

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

**Whole-School Evaluation
REPORT**

**Bunclody Vocational College
Bunclody, County Wexford
Roll number: 71620H**

Date of inspection: 30 November 2009



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

WHOLE-SCHOOL EVALUATION

A whole-school evaluation of Bunclody Vocational College was undertaken in November, 2009. This report presents the findings of the evaluation and makes recommendations for improvement. During the evaluation, the quality of teaching and learning in three subject areas (Technical Graphics and Design and Communications Graphics, English, and Science and Biology) was evaluated in detail, and separate reports are available on these subjects. A previous subject inspection in Civic, Social and Political Education (CSPE) was conducted during March 2009 and this report forms part of the evidence base for the whole-school evaluation (see section 7 for details). With the exception of senior management, teachers did not participate in any of the scheduled meetings to discuss their roles and contributions to the operation of the school. The teacher nominees to the board of management did not avail of the opportunity to engage in either of the scheduled pre-evaluation or post-evaluation meetings with inspectors. 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

Bunclody Vocational College is a co-educational post-primary school under the management of County Wexford Vocational Educational Committee (VEC). The school is the smaller of two post-primary co-educational schools located at either end of the town of Bunclody. Established as Bunclody Technical School in 1950, the school has since undergone several renovations and expansions. The school draws students with a variety of social and cultural backgrounds from nine feeder national schools, including Bunclody and its hinterland, the majority of which are rural.

Enrolment in the school has remained relatively static over the past five years. The school currently accommodates 172 post-primary students and an additional 104 students are enrolled in its six Post Leaving Certificate (PLC) courses. It aims to provide for the educational needs of students of all levels of ability and from a diversity of backgrounds, including newcomer students for whom English is an additional language (EAL) and students from the Traveller community. The school provides two programmes in second-level education: the Junior Certificate School Programme (JCSP) and the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP). Students proceed directly onto the LCVP following junior cycle. The school is part of the Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) programme and benefits from a number of supports, including a full-time home-school-community liaison (HSCL) co-ordinator and input from the local School Completion Programme (SCP). The principal aim of these programmes is to support students in completing their second-level education and in achieving their full potential.

1. QUALITY OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT

1.1 Characteristic spirit of the school

The school's mission statement includes a clear statement that it *endeavours to provide quality education for all students through a caring, disciplined and respectful environment*. A friendly atmosphere exists in the school and, during the course of the evaluation, interactions between students and their teachers were observed to be cordial and respectful. As a result of recent initiatives, significant progress has been made in reducing the number of disciplinary issues. The teaching staff is committed, caring and interested in the development and wellbeing of students, with many teachers giving additional time to support students' learning

and engagement in school. Members of the parents' association, the board of management and the student council described the school as a friendly and caring place where the work of teachers and initiatives, such as the Meitheal mentoring programme for incoming students and learning support provision, seek to promote the principles of inclusion and a culture of respect for all. In this regard, the school is successful in achieving the care and respect aspects of its mission.

The school's mission statement also states that the school aims to *prepare students for life and responsible citizenship and motivate them towards the achievement of their full potential*. Discussions with the board of management, senior management and with senior management of Co. Wexford VEC as patron of the school, indicated that there is a lack of either a strategic or a shared vision for the development of the school. Data for this school from the National Educational Welfare Board (NEWB) reveals that the average rates of student attendance are poor. While much good practice was found in many instances during the various subject inspections, concern was raised in some subject areas regarding the level of uptake of higher level and the level of attainment of students in state examinations. Some exceptions were noted in some subject areas where students attain equal to or outperform the national averages. However there were some instances when subject inspectors found the need for students to be more actively challenged in class and through the setting and correcting of homework. Therefore, it is recommended that a whole-school policy on raising expectations in relation to attendance and attainment be developed as a matter of priority, established in practice and subject to a cycle of ongoing evaluation and review. It is also recommended that all partners in the school development planning process engage in discussions on how to fully realise all aspects of the school's mission statement.

1.2 School ownership and management

The board of management, as a sub-committee of Co. Wexford VEC, is appropriately constituted. It is composed of nine members nominated by the various stakeholders, including three nominees from Co. Wexford VEC, two nominees from the parents' association, two nominees from the staff and two members of the local community who have been co-opted onto the board. The principal acts as secretary to the board and takes responsibility for drawing up the agenda for meetings. There is an element of overlap between outgoing board members whenever a new board is constituted, which ensures continuity and is considered good practice. In line with the articles of management for VEC schools, the board meets at least five times per year, with additional meetings convened on a needs basis. Co. Wexford VEC has provided training for members of boards of management within the scheme as a means of familiarising them with their legislative functions. However, some members of the present board have not received any training and were unfamiliar with their roles and responsibilities. It is recommended that Co. Wexford VEC facilitate additional training as a means of ensuring all existing and new members of boards of management have an opportunity to learn about their functions and responsibilities.

Following board meetings, an agreed verbal report is given to the staff and parents' association by their respective nominees and minutes of meetings are forwarded to the VEC, with a verbal report given at VEC meetings. Currently, the board has not optimised procedures for informing parents about matters to do with the operation and performance of the school, as provided for in section 20 of the Education Act, 1998. Consideration could be given to inserting a report with the newsletter, which is sent to parents on two or three occasions during the year, or on the school website, if preferred.

Members of the board endeavour to fulfil their duties and actively support the school. The five members of the board who attended the evaluation meeting, presented as being concerned with the welfare of students and were committed to ensuring that the school could adequately provide for their education. Members of the board rely on the guidance provided

by the principal and the patron and respond to the best of their knowledge and ability to items placed on the agenda.

Many of the responsibilities of the board are not being adequately identified or addressed. A review of the minutes of the board of management over the past two years indicate that the work of the board has been predominately focused on the provision of building accommodation and in dealing with disciplinary matters. Very little strategic planning is taking place at a managerial level in the school and this lack of leadership is impacting on the ability of the school to adequately address the needs of all its students. There is a pressing need for strategic planning in the school and the board must adopt a stronger managerial role in this regard. There is a need for the board of management to collaborate as a unit to identify fully the priorities for the school and to develop and implement strategies to achieve these goals. There is scope for the patron to be more proactive in supporting the board of the school, especially during the initial intensive phase of the urgent work necessary to address these shortcomings.

The board's involvement in the school development planning process is limited to a review of any documents that are presented for discussion or ratification. To date the school's admissions policy has been developed and ratified, along with a substance use policy, homework policy and guidance plan. Work is ongoing on the development of a code of behaviour and is being led by the newly appointed deputy principal. Other required policies were specified in various school documents as being in need of development, but little progress has been made in commencing these. It is recommended that the board establish a systematic approach to the planning process that involves all partners, as appropriate. Work should be progressed as a matter of priority in the following areas; the code of behaviour, an attendance and participation strategy, the schools procedures for suspension and expulsion, a policy to support students with special educational needs (SEN) and the preparation of a health and safety statement. In addition, it is a requirement that a Relationship and Sexuality Education (RSE) policy be developed and ratified by the board. The board should ensure that all policies reflect positive attitudes toward equality, diversity and inclusion and are effectively implemented and reviewed. Furthermore, it is the board's responsibility to make arrangements for the preparation of the school plan and to ensure that this plan is regularly reviewed and updated, in accordance with section 21 of the Education Act, 1998. It is essential that the development section of the plan identify the key priorities for the school and set attainable targets within fixed timeframes for the achievement of these goals, as already recommended.

To assist the board in the area of curriculum planning, it would be productive to establish a staff council or curriculum advisory board with the remit of advising the board of management in relation to the range of programmes and subjects in the school, the arrangement of the timetable and the provision of personnel, resources and school equipment.

As already referred to, the board is actively engaged in the development of school facilities including on-going efforts to secure a new integrated school building. A grant from the Department was recently secured for the construction of a permanent classroom to facilitate the introduction of Technology as a Leaving Certificate subject. This building is currently under construction. However, it came to the attention of the inspection team that the introduction of Technology may not now be possible and that the facility may be designated for other purposes. It is recommended that the board revisit this situation and explore all routes available to ensure that Technology is provided to students in accordance with the original proposal made to the Department.

A parents' association has recently been re-established. The members of the association, met in the course of the evaluation, were supportive of the school and reported that they were happy with the level of care and support given to their children. Members described the school as a

caring school concerned with the holistic development of the student. Parents praised the dedication of teachers and the additional efforts they make to support students' learning. The parents' association meets regularly and takes an active interest in school life. They support the school through attendance at celebration events and holding fundraising events. The association has suggested meaningful ways in which the school can improve the management of students, such as students remaining in the school during lunch breaks and establishing a dress code in relation to students' jackets. It is commendable that parents' contributions have been welcomed and acted upon by school management. The greater involvement of parents in the area of policy development is recommended as a means of enhancing their role as educational partners. Consideration should be given to re-affiliating the parents' association with a national body as a means of accessing information on the role and function of parents in the education process and as a support to the association in this regard.

1.3 In-school management

Together, senior management is ensuring that the school functions effectively on a day-to-day basis. Senior management in the school comprises the principal and deputy principal. The principal has been in this role for twelve years, having previously been a member of staff at the school. The deputy principal is newly appointed and was also a member of staff prior to appointment. The deputy principal has undertaken significant professional development prior to appointment and is settling into the new position very effectively. It was reported that the appointment of the deputy principal has brought a new perspective to school management, which was supported through observations and findings during the evaluation. The principal and deputy principal meet regularly to discuss school issues. The different roles within senior management are not formally defined. They both share responsibility for dealing with issues as they arise during the course of the day and fulfil a range of duties depending on who is available at any given time. The deputy principal also has significant teaching duties. It is recommended that, where possible, the majority of roles within senior management be more clearly delineated, in line with best practice.

There is a lack of an agreed or shared vision from senior management for the future of the school in the medium to long term. This is reflected in the poor management of the posts of responsibilities, the lack of progress to date in school development planning and the lack of strategic approaches to improve the attendance and attainment of all students. There is a need for greater leadership and direction from the principal, in particular, to motivate, manage and support others to progress. This leadership will be necessary to effect many of the areas for improvement identified in this report. Primarily, there is a need for a cohesive vision for the school, which must be supported by active and decisive leadership. Consideration should be given by senior management to participation in further professional development in the area of school leadership.

At the time of the evaluation, the school had eight assistant principal and nine special duties teacher posts, which represents a considerable and valuable potential support to the effective management and day-to-day running of the school. A schedule of posts has been developed and duties assigned to post holders. However, the duties and responsibilities of each post holder are not fully documented. Furthermore, there is no clear system in place for the review of the effectiveness of middle management duties, and there is also a lack of consistency from school management in ensuring that delegated responsibilities are carried out effectively. While there has recently been a rescheduling of some of the posts of responsibilities, the current schedule of posts is not fully meeting the substantive needs of the school. It is recommended that a whole-school review of posts take place and that roles commensurate with the levels of the posts be assigned, as outlined in Circular Letter 20/98. In particular, consideration should be given to assigning posts of responsibility in the area of promoting and monitoring academic attainment at both junior cycle and senior cycle. This will also provide an additional element to the pastoral care structures in the school. In addition, consideration should also be given to ensuring that the distribution of posts of

responsibilities is equitable to meet the needs of both the second-level and PLC sectors in the school.

It was reported that, in previous years, regular working meetings were scheduled between assistant principals and senior management, but this practice has ceased due to timetabling restrictions. A system whereby the assistant principals are brought together to work with senior management should be considered in order to move towards a more productive and effective middle management structure. The engagement of assistant principals as a collective unit, combined with regular consultation and distributed leadership in meaningful roles, should further a sense of ownership in the decision-making process in the school.

School staff has recently participated in a helpful process to initiate school self-review. As part of a staff development day, the School Development Planning Initiative (SDPI) facilitated a strengths, challenges, opportunities and threats (SCOT) type analysis of the work of the school. Several valuable suggestions were made by staff to improve the structures and systems in the school, including the need to improve the discipline structure, the need for greater clarity about the various posts of responsibility, the need to address the level of student attendance and the need to improve internal communications. Follow-through actions on some of these important areas has proved beneficial. For example, some good progress has been made in developing the discipline system. Systems for internal communications have also been improved. The posting of daily notices on a whiteboard in the staff room and the production of an excellent weekly staff newsletter are examples of the steps taken to address identified deficits. There has also been an increase in the number of staff meetings per year and staff are given an opportunity to add items to the agenda for discussion. This is a progressive step and ensures that all members of staff are familiar with any issues, are up to-date with developments and have an opportunity to voice their opinions and contribute to the workings of the school.

Staff also suggested the development of a formal induction system to support teachers new to the school or new to the profession. Peer mentoring has been noted in some documents and was also highlighted in discussions with senior management as a means of supporting new and established teachers. In addition, the deputy principal is currently developing a staff handbook that will include valuable information about the school, personnel and the school's policies in key areas of administration, curriculum and pastoral care. All of these initiatives are to be highly commended and should be progressed as expediently as possible in tandem with other developments recommended.

The procedures for the management of student behaviour have recently undergone significant restructuring. This had been an issue of major concern to staff for a prolonged period. Until recently, the management of students was framed within a series of school rules with a range of sanctions imposed. Arising from a review process, significant progress has been made in developing a new code of behaviour in line with the Guidelines from the NEWB. The National Behaviour Support Service (NBSS) was also consulted and provided useful support to the school in developing a positive approach to student behaviour. In the interim, a 'reflection room' has been established for students presenting with challenging behaviour. The initial feedback regarding the effectiveness of this room has been very positive, with the number of referrals decreasing significantly and a general improvement in students' behaviour. Throughout the course of the evaluation, students were found to be well behaved and a relatively calm atmosphere pervaded throughout the school. It is the intention of the school to progress the code of behaviour to ratification stage, and to evolve the role and function of the "reflection room" to ensure, that when referred, students' learning in the curriculum is continued. It is commendable that the school is working towards a clearly structured code of student behaviour.

There is a need to prioritise student attendance as an aspect of student management and for dedicated strategies to improve attendance across the whole student population. An analysis of attendance patterns is undertaken periodically and data provided by the school indicates that a relatively small cohort of students, mostly from the Traveller community and newcomer students, account for a large percentage of the recorded absences. A member of the SCP is deployed each morning as a support to the school in recording student attendance. This is a valuable and important service and is well organised and systematically implemented. Some interventions have been put in place to encourage better attendance, such as phone calls and text messages to parents, home visits by the HSCL co-ordinator, the issuing of letters to parents and the involvement of the Education Welfare Officer in some exceptional instances. It is necessary to conduct a detailed analysis of the needs of students with poor attendance, with a view to identifying how the available school resources and the curriculum provided can be more effectively deployed to engage these students in school life and improve both their attendance and attainment. As part of this review, the school should examine the effectiveness of providing the JCSP for all students. Greater emphasis should be placed on ensuring that the allocated resources, especially those provided for the JCSP and Traveller students, are focused on those students most in need of targeted interventions.

A student council has been established since 2007 and consists of three members from each year group in the school. Students wishing to be part of the student council put their names forward for election, which is held in October each year. The student council is well structured and members feel that they have a meaningful role to play in the school. They were articulate and confident in describing their roles and good procedures have been established to communicate the work of the council to the general student body. The presence of a student council notice board and identity badges is good practice as it provides a forum and access point for students to identify and receive information on issues of concern to them. Students have set goals such as reducing the price and increasing the range of food available in the canteen, in addition to undertaking fundraising events for charity. It is recommended that the role of the student council be expanded to involve students in the decision making process on issues and policies directly relating to their lives in the school.

The school facilitates the provision of information to parents on their child's progress through parent-teacher meetings and appointments with subject teachers on request. Formal parent-teacher meetings are organised in line with agreed procedures. Non-exam classes are grouped together and have one parent-teacher meeting per year. The placement of parent-teacher meetings for exam classes at the beginning of the year was rationalised as a means of providing guidance to parents and motivation to students. Consideration could be given to having an additional parent-teacher meeting for exam classes after the 'mock' examinations and with the student present. This will provide an opportunity to offer formative feedback on exam performance, to discuss appropriate subject levels, to identify strategies for improvement and to set expectations of attainment with the student and his/her parents. The student journal is also used as an additional mechanism of communications with parents. Consideration should be given to the inclusion of aspects of relevant policies and useful information in the student journal as a means of highlighting the various strategies and services available to support students.

The school has established appropriate links with outside agencies and community groups to support school activities and programmes. These links support work experience, vocational and civic programmes throughout the curriculum and to extra-curricular sport. These links also assist in the guidance of students from school to work or further or higher education. Whole-school self-evaluation and review is limited and mainly reactive to issues and problems that have arisen. However, some excellent examples of self-evaluation were found in some subject department planning documents. Additionally, the process involved in developing the school's DEIS plan has helped to provide a focus on some of the main areas in need of development. There is a need for a systematic approach to whole-school self-

evaluation. This process should focus on key school activities including learning and teaching, curriculum and student support structures that improve the learning outcomes for students.

1.4 Management of resources

The actual pupil-teacher ratio in the school is 14.81:1 and class sizes are therefore relatively small. The school has a total allocation of 19.25 whole-time teacher equivalents (WTEs). This includes the ex quota full-time positions for principal, HSCL and learning support and a 0.64 post for guidance counselling. Also included in the school's allocation is 5.75 WTEs to provide for students with special educational needs (SEN), for newcomer students and for students from the Traveller community. The principal takes responsibility for the deployment of teachers to the various programmes and levels.

In general, permanent whole teachers (PWT) and those with contracts of indefinite duration (CID) are fully deployed. However, in a small number of instances teachers fall short of their full teaching hours and management should explore ways of optimising the remaining time and the professional skills of these teachers for the benefit of students. Consideration should be given to using any available time to provide opportunities to further develop areas such as team-teaching. This should contribute to the quality of teaching and learning in the classroom, enable tuition for students with SEN to be provided without withdrawing students from lessons, and develop the professional discourse in the school. It is important that all of the allocated teaching time be included in the official record of each teacher's timetable, including class periods allocated to learning support and resource teaching. A comprehensive set of up-to-date timetables indicating the full deployment of teachers, including the full allocation of resource and learning support teaching hours, was not fully available at the time of the inspection. Every effort should be made to ensure that the comprehensive master timetable is completed as expediently as possible in the school year.

The school complies with Department regulations with respect to the organisation of the annual calendar and the number of teaching days per year. It is good practice to have an induction day for first-year students, but care must be taken to ensure that the phased return of the other year groups does not compromise the provision of 167 days tuition in the curriculum for all students. The school's current practice at the commencement of the school year should therefore be reviewed. The school provides twenty-eight hours instruction in the curriculum per week as per Circular Letter M29/95.

Teachers are deployed according to their qualifications and subject specialisms and have opportunities to teach all levels and programmes. This good practice ensures that teachers develop a comprehensive understanding of the various syllabuses related to their subject specialisms, are familiar with all relevant texts and resources and develop the pedagogical skills required to engage the full community of students. Where possible and desirable, class groups retain the same teacher from year to year for the duration of their programme of study, thus ensuring good levels of continuity. In a minority of instances this was not the case and should be carefully monitored. A supervision-and-substitution roster ensures that adequate cover exists to monitor students' movements and welfare before school, during break times and after school, as well as providing cover for absent colleagues as per Circular Letter 01/03.

There is good support for teachers' continuing professional development (CPD). Individual teachers are facilitated to attend relevant in-service events upon request. In addition, several staff days have been organised and provided by various support services, such as the Special Education Support Service (SESS), the SDPI and the NBSS. This is to be commended. Members of staff have also recently completed relevant courses in the areas of school development planning, special education and resource teaching, health and safety and Social

Personal and Health Education (SPHE). The support for CPD ensures that there is sufficient professional capacity within the school to lead these specific areas.

The school currently has ten prefabricated buildings (prefabs) of varying levels of repair. One of these buildings is used as an art room and is very restrictive for this purpose, thereby limiting the number of students that could potentially use this room. The permanent room for Materials Technology Wood (MTW) is also very restrictive. Nonetheless, accommodation is fully utilised to deliver the curriculum and in addressing the needs of the school community. It is commendable that the school has acted upon a number of recommendations in previous inspection reports that identified potential health and safety issues, which have now been remediated.

Classrooms are mostly teacher-based and this system works well. This arrangement promotes the development of the rooms themselves as resources, and there were exemplary instances of this observed. Some classrooms contained displays of students' recent work and also subject specific key words, statements, models, graphic and print materials. This reflects some of the strategies recommended for use with the JCSP and is commended. Specialist rooms are mostly used only for teaching in their designated subject. Teachers make very good efforts to ensure that they provide a safe and stimulating learning environment.

The school's support staff including administrative, catering and maintenance personnel, make an invaluable contribution to the day-to-day running of the school. The grounds are well maintained despite on-going construction and the number of prefabs. The significant contribution of the care-taking and cleaning staff is highly commended in this regard.

Co. Wexford VEC has recently facilitated a health and safety audit of all of its establishments and Bunclody Vocational College is currently awaiting this report. However, contrary to Section 20 of the Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Act 2005, the school has yet to prepare a health and safety statement. It is recommended that the school prepare a safety statement, based on a comprehensive risk assessment. Management should ensure that the hazards, risks and measures to reduce risk or prevent accidents are documented in the safety statement and are communicated to, implemented and adhered to by the whole school community. It is commendable that a number of subject departments have conducted their own risk assessment and an identification of hazards. In some cases, subject departments have developed a series of safety measures and have documented their practice to ensure a safe working environment and the safe participation of students in lessons. Much of this good work should be assimilated into the overall school safety statement.

A comprehensive information and communications technology (ICT) audit was recently conducted by a post-holder and a strong case was made to upgrade and replace the school's dated ICT equipment. As a result, a significant investment has been made by the VEC and the school to develop a range of modern ICT facilities and resources. The college is networked, with broadband access available throughout the buildings. Modern desktop computers are available in the DCG room and also in the dedicated computer room. A number of data projectors have also been made available in several classrooms and are becoming more widely used in the teaching and learning of subjects. The further development of the ICT plan is recommended to support the strategic development of the hardware and software resources, and to include the identification of staff training needs to facilitate the further integration of ICT across the curriculum to support teaching and learning, where appropriate. The school has recently launched its own website and is to be congratulated on this initiative. A well-maintained website provides a useful mechanism to communicate with parents and the general public and to showcase and provide positive affirmation on the work of the entire school community.

Of particular note is the school's involvement in the Green Schools Programme. There is a students' green school committee, facilitated by a staff member, which is working towards attaining the school's first Green Flag. This is a very worthwhile initiative and the general improvement in the cleanliness of the school and its environs was commented on favourably during the course of the evaluation. The commitment of staff and students to this project is highly commended.

The school, through DEIS, heavily subsidise a book rental scheme that includes all textbooks, workbooks and examination papers. This is a valuable support to families and significantly reduces the cost burden that would otherwise be involved.

2. QUALITY OF SCHOOL PLANNING

2.1 The school plan

There is a lack of a systematic or collaborative approach to the whole-school planning process. The school has engaged the SDPI as part of staff development days to promote the process of SDP. While some progress has been made in this area, much work remains to be completed. Some members of the school community, in particular members of the board of management, support services available to the school, parents and students, are not appropriately included or invited to contribute to the planning process. It is recommended that a collaborative approach to school planning be established, involving all of the school's educational partners, as appropriate to the focused area. This may involve several cluster planning groups or core development groups who share developments and consult with relevant partners. Planning activities should be seen as a cyclical process of development, implementation and review. A post of responsibility has recently been allocated to the co-ordination of the school development planning (SDP) process. This is a welcome development as this is an area in need of significant attention.

It is acknowledged that in some areas of the school, there has been some excellent review and analysis, however, there has been a lack of follow-through action and intervention in many of these areas. For example, there is a wealth of attendance data collected and collated and detailed analysis of exam results has been conducted by some individuals and subject departments, but there is little evidence that this data has transferred into actual whole-school policy driven interventions that improve either attendance or attainment. The elements of successful planning and implementation, such as the positive developments in the code of behaviour should be used as an example of how collective and collaborative efforts, based on research and sound educational management, can result in successful outcomes.

The school planning process is ongoing but significant aspects of the school plan are incomplete. Some elements of the permanent section of the school plan have been developed and provide an overview of the structure and organisation of the school. The development of a whole school guidance plan, in line with best practice and guidelines, has been ratified by the board, along with policies in the areas of admissions, anti-bullying, substance use, homework and an ICT acceptable use policy.

Many of the required policies identified in section 1.2 above have yet to be developed, while other areas have yet to be advanced to ratification stage. Some good work has been undertaken as part of the planning requirements for DEIS, which has resulted in the school identifying areas for improvement based on the prompts provided in the DEIS planning templates. The evidence from an analysis of the school planning documents indicates that, to date, there has been a lack of completion of set tasks, which arises from the absence of appropriately defined priorities and timeframes for development. A planning advisory group should be established to identify and ensure follow-through on the key areas for development. It is imperative that school policies required by legislation be developed as a

matter of priority and ratified by the board. Strategic planning should take time to analyse the school's practice in specific areas such as the promotion of attendance and participation in the school, advancing curriculum development and provision for the diversity of students and the development of key priorities in the areas of pastoral care, teaching and learning, maintaining and improving standards of learning and raising attainment.

Elements of good practice were, however, evidenced in the advancement of some areas of school development planning. The establishment of working groups of interested personnel with the experience and interest to advance specific areas is commended. Good examples of working groups include the code of behaviour working group and the DEIS planning group. The DEIS planning process of gathering evidence, analysis and task identification and target-based outcomes within an agreed timeframe is a good model on which to base further whole-school planning initiatives. The priorities identified in the schools DEIS plan should be incorporated into the development section of the school plan.

Some very good practice was also identified in individual subject department plans. However, there was significant variation in the standard of preparation and presentation of these plans. Consideration should be given to making all subject plans available in one central area to facilitate an overview of planning by teachers in other subject areas and to support planning for cross-curricular work. An increased focus on the discussion of teaching and learning, sharing ideas and resources should be the next step in the subject department planning process.

Members of the existing board of management were unsure if a set of child protection guidelines had been adopted. Confirmation was provided that the *Child Protection Guidelines for Post-primary Schools* (Department of Education and Science, September 2004) were adopted by a previous board of management in 2005. School documentation also confirmed that child protection procedures have been brought to the attention of school staff through a presentation made by the guidance service. A designated liaison person (DLP) has been appointed, but no reference exists in the documentation provided to a deputy designated liaison person (DDL) in line with the requirements of the guidelines. It is recommended that procedures be established to ensure that each successive board is familiar with the *Child Protection Guidelines for Post-primary Schools* and ensure compliance with post-primary circular letters M44/05 and 0062/2006. A DDL should also be appointed and clearly identified in relevant school documentation. The school's procedures and identification of key personnel could be provided through the school's website, classroom notices and a brief note included in the school's next newsletter to parents. The proposed staff handbook will also provide a useful mechanism for the inclusion of the school's procedures in this regard.

3. QUALITY OF CURRICULUM PROVISION

3.1 Curriculum planning and organisation

The school provides just two curricular programmes for its second-level students. All junior cycle students follow the Junior Certificate School Programme (JCSP) and all senior cycle students follow the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP). These programmes are delivered in line with the programme requirements and guidelines. The involvement of the school in these programmes is commended as they can provide many benefits for the students involved. However, the involvement of all students in each of these programmes may impose some limitations on students' subject choices at senior cycle and may not represent the most effective use and targeting of the additional resources provided at junior cycle. Specifically, it would seem that the absence of the Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) programme in the school is a drawback as it would be beneficial to many students. The board of management is urged to keep the viability of this programme in mind as part of future curriculum planning.

Class groups are organised into mixed-ability settings. Two classes are formed in each year for most subjects. The school offers access to a relatively broad range of subjects, within the limits of the available resources. At junior cycle, Irish, English, Maths, History, Geography, French, Science, CSPE, Religious Education, SPHE and Physical Education are offered as core subjects for most students. Some students have exemptions from the study of Irish and receive learning support tuition at this time. In addition, students choose one subject from each of three bands; Metalwork or Business Studies, Technology or Materials Technology Wood, and Technical Graphics or Home Economics. This means that most students are studying fourteen subjects, which is considerable. A number of junior cycle students in receipt of learning support tuition study Environmental and Social Studies (ESS) as an alternative to History and Geography. While ESS is a valuable subject in its own right, withdrawing students from History and Geography may impose restrictions on these students' subject choices at senior cycle. The intention to reduce the curriculum load on these students is commended, however, it is important that these students' educational opportunities are optimised in so far as possible. Providing additional tuition in either History or Geography at the students' discretion may be a more suitable means of reducing the number of subjects for these students, whilst supporting their attainment and ensuring that they can access their preferred subject at senior cycle.

English, Irish, Mathematics, Physical Education, Religious Education, Career Guidance and LCVP Link Modules are provided as core subjects at senior cycle. Students also choose four subjects from Design and Communication Graphics, Construction Studies, History, Geography, Home Economics, Business Studies, Accounting, Engineering, Biology and French. This is a good range of subjects for a school of this size and the school is commended for providing such a range. Students who do not study French study an *ab initio* Spanish module in fulfilment of the language requirement of the LCVP. Management indicated that Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) is provided in a modular way through Religious Education at senior cycle. The delivery of RSE to senior cycle students, as reported by management, is in accordance with Circular Letter 0027/08.

The time allocated to most subjects is broadly in line with the syllabus guidelines and best practice. However, the time allocation for Physical Education for students in first and third year, of a single period per week, is significantly below the recommended time allocation of two hours per week for all students. It is recommended that all students receive a minimum of one double period per week for Physical Education and the school should work towards providing the subject in line with the Department guidelines. English, Irish and Mathematics are timetabled concurrently for the two classes in each year group. If used appropriately, this good practice ensures that students have access to subject levels commensurate with their ability and facilitates whole year group activities and events in the subject area. Concurrent timetabling may also facilitate the allocation of additional teaching resources at intervals during the week, which can expand the range of approaches to teaching and learning and provide targeted support to students most in need. The distribution of lessons in the core subjects throughout the week should be reviewed to avoid timetabling the same subject twice in one day. It is best practice that students have daily exposure to the core subjects of English, Irish and Mathematics.

Six courses at level five on the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) are offered to PLC students and certified by the Further Education and Training Awards Council (FETAC). These are: Art, Business Studies, Childcare, Healthcare, Horticulture and Youthwork. It is commendable that the decision to offer these courses is made in consultation with members of staff who possess the necessary knowledge and skills to organise and deliver the prescribed syllabuses. An assistant principal post is allocated for the co-ordination of the PLC

sector in the school, and one special duties teacher post is also assigned to provide quality assurance in the delivery of the various courses.

3.2 Arrangements for students' choice of subjects and programmes

Appropriate procedures are in place to facilitate the transfer of students from primary to post-primary level. The principal and a member of staff visit the local feeder primary schools to gather information on incoming first-year students. An open night is held to provide prospective students and their parents with an overview of the school and the various programmes and subjects offered. All incoming first years sit assessments to provide benchmarks on their literacy and numeracy levels and to identify those students who may have additional educational needs. This ensures that the required supports are in place for these students prior to commencing school.

Parents are informed when subject choices are being made by students and are given appropriate information on the subject options available. Guidance is provided to students to assist them in choosing subjects and levels within subjects. Guidance is also provided to students on the implications of these choices. Students are appropriately facilitated in making these choices in first year and when making the transition from third year to fifth year. The recent introduction of an educational and career guidance module for third-year students to support their decision-making is highly commended. Consideration should be given to providing an information evening for the parents of third-year students to outline subject choices, the benefits of the LCVP and any implications for third level education and future employment.

It is commendable that the school has recently surveyed both the first-year and fifth-year students to determine their level of satisfaction with the arrangements for subject choices. The provision of a brief 'taster' programme for first-year students to sample each of the available optional subjects is commended as it ensures that their subject choices are more informed. Senior cycle students must choose their subjects to ensure that they meet the requirements of LCVP. It is recommended that this practice be constantly monitored to ensure that it does not impose greater restrictions on students' preferred options, than if the established Leaving Certificate was provided.

3.3 Co-curricular and extra-curricular provision

The school provides a number of opportunities for students to engage in a range of co-curricular and extra-curricular activities. These complement the curriculum and extend learning beyond the classroom. Activities include educational field trips, focused whole-school events, such as school musicals and drama productions, and the visit of guest speakers and performing groups to the school. The extra-curricular sports activities organised in the school include participation in a number of inter-school competitions in athletics, camogie, Gaelic football, hurling, soccer and an annual school sports day. In addition, the school organises a lunchtime indoor hockey and soccer league. A regular lunchtime chess league is also organised. Whilst this is open to all students, it provides a valuable opportunity for newcomer students to interact with their peers. Fifth-year LCVP students enter an annual mini-company event, in conjunction with Wexford Enterprise Board, which provides them with valuable opportunities for self-directed learning as part of their LCVP course. A number of school educational tours have also been organised in the past and weekend tours to cross-channel soccer matches have also featured on the school's calendar. The dedication and commitment of those involved in the organisation of all of these events is highly commended.

It would be worthwhile, through the subject department planning process, to document the existing opportunities and to identify additional opportunities to support and enhance learning through participation in these focused co-curricular events. These provide students with the platform to apply their newly acquired knowledge and skills in the subject areas.

The value placed on all of the co-curricular and extra-curricular activities is given a visible presence in the school through the prominent display of photographs along the school corridors, on the new electronic notice board and on the school's revamped website. In addition, the trophy cabinet displays some of the accolades awarded to individuals and teams for their achievements in a number of activities. These visible displays are commended as they record and celebrate the participation of students and teachers. The board, senior management and parents expressed their appreciation of the commitment of staff in providing these additional opportunities for students.

4. QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN SUBJECTS

4.1 Planning and Preparation

Teachers work collaboratively in planning for subjects and resources. This has proved productive and beneficial to all. Minutes of meetings are maintained and these indicate a focus on both organisational and developmental issues. Subject department planning occurs during formal planning meetings facilitated by school management and through regular informal meetings that occur on an ongoing basis. Some subject department meetings are convened by a subject department co-ordinator, a role that is rotated among all members of the subject department. This good practice should be extended across other subject departments so that individual teachers can avail of the opportunity to lead the subject.

Many subject departments have developed subject plans. These plans detail the department's organisational framework while also outlining the curriculum content. It is recommended, in cases where detailed plans do not exist, that a subject plan be developed. Some plans are very well developed in relation to provision for and teaching and learning in subjects and serve as a useful guide to practice in the classroom. Some plans include goals for future development. With the support of management, teachers are urged to ensure that these important goals are realised and achieved. In many cases, agreed common schemes-of-work have been set out for each year group. These are generally reviewed collaboratively each year.

Within some subject departments, a reflective, realistic and self-evaluative approach is taken to the planning process. In order to further advance subject planning across all departments, teacher groups should now focus on each of the following areas in their plans and in the planning process: sharing effective teaching strategies and resources, agreeing policies and practices in relation to areas such as frequency of homework, agreeing standards of presentation of student work, discussing strategies to raise attainment, exploring the possible implementation of common examinations, agreeing learning outcomes that each year group should achieve and ensuring that the plan is reviewed annually.

Teachers' preparation for lessons was very good. This preparation included student worksheets, teaching aids and models, ICT resources, prepared blackboard drawings and sketches and exemplar solutions. Materials for practical work were ready for use and this led to a seamless sequence of activities for students.

4.2 Teaching and Learning

Many lessons opened with roll call and in some cases, the purpose of the lesson was communicated to students. This good practice should be extended to all lessons and teachers should consistently plan to use the final few minutes of lessons to review and summarise lesson material. The content, structure and pace of each lesson was generally appropriate and time was in the main efficiently utilised. Lessons were best when there was a good break up of tasks, an appropriate pace and when students were fully involved in the lesson. Students could have been organised in pairs for a period of some lessons to share observations before communicating these to the teacher. In this way, students would be learning from each other as well as from the teacher. Greater attention to the management of time in terms of the

lesson structure and the duration of activities is needed in some instances to ensure optimal engagement and successful learning outcomes. There were some very good examples of effective teaching and learning where the teacher simplified the key concepts to appropriate levels and enabled students to source examples from their own lives and environments.

Considerable effort was made to provide a secure, caring and supportive learning environment. In a small number of instances, however, observations indicated that there may have been too much teacher direction, encouraging a passive attitude among students. When teachers were enthusiastic and lively in their delivery of lessons, students were engaged and good learning was evident. However, in some lessons observed, the students were not sufficiently challenged in their learning and were inactive at times. Students should be challenged more in their learning so each individual can reach his or her potential. In-class strategies that challenge students more in the recall and application of their knowledge at the appropriate level should be extended in practice.

Some of the methodologies observed were effective in promoting active student engagement in learning. To this end, it is recommended that greater use be made of student-based tasks involving individual, pair or group work activities. There was very little evidence of self-directed learning. Initiatives to support such learning should be developed and implemented as a means of helping students to achieve their full potential. The expansion of the use of discovery learning is recommended, particularly in student practical work.

ICT presentations were used throughout some lessons observed and while these provided a valuable reference point and visuals for the topics, the technology was over utilised at times at the expense of student note-taking, good use of the textbook and student written work. Conversely, there were some lessons where the use of ICT or audio or visual recordings could have enhanced learning. The board was very well used in most instances to record students' points and their assigned homework. Many teachers had useful worksheets prepared, which enhanced students' learning. Other teaching and learning methods observed included practical work, teacher demonstrations, the use of video, discussions and the use of worksheets. In the main, teachers catered for the needs of students with SEN through individual attention, differentiated tasks and differentiated questioning. Students generally participated as requested in their lessons and were co-operative, respectful and responsive.

There were many examples of the very effective use of questioning and this methodology was best used when teachers asked questions by naming students as opposed to asking general questions of the whole class group. An area for development is the need to give students more opportunities to make oral presentations in class as they were often reticent when it came to answering questions. Questioning was integrated with short sections of instruction in material new to the lesson and links were created with prior learning so that a continuum of learning was in evidence. However, in a small number of lessons, students were not sufficiently challenged by ongoing questioning and this should be addressed.

Trends in relation to the uptake of higher level and attainment of students in the certificate examinations are a cause for concern in many subjects. Some subject departments have identified this problem through its detailed analysis of examination results and this good practice should be extended to all subjects. It is recommended that the outcome of this analysis be placed in the subject plans, discussed at subject department meetings and used as a basis for future planning. Teachers should develop a strategy to encourage more students to take higher level in certificate examinations, as appropriate. Statistics relating to the level of attainment in the state examinations have also been collated as part of the DEIS planning process and this will provide useful baseline data for future comparisons and evaluating the success of initiatives to raise attainment.

4.3 Assessment

All students sit formal examinations at Christmas and examination classes also sit 'mock' examinations. Non-examination classes sit summer exams. Teachers administer common tests where possible. It was reported that class tests also take place. It is recommended that these tests be kept by students and organised into folders to ensure that they are readily accessible. This will help students to become more aware of their ongoing performance and progress. Furthermore, it is recommended to some teachers that they improve their record keeping of students' results in assignments and longer pieces of work, in addition to records of class tests.

Students could be challenged more in homework, their written work, completing past examination questions, class tests and in group work. Homework was assigned in some lessons and the quality of students' work was good in many of these cases. In other instances, however, there was little evidence of assigned homework. It is strongly recommended that homework is regularly assigned for all subjects in line with the school's homework policy. Homework exercises should be planned to consolidate class work and should help students develop their independent learning skills, which, as outlined in section 4.2, were lacking in many instances. Differentiation of homework for students doing higher and ordinary level in subjects and for students' individual capabilities was noted in some cases. The use of a variety of student exercises with more frequent opportunities to complete assignments is strongly recommended.

Good practices that encourage students to record their work and consolidate their learning were observed in some lessons. In these cases, students' copies were well corrected and there was evidence of constructive feedback given to students on areas where they needed to improve. However, a wider variety of more frequent and more challenging written assignments should be given to students. It is strongly recommended that students be expected to redraft incorrect answers to questions and this should be applied to all written work. There was a good standard of presentation in some of the copybooks examined. Exercises given to students were mainly of the short question variety and in future this should be balanced with longer questions and other types of revision assignments, for example, the construction of spider diagrams or mind maps. Good records of progress were presented during the inspection pertaining to students in the JCSP.

5. QUALITY OF SUPPORT FOR STUDENTS

5.1 Inclusion of students with additional educational needs

New and evolving structures and systems to support students with additional and SEN are developing in the school and significant progress has been made recently in this area. These include increasing the models of support from withdrawal to team-teaching and in-class support, in addition to the development of a well-resourced and dedicated learning support room. In order to develop the professional capacity to provide for students with SEN, the school has supported a teacher in gaining recognised qualifications in resource teaching and learning support. This is commended as it ensures that the school has access to the professional knowledge and skills necessary to lead a specialist learning support department. At present, the delivery of resource and learning support teaching is provided by a large number of subject teachers with interest rather than specific training in this area. A reduction in the number of teachers involved in the learning support department has been identified in the SEN plan as a priority. Management should review the deployment of teachers in this area and aim to establish a small core team of teachers with the interest, training and skills to meet the needs of these students. The development of this core team will lead to a consistency of approach and continuity of personnel in the provision of support for students.

The school has an allocation of 1.0 WTE teachers for learning support and 3.07 WTE teachers for resource teaching. The learning support co-ordinator uses some of the allocation

for co-ordination work and some for the provision of a range of student supports. Resource hours are used to provide additional tuition to students either through team teaching, or in small group or one-to-one settings.

Students with SEN are identified in an appropriate and systematic manner by the learning support co-ordinator and the guidance service. Incoming students who may require additional support are identified through psychological reports and information received from parents and the respective primary schools. Students are also identified through standardised tests, which are administered prior to students starting first year. It is good practice that progress of students in receipt of resource and learning support is regularly reviewed. It is recommended that the results of retesting are recorded to create a profile of students' development in the key areas of literacy and numeracy.

The school accesses all available resources to support these students, including additional teaching resources, special needs assistants (SNAs) and reasonable accommodations in certificate examinations (RACE). Students receive learning support right through until sixth year, if required. A number of approaches are in place to provide support, most of which involve the withdrawal of individuals or small groups from mainstream lessons for specific tuition in literacy or numeracy. Students who have an exemption from Irish or who, with the agreement of parents, do not study French are withdrawn from these lessons for learning support. In some instances, support involves adapting students' timetables by providing alternative subjects such as Environmental and Social Studies and Art, which students study as part of their Junior Certificate examination. The model of learning support has been identified for review by the learning support department. As already stated, the identification and recent introduction of in-class support and team-teaching to provide additional classroom support for students with SEN is good practice. It is recommended that this approach be further developed and promoted.

The school endeavours to bring a whole-school approach to the provision for students with SEN and there is structured liaison between subject departments and the learning support department. Teachers have received some whole-staff training on strategies for supporting students with SEN in the mainstream classroom, which is commendable. Subject departments are also provided with relevant information on students with SEN, which facilitates appropriate curricular planning and a whole-school approach to provision. In addition, the learning support co-ordinator provides advice and support to teachers on teaching methodologies such as differentiation and other specific strategies to assist in the full inclusion of students with SEN in the mainstream class, which is good practice.

Good progress has been made in the development of a special educational needs plan. Good work has also begun in the development of individual education plans (IEPs) for students in receipt of resource hours. It is recommended that a comprehensive policy for students with special educational needs, including students who are exceptionally able and talented, be developed. Many of the elements of such a policy currently exist within the present plan. The distinct policy should be prioritised for completion and ratification by the board and adoption by the whole-school community. This policy should inform and guide the practice of all teachers in the school in providing for and including all students with additional educational needs.

The school has a number of newcomer students whose first language is not English. The school is in receipt of an allocation of 0.68 WTE teachers to provide English as an additional language (EAL) for these students. As the majority of these students are from Poland, the school has translated relevant documentation into Polish to improve the quality of communication with parents of this particular group, which is commendable. A structured programme is provided to support the linguistic development of many of these students. It was observed during the course of the inspection that not all EAL students were appropriately

supported despite some having little proficiency in the language. The school should identify how the social integration of EAL students can be further enhanced, particularly during break times when many of these students congregate together along one of the corridors. Some additional strategies should be identified to encourage and facilitate these students to engage with the wider school community.

The school is in receipt of an additional 1.0 WTE teacher to support students from the Traveller community. A local youth organisation supported by the Diocese, the Ferns Diocesan Youth Service (FDYS), generously provides an educational support programme in the school for these students, which takes place one afternoon per week each for boys and girls. Many of these students are also in receipt of learning support provided by the school. A forum was held in the school some years ago to discuss how the school itself can best provide for students from the Traveller community. However, many of these students continue to have poor attendance records in school and this is an area of major concern for all involved: a further concern is that the curriculum may not be fully meeting their educational needs. Support is also offered by the school to these students and their families to improve attendance through the HSCL service. An examination of the current curriculum provision and support for students from the Traveller community should be undertaken. This should involve all relevant parties including the visiting teacher for Travellers (VTT), the FDYS, the Education Welfare Officer (EWO), a representative of the Traveller community and appropriate school personnel. The aim of such an initiative should be to examine curriculum provision best suited to ensure that the particular needs of these students are met, to encourage their greater attendance and participation in the school and to monitor their progress. It is important that these students have a voice and that the school's additional resource allocation for these students be fully used to identify and support their educational needs, in consultation with their families.

5.2 Guidance and student support in the whole-school context

The school has an allocation of 0.5 WTE *ex quota* position for Guidance and a further allocation of 0.14 WTE under the DEIS scheme. Full use is made of these combined resources to provide personal, educational and vocational guidance. A qualified guidance counsellor delivers the guidance service and plays a central role in the transfer of students into the school, in devising and advising on subject options and in the provision of a structured programme of guidance and counselling. Guidance is timetabled for fifth-year, sixth-year and PLC students and a module is also provided for third-year students. The Guidance service also supports students through personal counselling, and where appropriate or necessary, through referral to external agencies. Involvement of the guidance counsellor in the care team and pastoral structures of the school ensures that the guidance service plays an active role in student welfare and progress, and this is commended.

While the school has a dedicated office for Guidance, it does not have a well-developed guidance area. The guidance office has limited ICT facilities but has broadband access, a telephone, some storage space and a small display area to accommodate a guidance reference library. The available office space imposes limitations on the ability to offer guidance or counselling services to small groups or to provide students with access to online resources.

Good practice was evident in the development of the whole-school guidance plan, which involved a collaborative approach of key school personnel. It is highly commendable that an evaluation of the guidance provision in the school was undertaken to inform the structure and content of the current guidance programme. This plan should be updated annually to reflect any changes in provision, student needs and structures in the school. The guidance counsellor participates in information sessions arranged for parents to assist them in helping their child to make subject choices and to make successful transitions. Good links have been established between the school and community, business, institutes of higher and further education and training bodies. Student destinations into employment or further education are also tracked.

The school participates in the HSCL scheme funded under DEIS and has an allocation of 1.0 WTE for this service. The service appropriately prioritises students and families in need to support and intervention to fully engage with the school. The HSCL also supports the work of various personnel, such as guidance and learning support, and contributes to the pastoral care structures in the school. The SCP provides financial support to operate a successful breakfast club each morning for students, to monitor school attendance, and to operate a homework club and evening study, which is available to all students. The work of the various personnel involved in providing these valuable supports to students is highly commended.

A student support structure is in place in the school. Individual class groups have been assigned to a class teacher who monitors students' progress and well-being. However, this role is mainly pastoral with some focus on behavioural issues. A formal role for the monitoring of students' academic progress is not clearly established. A year head system does not exist in the school. Consideration should be given to establishing a junior cycle and senior cycle dean or co-ordinator, within the post structure, with specific responsibility for monitoring and improving student attainment. Given the recommendations made regarding posts in section 1.3 and student outcomes in section 1.1 of this report, there is significant scope for this and it should become a prioritised area for whole-school development.

A care team was recently established consisting of the principal, deputy principal, the guidance counsellor, the JCSP co-ordinator, the learning support co-ordinator and the HSCL co-ordinator. A timetabled weekly meeting takes place to identify students at risk, to discuss students' needs and to agree appropriate interventions for students. This is good practice. Essential information is disseminated to relevant teachers on a needs basis following these meetings. A Meitheal mentoring team, comprising of sixth-year students, provides support for incoming first-year students and this was found to be working well in the school.

In addition to celebration events for JCSP students, the school has an annual awards ceremony at the end of the school year to acknowledge the importance of all students' efforts and achievements. This is highly commended.

6. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT

The following are the main strengths identified in the evaluation:

- A caring atmosphere exists in the school and inter-personal interactions within the school were found to be cordial and respectful.
- The board of management is appropriately constituted and meets regularly and members endeavour to actively support the school.
- A relatively broad range of subjects is provided by the school.
- Teachers are appropriately deployed according to their qualifications and have opportunities to teach all programmes at all levels.
- Good ICT facilities are available in the school to support learning and teaching across the curriculum.
- Many subject departments are developing common approaches to learning and teaching and assessment and many have developed comprehensive subject plans.
- Good efforts are made by teachers to provide a secure, caring and supportive learning environment.
- Structures and systems to support students with special educational needs are developing well in the school.
- A well structured and organised student council is in place to represent the student voice.

- The personal, social and pastoral needs of students are supported in the school through a range of structures.
- The school provides a number of opportunities for students to engage in a range of co-curricular and extra-curricular activities. Student achievement, in a variety of areas, is celebrated.
- There is an active parents' association which is committed to supporting school improvement. There are appropriate structures to support regular communication between the school and parents.

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

- The board of management should be proactive in providing management and leadership to the school. It must ensure that appropriate structures and procedures are in place to support all areas of school improvement in order to realise fully its mission statement and to uphold the characteristic spirit of the school.
- Senior management should develop, communicate and deliver a clear action plan for the school's development.
- There is a need for a systematic focus on the improvement of learning outcomes of students as a result of an inclusive review and self-evaluation process.
- A whole-school policy on raising expectations in relation to attendance and attainment should be developed as a matter of priority, established in practice and subject to a cycle of ongoing evaluation and review.
- Subject departments should focus on methods of incorporating more active teaching methodologies into the teaching of their subjects. Initiatives to promote student self-directed learning and appropriately challenging tasks for students should be developed and implemented to support students to achieve their full potential.
- A whole-school review of the posts of responsibility should be undertaken to ensure that the middle-management structure operates effectively to meet the identified needs of the school community.
- All school policies required by legislation must be developed as a matter of priority and ratified by the board.
- Allocated teaching hours for all staff should be included in the school's official timetable. Additional hours for resource and learning support tuition should, where possible, be factored into the timetable at the time of its construction. Due regard should be given to reducing the number of teachers involved in providing learning support to a smaller core team.
- Procedures should be established by the board to ensure compliance with post-primary circulars M44/05 and 0062/2006 and to meet its responsibilities regarding Child Protection matters. Moreover, steps should be taken to ensure that each successive board is made aware of its responsibilities in this regard.
- When organising the curriculum and timetable, the time allocated to Physical Education in first and third year should be increased and core subjects should be more evenly distributed across the week.
- Additional strategies should be identified to encourage and facilitate the greater social integration of EAL students.
- Consideration should be given to the development and implementation of strategies to improve the educational provision and outcomes for students from the Traveller community.

Post-evaluation meetings were held with senior management 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 Biology/Science – 27 November 2009
- Subject Inspection of CSPE – 25 March 2009
- Subject Inspection of English – 25 November 2009
- Subject Inspection of DCG - 26 November 2009

Published February 2011.

Appendix

School response to the report

Submitted by the Board of Management

Area 1: Observations on the content of the inspection report

While this report provides the school with a valuable perspective and possible blueprint for further school improvement, it should be noted that many of the recommendations outlined in the report encapsulate the vision of the new management team which is now in place in the school. The school's new senior management team welcomes this report as a positive affirmation of their plan.

The Board of Management and staff of Bunclody Vocational College also welcome this whole school evaluation report which recognises the many strengths of our school and examples of good practice which include:

- A committed staff, a caring atmosphere and the respectful interpersonal relations which exist in our school.
- The quality of teaching found during the various subject inspections and the efforts made by teachers to provide a secure, caring, stimulating and supportive learning environment.
- The well behaved students and calm atmosphere in our school.
- The broad range of subjects provided.
- The quality of ICT facilities available to support teaching and learning across the curriculum.
- The quality of structures and systems to support students with special educational needs.
- The range of co-curricular and extracurricular activities.
- The contribution of support staff and the well maintained grounds despite the age of the school.

The Board is satisfied that the inspection recognised the caring spirit of our school. We are also very pleased with the various subject evaluations and wish to congratulate the Science, Biology, English, Technical Graphics, Design and Communication Graphics and CSPE Departments in the school. While the report recognises many of the school's strengths, it is

the board's opinion that it does not provide a totally accurate reflection of day to day life in our school and its exceptional strengths.

It is significant that the report is somewhat misleading as it implies that teachers were uncooperative with inspectors in pre and post evaluation meetings. While it is true teachers did not engage in these meetings it is important to note that this was due to the TUI directive which was in place at the time of this inspection. These directive prohibited teacher engagement with the inspectorate and also stalled school planning work for a considerable period leading up to this inspection. The directives which were in place are not acknowledged in any shape or form by this report. These directives therefore prohibited teachers from describing in detail for themselves the work that they do and/or their contribution to school life. The information contained in this report with regard to their work was by and large obtained from secondary sources and therefore is not necessarily a truly accurate account of their work.

The board is also of the view that this report does not take due cognisance of the context of the designated disadvantaged area in which our school is situated. Bunclody Vocational College is an inclusive school which welcomes and caters for students from **all** socio economic and cultural backgrounds. While we view our inclusiveness as one of the many commendable features of our school we also recognise that inclusive policies which embrace all children present challenges for any school therefore some of the issues identified in this report are issues of national concern and therefore are not solely unique to our school. Our exceptionally dedicated staff gives generously of their free time after school, at weekends and even during holiday periods to ensure that all students are driven to achieve their full potential. We believe we are very successful in promoting the academic and holistic development of our students. Many have won local and national awards for their accomplishments and achieve results which compare favourably with and indeed often exceed national averages in several subject areas. Many of our pupils go on to third level. Many have also gone on to forge successful careers or set up their own businesses within their communities. The Board was disappointed that no reference or affirmation was made to the adult education services the school provides to the community through its PLC and night classes. It also noted the report did not reflect the wide range of extra-curricular activities for 2nd level students including drama, horse riding, cultural tours and outdoor pursuits.

The Board is of the view therefore that the efforts of our students and teachers are not fully reflected in this report.

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 following areas have also been addressed since the evaluation:

- The schools SEN and Learning Support policy, RSE policy, Admissions policy and Code of Behaviour have been developed and are soon to be ratified by the Board of Management. The school is currently focussing on its Health and safety statement.
- A Personal identity Workshop was attended by all students. This programme focussed on the student's integration into school life.
- A morning assembly for all classes has been introduced. This provides each student with the opportunity to meet with their class teacher, who will monitor their

attendance, progress and participation on a daily basis. This compliments the continuous assessment strategy which has also been introduced.

- The school has conducted a report into student attendance and has also established a committee to promote strategies for improved attendance. This committee involves all stakeholders: NEWB; HSCLO; school completion; EAL teacher; Guidance Counsellor; JCSP; Resource; Principal; PBL teacher.
- The majority of Board members have attended Board of Management training and Child Protection Information training will be ongoing.
- A Parents Handbook was produced and distributed to parents at the induction night for all students new to the school.
- An information night was held for parents of 3rd year students. This dealt with subject choice and an overview of LCVP. LCVP subject restrictions have been removed to facilitate student access to their preferred subjects.
- The Staff Handbook is expected to be launched for the forthcoming academic year.
- The Board of Management the continuous development of all staff. In particular we encourage staff to embrace alternative teaching methodologies, with a view to enhancing the learning community within our school. Further staff development days are being considered with this in mind.
- A review of the post structure within the school is currently underway since the removal of TUI directives in the past few weeks. Senior management will carefully consider recommendations from this report when restructuring posts of responsibility.
- The “Moving On” programme was launched to promote our school. This initiative was held over four days during the mid-term break and provided primary students in the catchment area with the opportunity to experience second level subjects.
- The school has also expanded its programme aimed at supporting students in their transition from Primary to Post Primary school.
- An additional parent teacher meeting for exam classes after the mocks has been introduced. The student was also present for this meeting. This proved to be very successful and will now become a permanent feature of the school calendar.
- The School Development Plan is under complete review given the shared vision of the teaching staff and new management of the school.
- The Board of Management feels that staff and the new management of the school have made significant progress since the WSE and we look forward to the challenge of implementing the recommendations of this report.