped with computers and data projectors. Now that ICT is more accessible the school website should be updated and used as a means of communicating with parents and the wider community. Given the efforts by the whole school community to ensure a well maintained and attractive school environment, consideration should be given to developing CBS New Ross as a green school.

2. QUALITY OF SCHOOL PLANNING

2.1 The school plan

Whole school development planning in CBS New Ross has focused in recent years primarily on the development of school policies and most of those required by legislation are in place. The outgoing board of management has carried out considerable work in developing systems to ensure that policy development and review is progressed in accordance with best practice and that continuity is facilitated for incoming boards of management. Initial work on policy development or review is carried out by a drafting committee and all relevant members of the school community are consulted in relation to the development of these policies.

Time for whole school planning is factored into staff development days and staff meetings. Senior management also indicated that, on occasions, teachers have been released from lessons to attend planning meetings. It is important to keep in mind that the time devoted to planning should not impact negatively on students' instruction time.

While the school has the relevant policies in place and this is commended, there is currently no overall school plan with its permanent and developmental sections. This needs to be addressed as a matter of priority. To this end a school planning team should be formed to instigate the development of a school plan which grounds the school policies in the context of the history, tradition and ethos of the school. The developmental section of the plan should establish a series of targets and action plans for ongoing school development and review. Furthermore, minutes should be kept of all planning meetings and stored in the school planning folder.

Following the inspectors' review of all school policies submitted during the course of the evaluation, it is recommended that the admissions policy be further reviewed as some of the statements included in the policy, particularly in relation to the school's inclusivity, need greater clarity. Furthermore, the recent decision to cap the number of incoming first-year students to forty eight should be reconsidered. The school has capacity for an increased number of students and the current situation, whereby there are a number of supernumerary positions among the teaching staff, indicates a need to increase rather than reduce the student population. The proposed reduction in numbers has the potential to threaten the school's viability as it would render maintenance of the current student population quite difficult. The impact on resources could also result in restricting the broad education currently offered to students. It is thus recommended that the school consider ways in which the student population could be increased to ensure that CBS New Ross remains in a position to fulfil its vision for the education of all its students.

Confirmation was provided that, in compliance with Post-primary Circulars M44/05 and 0062/2006, the board of management has formally adopted the Department's *Child Protection Guidelines for Post-primary Schools* (Published September 2004). Confirmation was also provided that these child protection procedures have been brought to the attention of management, school staff and parents; that a copy of the procedures has been provided to all staff (including all new staff); and that management has ensured that all staff are familiar with the procedures to be followed. A designated liaison person (DLP) and a deputy DLP have been appointed in line with the requirements of the guidelines. In order to ensure that all parents are fully aware of the *Child Protection Guidelines* the school proposes to post up the guidelines on the school website. The guidelines are also available to all parents of incoming first-year students in the information pack which is distributed to them on the induction night.

3. QUALITY OF CURRICULUM PROVISION

3.1 Curriculum planning and organisation

CBS New Ross currently offers three programmes, Junior Certificate, Transition Year (TY) and the established Leaving Certificate.

The curriculum offered in junior cycle is broad and there is a good balance between the academic and practical subjects offered. Classes are mixed-ability groupings with the exception of Irish and Mathematics. Students in Irish and Mathematics are currently organised into higher-level and ordinary-level class groups based on the results of the assessment tests that they take in the month of February prior to their entry to the school. Plans are currently being progressed to place students into mixed-ability groupings for Irish in first year and this is welcomed. It is recommended that students also be kept in mixed-ability groupings for Mathematics for as long as possible. This will provide them with the opportunity to develop their skills in these subjects and will allow all students optimum opportunity to progress to their full potential.

A well organised and comprehensive programme is in place for students who opt for TY. The aims of the programme outlined in the TY plan include the provision of different ways for students to experience learning in a range of learning environments and the development of their individual talents. The programme also aims to prepare students to become self-motivated learners. In addition to continuing to study the core subjects, students are offered the opportunity to complete a range of modules related to curricular subjects. This is to help them make informed subject choices for senior cycle. Students also engage in a number of external activities including work experience, community work, equestrian studies, film studies and some outdoor pursuit challenges.

All senior-cycle students follow the established Leaving Certificate programme. The school has in the past offered the Leaving Certificate Vocational (LCVP) programme. However, due to difficulties relating to subject combinations, the school has been unable to offer the programme in recent years. While these difficulties are acknowledged, the benefits of the programme for students with the appropriate subject combinations are such that senior management should keep the re-introduction of LCVP under active review.

Classes in senior cycle are divided into discrete higher and ordinary-level groupings for the core subjects and for those subjects where the numbers facilitate this. All others are mixed-ability groupings. A review of examination results in the certificate examinations indicates that many Leaving Certificate students are taking ordinary-level papers and achieving high outcomes. It is essential, particularly when teaching mixed-ability groupings at senior cycle, to ensure that all students are actively encouraged and facilitated to achieve to their highest potential in the uptake of levels in the certificate examinations. To this end a whole-school approach aimed at raising expectations and improving motivation among students is recommended as a matter of priority.

3.2 Arrangements for students' choice of subjects and programmes

All incoming first-year students study Irish, English, Mathematics, History, Geography, Science a modern European language, Religion, Physical Education, Civic Social and Political Education (CSPE) and Social Personal and Health Education (SPHE). In addition, students have a year-long taster programme in Business Studies, Technical Graphics, Art and Music. They continue with two of these optional subjects on entry into second year.

A recent change in curriculum provision at junior cycle has been to offer French and German on alternate years. While this has resulted in better management of resources in junior cycle, it has implications for timetabling at senior cycle. It is recommended that senior management reviews the current provision and that resource-effective ways be investigated whereby options can be set in senior cycle which will allow students to study their language of choice to Leaving Certificate.

Considerable work has recently been completed by a subcommittee of teachers in relation to subject choices and availability in senior cycle with a view to affording students the subjects they need while at the same time optimising available resources. Cognisance was taken of students' Junior Certificate results and discussions with parents and students. The outcome of this work was that following an initial open choice of option subjects, most students were offered three out of their four preferred options. Systems should now be put in place whereby the benefits of this worthy initiative can be replicated from year to year. It is also recommended that a parents' information night be held annually to inform parents of the options open to students and the implications of students' subject choices.

3.3 Co-curricular and extra-curricular provision

The range of co-curricular and extra-curricular activities offered in the school contributes significantly to the holistic development of the students. Students are given a handout at the beginning of each year with details of the activities provided in the school. Teachers reported that the majority of students are engaged in one or more activities.

A number of subject-related activities including debates and an exchange programme with a French school are organised annually to enhance students' educational and cultural experiences. Students' musical and artistic talents are fostered through the school musical organised biennially in conjunction with another of the voluntary secondary schools in the town. Community spirit is nurtured through a disability awareness programme running in the school, in addition to student participation in annual pilgrimages to Lourdes.

Sporting activities include a range of team and individual sports and the school has participated in the active school's programme. A successful social group called OWLS has also been set up by the current resource teacher for the purpose of organising a range of outings, sport and dance activities for female students in the school. The commitment of staff to co-curricular and extracurricular activities contributes in a significant way to promoting a positive school spirit.

4. QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN SUBJECTS

4.1 Planning and preparation

The four subjects inspected during the course of the evaluation were Irish, Social Personal and Health Education (SPHE), Design and Communication Graphics (DCG) and History. The position of department coordinator is undertaken on a voluntary basis in each case and involves a number of key tasks that enable the development of the teaching and learning of the subject to progress. It is recommended that, where appropriate, the position should be rotated at agreed intervals among the members of the subject team. The agreed duties and responsibilities of the coordinator should also be documented in the subject department plan where this has yet to be done. The feasibility of convening formal subject meetings more than once a year where this is currently the practice should be discussed with management.

Subject department plans to guide and inform the teaching of the individual subjects have been developed. The teachers' extended schemes of the coursework are also contained in their respective department plans. Effective planning documentation is always best viewed as work in progress rather than a finished product and towards that end the work contained in the subject plans should be further progressed. It is recommended that clear details regarding teaching methodologies, resources and learning outcomes be a standard feature of the extended schemes of coursework.

The Transition Year programme for Irish reflects the good planning invested in it to ensure that the students find the coursework interesting and appealing. As part of the ongoing development of the programme it would be worthwhile conducting an annual review of the coursework in order to ensure its continuing appeal for the students. It is recommended too, that strategies to raise students' awareness of Irish as a living language be explored. The Transition Year plan for Design and Communication Graphics is comprehensive and details the various curricular strands covered as part of the module.

All the lessons observed were well planned and prepared beforehand. In some instances teachers also submitted individual lesson plans.

4.2 Learning and teaching

The standard of teaching and learning observed was good overall with some examples of excellence. All lessons had a definite focus. The teachers frequently informed the students of the purpose of the lesson at the outset and it is recommended that this practice be universally adopted. Classroom management was uniformly good and contributed to the positive learning environment in the classrooms. In the Irish lessons observed, there was very good use of the target language. The subject team's implementation of the recommendations made in this regard in the 2006 subject inspection report for Irish is commended.

A range of effective teaching and learning strategies was employed to steadily impact on student learning. The questioning techniques of the teachers for example, helped the students to increase their knowledge and understanding of the lesson material. The identification of key words supported students in their study of the lesson topic. The employment of independent learning activities for the students such as paired work, group work, practical tasks and writing assignments was effectively utilised to consolidate their learning. Efforts made by the teachers to involve all students in the learning process and class activities were also noted. Group work and activities provide good opportunities for the integration of Irish and newcomer students and more frequent use of these is recommended. Greater use of active learning tasks is recommended in some lessons to enable students to apply and consolidate their learning in addition to establishing a better balance between the teacher and student inputs in some lessons.

There were many instances of very good use being made of resources to support lesson delivery. ICT was effectively utilised to enhance teaching and learning in a number of lessons as evidenced by the use made of PowerPoint, parametric modelling software and a DVD clip. Overhead transparencies, the class textbook, laminated pictures for a group activity and prepared handouts provided students with a greater understanding of lesson material and helped to maintain the students on task. However, there were some instances where better use could have been made of the resources available to support lesson delivery.

The quality of learning achieved by the students in the lessons observed was good. They quickly settled into work and remained engaged as the lessons developed. Their responsiveness to the teachers' questions, the voluntary contributions of individual students and their competence in undertaking assigned tasks demonstrated their learning. The students' use of Irish in responding to the teachers' questions was also indicative of their participation and learning during the course of the Irish lessons.

4.3 Assessment

The teachers employed a range of assessment strategies in the subjects evaluated to monitor and track the progress of their students. These strategies included addressing questions to the class and to named individuals, feedback from group work, set tasks such as note-taking and reading aloud, the correction of homework assignments and portfolio work. Perusal of students' folders and copybooks showed the homework being monitored by the teachers.

The students' progress is also tracked by noting their progress in the formal school examinations namely the Christmas tests, summer term examinations and the trial certificate examinations that are organised for the third-year and sixth-year classes during the spring term. The competency of students to speak Irish is monitored in the oral examinations that are organised for third, fifth and sixth-year students. This practice should be introduced for all year groups and the grades achieved by the students should be indicated on the reports sent to their homes. The achievements of the students in the

certificate examinations are another source used in the school to inform judgements regarding students' progress.

5. QUALITY OF SUPPORT FOR STUDENTS

5.1 Inclusion of students with additional educational needs

CBS New Ross has an ex-quota allocation of .7 whole-time teacher equivalents (WTE) for learning support and a concession of .5 WTE for special needs. There is a learning support teacher who co-ordinates the use of this resource. In addition, the school deploys a privately funded teacher to work specifically with students eligible for learning support or resource teaching. Some members from the general teaching staff are also deployed to take some withdrawal groups. In these instances, the learning support co-ordinator tries to match the individual teachers' strengths to the needs of students. There is a learning support policy and plan in place and the learning support coordinator and resource teacher meet formally once a week. A record of all meetings is kept in line with good practice.

Students are assessed on entry into the school for the purpose of identifying those in need of additional support. The assessment test currently used for this purpose is the AH2. It is recommended that a more up-to date assessment test be used. To this end, the learning support department should refer to the Department of Education and Skill's list of tests approved for use in 2010-2011 for guidance and/or learning support in post-primary schools. This list is available on the Department's website.

Some of the students requiring additional support drop one of the optional subjects in second year and this affords them a certain number of periods in the week for individual tuition. Those who have resource hours allocated to them may also work in small groups, but to an individualised programme. Other students are withdrawn from lessons for individual or group tuition. Students are often withdrawn from Religious Education, but the practice of rotating withdrawals is in place to minimise the impact of ongoing absence from any individual subject. However, while concern for the students' welfare is acknowledged, it is recommended that this practice be kept under review to ensure that students in receipt of learning support do not become further disadvantaged as a result of either a reduced curriculum or their absence from a number of different lessons. Team teaching has been recently introduced into some first-year class groups in order to maximise resources and the expansion of this good practice is currently being considered for other year groups. This initiative is welcomed as it helps to maximise resources in addition to retaining the students in an inclusive setting. In-class support is also provided, where needed, to students who are members of the travelling community.

Good programmes are set out for students in receipt of additional support. They focus on literacy and numeracy skills and on examination preparation for students taking the certificate examinations. Collaboration between the learning support department and the teaching staff provides very good support to students in the school. Members of the learning support department inform all teachers of the students' individual needs. They are also available to advise subject teachers on the challenges identified for certain students and on appropriate teaching and learning strategies to support them. Student progress is tracked through ongoing assessments and, in some instances, through individualized student support plans. Teachers providing learning support also keep a record of students' progress and liaise with the learning support coordinator. The learning support coordinator liaises with the guidance counselor when making application for reasonable accommodation for students taking the certificate examinations (RACE).

The student population of CBS New Ross comprises a significant number of newcomer students for whom English is an additional language. However, educational provision for these students is currently unsatisfactory. Their English language proficiency has not been assessed and there are no programmes of language support in place for these students. Many are exempt from studying Irish and the current practice is that, when in junior cycle, they sit at the back of the Irish class and do their own study. The newcomer students in senior cycle have supervised study periods during Irish lesson time. These arrangements need to be reviewed to ensure that newcomer students' needs are being met appropriately. Where the numbers of newcomer students exempt from Irish in each year group is sufficient to form a class group, it is recommended that these students be provided with either additional support in English or some other course of study such as another European language. To this end a coordinator for students who have English as an additional language (EAL) should be appointed and a whole-school strategy developed to support the newcomer students both in terms of their educational progression and attainment and their full integration into the life of the school.

5.2 Guidance and student support in the whole-school context

The school has an allocation of .52 WTE for the delivery of guidance. This comprises an ex-quota allocation of .4 WTE and a concession of .12 WTE under the guidance enhancement scheme. There is one qualified guidance counsellor on the staff whose work involves both careers and personal counselling. Guidance provision is further supported by the school's links with the *Reach* access programme in Waterford Institute of Technology and by the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS).

A subject plan is in place for the delivery of guidance and the whole-school guidance plan is currently a work in progress. There is good access to the guidance service for most students either through timetabled provision or through targeted interventions. First-year students are prioritised at the beginning of the academic year and each student is afforded a short meeting with the guidance counsellor. First-year students are also advised by the guidance counsellor in relation to their subject choices which are made prior to entry into second year. Plans are in place to expand guidance provision for second-year students through a team teaching approach with the teachers of Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) and this is welcomed. Third-year students complete the Differential Aptitude Tests to support them in their future career choices.

Sixth-year students are provided with three personal interviews with the guidance counsellor during the year in addition to one timetabled guidance lesson per week. This is very generous provision. Guidance is also timetabled for TY students. However, students who do not choose to follow the TY programme do not have any formal contact with the guidance service in senior cycle until sixth year. While the difficulties in timetabling guidance for each year group are acknowledged, a better distribution of guidance provision in fifth and in sixth year is recommended, perhaps through a rationalisation of the time provided to sixth-year students to free up time for guidance provision in fifth year. Personal counselling is offered to all students on an appointment basis. Meetings with parents are also arranged on request.

The school ethos places strong emphasis on the pastoral care of the student. Each class is assigned to a class tutor, whose work is to ensure that students are progressing well both academically and socially. Where further help is warranted in these areas the class tutor refers the student on to the school's welfare committee. The welfare committee comprises the deputy principal, the guidance counsellor, a female teacher and the school chaplain. Members of the welfare committee have a timetabled meeting every week to deal with such referrals and other issues of a pastoral nature. The committee also liaises with the parents of

these students. In addition, members of the welfare committee have had a strong input in the development of the whole school policies which relate to the pastoral needs of the students. The welfare committee reports back to the year head and to the class tutor and records are kept of all interventions.

The school also has a care team comprising senior management, the guidance counsellor and the chaplain. The care team supports students at risk and those experiencing personal difficulties. The care team also has responsibility for implementing the school's critical incident policy.

A *Meitheal* system is in place to offer peer support to first-year students. Fifth-year students apply and are formally interviewed to become Meitheal leaders. They also receive training for their role. Two leaders are assigned to each class group and their role is to support the students so that they may become fully integrated into the life of the school. They are available to sort out difficulties experienced by the younger students and where appropriate they refer issues on to the relevant members of staff. Meitheal leaders are very involved in the first-year induction programme and they take the first-year students for a class period at different times during the school year. While the practice of giving Meitheal leaders this experience of responsibility is commendable, the teacher should also be present in the classroom when Meitheal leaders are taking their class group.

Meitheal leaders reported high levels of satisfaction in carrying out this work as it enabled them to give something back in acknowledgement of the care and support they had received when they first came into the school.

6. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT

The following are the main strengths identified in the evaluation:

- The school's mission statement is central to the work of management and staff in CBS New Ross.
- The board of management is proactive and has achieved considerable success during its tenure in progressing school development and improvement.
- The senior management team is effective in carrying out the day-to-day management of the school.
- Good systems are in place to support the effective management of students.
- There is an articulate and enthusiastic student council committed to active and effective representation of the student body.
- Good relationships are maintained with parents and local community
- The school plant is well maintained and affords students an ordered learning environment in attractive and student friendly environs.
- All policies required by legislation are in place.
- The school offers a broad and comprehensive curriculum.
- The TY programme affords students the opportunity to engage in experiential learning which will motivate them both educationally and in their personal and social development.
- The work of the learning support department is effective in supporting students in need of learning support and resource teaching.
- The ethos of care for students is progressed through the work of the guidance service, the welfare committee and the care team.
- The work of the Meitheal leaders further enhances the quality of care for the students.

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

- Senior management should delegate some of the tasks currently being undertaken by them to members of middle management or to the general body of staff. In addition, some of the current AP posts of responsibility should be reviewed to ensure that the duties assigned reflect the level of responsibility and workload commensurate with the category and that they better respond to the management needs of the school.
- To maintain the integrity of the school year Transition Year students should start and end their academic year with all other class groups. Furthermore a detailed school calendar should be issued at the beginning of the school year to staff and parents.
- The proposal to cap the number of in-coming first-year students to forty eight needs to be reviewed in order to ensure the continued viability of the school.
- A whole-school plan which grounds all policies and practices in the context of the history, tradition and ethos of the school needs to be expedited as a matter of priority. The developmental section of the plan should establish a series of targets and action plans for ongoing school development and review. Minutes should be kept of all planning meetings and stored in the school planning folder.
- The board of management should formulate a policy regarding timetabling requests and the timing of meetings to ensure that teaching and learning is not compromised and that the volume of requests does not impact negatively on the optimum functioning of the school. Furthermore, all timetabling requests should be made to and approved by the board of management.
- Recommendations contained in the subject inspection reports should be prioritised and implemented within an appropriate time frame.
- Newcomer students who have an exemption from Irish should be provided with either additional support in English or the opportunity to pursue another course of study.

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 History – 18 September 2010
- Subject Inspection of Irish – 23 September 2010
- Subject Inspection of Design and Communication Graphics – 20 September 2010
- Subject Inspection of Social, Personal and Health Education – 21 September 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 is very pleased with the content of the Whole School Evaluation which took place in September 2010, and in particular that the report stressed so many of the features of school life and teaching and learning as practiced in CBS Secondary School, New Ross.

We welcome in particular the positive comments with regards to the various members of our school community – the planning and excellent quality of teaching as commended, the proactivity of the Board of Management, the effectiveness of the senior management, the articulate and enthusiastic Student Council, the work of the Meitheal leaders and the good relationships with parents and the local community. We also welcome comments that acknowledge the board curriculum offered by the school; the opportunity to engage in experiential learning in our TY programme; the student friendly nature of the school building; the work of the Learning Support department and the ethos of the care demonstrated for our students.

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

The Board of Management is very pleased to accept the recommendations as a means of building on our strengths. We know that the enactment of these recommendations will further enhance the excellent work already being undertaken by the teachers and all members of school community.

In all, there were seven recommendations, of which five have already been implemented, one being resource dependent is under investigation and priority has been given to the work recommended in relation to the Whole School Plan, a detailed implementation schedule for which is currently being prepared by a sub-committee of the Board of Management

Finally the Board of Management would like to thank the Inspectorate of the DES for affording us the opportunity to further improve our school and to thank the members of the inspectorate for the quality and professionalism of their work.