

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Whole-School Evaluation
REPORT

Mount Temple Comprehensive School
Malahide Road, Dublin 3
Roll number: 81002K

Date of inspection: 23 October 2009



WHOLE-SCHOOL EVALUATION

A whole-school evaluation of Mount Temple Comprehensive School was undertaken in October, 2009. This report presents the findings of the evaluation and makes recommendations for improvement. During the evaluation, the quality of teaching and learning in four subjects was evaluated in detail, and two subject evaluations were carried out in advance. Separate reports are available on these six subjects. (See section 7 for details.) The board of management was given an opportunity to comment in writing on the findings and recommendations of the report, and the response of the board will be found in the appendix of this report.

INTRODUCTION

Mount Temple Comprehensive School was established in 1972 following the amalgamation of Bertrand and Rutland School with Mountjoy School and the Hibernian Marine School. Its primary objective was the provision of free education for the Protestant population of north Dublin. In the past, in an attempt to promote diversity, there were reserved places for Catholic students. However, this has proven no longer necessary and both students and staff provide a mix of twenty or more religious persuasions.

The school has been situated on the same twenty-three acre site around Mount Temple House since its inception. The house, a listed building, dates from 1863 and its clock tower was immortalised in the novel “Under the eye of the clock” written by Christy Nolan, a past pupil of the school. The main feeder schools for Mount Temple include north Dublin primary schools under Protestant management along with north Dublin multi-denominational schools.

The main school building, completed in the early 1970s, was built to house approximately 450 students. However, with a current enrolment of 849, the school is operating out of nine different buildings on the site. School management are actively engaged with the Department of Education and Skills planning and building unit as they proceed through the stages to acquire a new, more spacious and better equipped school building.

The school has had a number of changes in in-school senior management in the recent past and, at the time of the inspection, had an acting principal in place since September 2008.

1. QUALITY OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT

1.1 Characteristic spirit of the school

From the outset, Mount Temple was strongly influenced by the ethos and values of its amalgamating schools. It espoused education of the whole child, promotion of the individual and commitment to those excluded by society. Today, the school’s mission statement emphasises care, mutual respect, responsibility, growth and learning, underpinned by the assertion that all members of the school community are different and all are equal. The expansion of the school’s curriculum to include the Transition Year (TY), Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP) and, most recently, the Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) makes a significant contribution to meeting the stated mission.

School documentation states a respect for diversity and the promotion of inclusion. It emphasises tolerance, co-operation and respect. The board of management described the school as truly comprehensive, inclusive, tolerant and valuing diversity. The parents’ association expressed pride in the school being inclusive, sharing, considerate and tolerant.

However, during the evaluation, there was a strongly and frequently expressed sentiment that the school has been too successful in living out its ethos of inclusiveness and should now look at ways of modifying its intake. It would be regrettable if changes to the admissions policy or practices would see Mount Temple lose its fundamental and admirable principles of inclusion and tolerance.

The school has articulated its vision and direction for the future as an innovator and leader in world-class inclusive education and has stated its commitment to sustainable development. This vision is communicated to students through the student journal and to others through the school website. It remains for the school to decide if this vision still reflects the path along which it wishes to proceed.

The school's admissions policy currently supports the stated inclusive ethos of the school, as does the anti-bullying charter. The school's focus on the education of the whole child or young person can be seen in the curriculum it offers: skills-based subjects sit alongside theory-based or academic subjects and there is a strong emphasis on the creative arts. Its extracurricular programme promotes growth and learning outside the classroom walls and its good uptake rates at higher level in examination subjects is indicative of the learning that is taking place.

During the inspection, an early-morning assembly of sixth-year students was observed. Without any need to call for order, the year head began the business of the day, making announcements and reading notices that were listened to attentively. Respect was also strongly in evidence for the thoughts shared with the group by the school chaplain.

A lunchtime music recital that took place during the inspection week not only provided the opportunity to publicly celebrate students' talents, but also indicated the mutual respect between students in the school. Performers felt secure in standing out among their peers, and the audience, who listened respectfully and attentively until the final notes, then showed huge appreciation for the gifts that had been shared with them.

1.2 School ownership and management

The board of management, following agreement with the Department of Education and Science, changed to having eleven members in October 2007. Its composition is in line with the Education Act 1998, having nominees of the patron, teaching staff, and parents as well as a nominee of the City of Dublin Vocational Educational Committee. A number of members of the board have participated in training offered by the Association of Community and Comprehensive Schools (ACCS) at the time of its establishment. More recent additions to the board have not as yet availed of specific training. The board should establish a system whereby new members are offered information and training as a matter of course.

The chairperson of the board is selected by the patron from among his nominees. The current chairperson has held the position for a number of years and was reported to lead the board very effectively. Meetings take place every four to six weeks during the school year, indicating a recognition by the board of the importance of its function within the school. The board produces a written report of its meetings for communication to the parent and teacher bodies, but dissatisfaction was expressed by one member in regard to its method of compilation. Items to be included in this report should continue to be agreed by the board prior to the close of meetings and the written text prepared by the secretary to the board in consultation with the chairperson.

The board sees an important aspect of its role as supporting in-school management, with whom it has an excellent working relationship. There is weekly contact between the acting

principal and the chairperson, who is actively involved in school issues. The chairperson also communicates regularly with the patron, the Church of Ireland Archbishop of Dublin and Bishop of Glendalough, and formally writes to him once each year to keep him informed of the work of the school.

Areas of work on which the current board has spent considerable time and effort have been personnel and industrial relations matters along with accounting and financial matters. Preference was expressed that they would spend their time on the review and development of school policies, the improvement of and support for teaching and learning, planning for the new building and the security of the school site. While recognising the dedication and commitment of board members, there was evidence to suggest that the board can have difficulty making progress on agreed agendas. It is hoped that steps being taken by the chairperson to resolve this situation will be successful, allowing the board focus more of its energies on issues that have a direct impact on learning and teaching in the school.

The parents' association (PA) is long standing and plays a significant role in the life of the school. Although the committee of the association is made up of twenty-two members, interest is such among the parent body that there is no difficulty in making up that number. The association is affiliated to the Parents Association of Community and Comprehensive Schools (PACCS), but to date, committee members have not engaged in training specific to their role. It is recommended that training opportunities be investigated and officers and committee members participate in available courses or seminars so as to optimise the effectiveness and efficiency of PA activities.

The role of Mount Temple PA is that of liaison between the general body of parents and the school. Its members engage in fundraising to support school activities, they are partners in the policy development process and they take initiatives, most notably acting as volunteer librarians and as volunteer 'matrons' taking charge of the school's 'sick bay'. The committee of the PA meets monthly and good lines of communication with the school are maintained through attendance at its meetings by the principal and by teacher nominees.

1.3 In-school management

The acting principal has been in situ since September 2008 and the deputy principal since early 2007, with a period of approved absence through the end of 2008 and beginning of 2009. Thus, as a senior management team, at the time of the inspection they were in the early stages of building a professional relationship. However, their interactions are characterised by openness and co-operation. They consult with each other at least twice daily, discussing current issues and planning for the short term. Although long-term planning is difficult in the present circumstances where the acting principal is expecting his contract to finish, it is impressive that decisions with long-term consequences are still being taken.

Both acting principal and deputy principal adopt an open-door approach and are available to staff without appointment. Their division of duties has been informal and evolving and the resolution of issues is very much a joint effort. The acting principal, despite being busy with normal management and administrative duties, is visible around the school, greets students and staff on corridors or in the grounds, and keeps in touch with extracurricular activities involving both students and teachers. He is the public face of the senior management team. The deputy principal is involved more in discipline issues, usually in conjunction with the year heads or dean of discipline and she expressed an appreciation of the collegiality that exists with other staff members. Together, the senior management team share a vision of Mount Temple as an inclusive, tolerant, caring environment where independence and individuality are fostered.

The schedule of posts defines the middle management structure within the school. It was last reviewed and agreed in January 2007 following the documentation of duties at that time. The review involved much discussion, a number of meetings and a staff survey. In line with good practice, post holders, the whole teaching staff and the board of management were involved in the review process. The next review, the objective of which is to ensure the promotional posts continue to reflect the changing needs of the school, is planned for the current school year and will likely be led by an external facilitator. The subsequent agreed schedule, ratified at board of management level, and a list of related post holders should then be notified to all staff.

There are currently eleven assistant principals and fifteen special-duties teachers forming the middle management structure within the school. A significant number of these post holders have retained the same duties for many years. Following the latest planned review of the schedule of posts, it is recommended that a rotation of posts among individual post holders be agreed. In this way, the school can benefit from the different strengths of staff members and teachers can benefit from familiarisation with new areas of experience and the development of new areas of expertise.

Annual end-of-year meetings between post holders and senior management have not been systematic or across the board. Such meetings can assist post holders in identifying and communicating post-related issues to senior management and allow for priorities to be set for the coming year. They are also an important source of encouragement and support for all members of middle management and so should be incorporated into the school's annual schedule.

Assistant principals, as a group, have met on one occasion this term, at a time allocated by senior management. In previous years, regular early morning meetings took place, but that arrangement has since lapsed. Special-duties teachers do not currently meet as a group. The sense of being members of middle management is underdeveloped among the post holders. However, many of them take on leadership roles such as driving working groups, influencing enhancements in teaching and learning, providing advice for less experienced staff members or standing in for the principal or deputy in their absence. Assistant principals are now encouraged to reinstate regular meetings, creating a forum for developing action plans to address whole-school issues. Such plans should then be discussed with senior management and implementation roles agreed. In this way, the assistant principals can develop into a cohesive middle-management body, shaping a stable present and future for the school. Once-per-term meetings of special duties teachers, at which they would share perspectives on whole-school matters, would also enhance their sense of belonging to middle management, to the benefit of the school.

Systems for communication with staff include announcements at the morning break, use of pigeon holes, staff handbook, notices on the staff room notice board and email messages. While recognising the difficulties in a school the size of Mount Temple in trying to ensure appropriate staff members are kept informed of changes, increased efforts need to be made to achieve this. Full staff meetings are scheduled for this year to take place on ten occasions. School management is reminded of the agreed arrangements for staff meetings (circular M58/04), under which one meeting per term is to have one half of its time allocation from outside normal school hours.

Teachers' continuing professional development (CPD) is provided for partially through the organisation of staff development days; in December 2008, staff attended workshops facilitated by the Second Level Support Service (SLSS) on behaviour management, student motivation and mixed-ability teaching. In addition, individual teachers are supported in accessing available in-service courses during school time. It is suggested that an opportunity might be found during staff meetings for the sharing with other teachers of

information gained at external CPD activities. The board of management encourages the undertaking of courses of study by providing a small amount of funding. The board has also funded some memberships of subject associations. Consideration should be given to inviting each subject department in the school to avail of one board-of-management-funded subject association membership on an annual basis.

Mount Temple operates a year head and form teacher system as a means of managing the care, discipline and academic matters that are normal elements of student life. The roles, although well-established, have not as yet been formalised. It is suggested that current form teachers and year heads use their considerable experience and expertise in documenting a profile of each of these roles that are so vital in the life of the school.

The student council, under the expert guidance of the liaising teacher, has recently written its constitution and reviewed the way in which students are elected. The council is made up of year representatives, but weighted in favour of senior students. It is recommended that the council reviews its level of representation from first year and second year in particular, with a view to building student leaders for the future. The council members are elected each year; elections take place in May (for the following year) for year groups from second to fifth year and in November for first year. Meetings of the council are conducted once per week, are agenda-driven and minuted. The council communicates with the general student body through its notice board outside the library, on which minutes of meetings are pinned. Students can communicate with members of the council through a suggestion box in the library, or directly, in person. Members are recognisable from their names and photos on the school website and their names at the front of the student journal and they are currently considering the acquisition of badges to further improve their profile. The council participated in role-specific training this year with their liaising teacher and displayed a sound knowledge of their important function within the school. Members who met with the inspection team were articulate, realistic and enthusiastic.

The importance attached by the school to student attendance and punctuality has led to this area being overseen by an assistant principal, who links in with year heads and the student care team. Monitoring systems are in place, including the use of text messages to alert nominated parents to a child's absence. In line with good practice, attendance of students of the Leaving Certificate Applied is closely observed to ensure they meet the ninety percent attendance requirement of the programme itself.

The code of behaviour for students is published on the school's website and printed in a policy booklet. Its fundamental principles are respect for and tolerance of all members of the school community. Its aims promote self-discipline and personal responsibility and it notably makes reference to staff behaviour with respect to students as well as student behaviour. Active participation in the learning process is expected of students and there is an appropriate focus on gaining maximum benefit from time spent in Mount Temple. School rules, the role of parents and possible sanctions up to and including expulsion are included in the code. A statement of the right of parents and of students over the age of eighteen years to appeal a suspension or expulsion should also be included in this section. A notable feature of the code of behaviour is an open invitation to all members of the school community to contribute to its development and improvement. The code is currently undergoing audit and review in line with National Educational Welfare Board (NEWB) guidelines.

The school communicates with the general body of parents in a variety of appropriate ways including via text message, email, phone, letter, the student journal and the school website. The website provides easily accessed accounts of the ongoing business of the school along with regularly updated news and information from school management, teachers and students. It is suggested that a system whereby parents or other members of the school

community could communicate with the school via the website should be investigated. The school also holds a series of meetings for parents of different year groups in the first and second terms. Parent-teacher meetings take place once in the year for each year group on designated afternoons from October to March. School management's attention is drawn to the terms of circular M58/04 regarding the timing of three of those meetings.

The links between the school and the local community are many and varied. Students following the TY, LCA or LCVP find placements with local businesses for work experience. TY students also engage in community work with local centres for the elderly and for children with disabilities. The school makes its sporting facilities available to clubs in the area and representatives of some of these clubs sit on the school's sports council. There are also impressive links maintained with past pupils, many of whom remain with or return to the school to become involved in the areas of sports, arts or business, laudably sharing their expertise and enthusiasm with current students.

1.4 Management of resources

Under Department of Education and Science circular M29/95 it is a requirement for schools to provide a minimum of twenty-eight hours' tuition time per week for all students. At Mount Temple, this obligation is not currently being met. In addition to the new school arrangement that sees classes finish thirty minutes early on Wednesdays, the timetable for this year indicates that first-year classes are receiving only twenty-six hours tuition and TY classes twenty-four hours forty minutes per week. It is essential for school management to address this situation as soon as possible.

The time allocated to individual subject areas is in line with syllabus guidelines and teaching staff, in almost all cases, are teaching subjects in line with their qualifications and expertise. Teachers' timetables, however, indicate that a very small number of permanent whole-time staff are not fulfilling the minimum requirement of eighteen hours' class contact time as required by the Department of Education and Science regulations. This situation should be corrected as soon as possible. In addition, the hours of deployment of a larger number of teachers falls short of the expected maximum level of twenty-two hours per week. The fuller utilisation of teachers' classroom teaching hours would greatly assist the school in meeting its obligations to students with regard to the number of hours' tuition being made available each week.

The school accommodation is not ideal, with numbers of students having far outgrown the original target. However, specialist subjects are being catered for as well as possible, in the circumstances. Having only one home economics kitchen area, one design and communications graphics (DCG) room, one metalwork/engineering room and one materials technology (wood)/construction studies room has an impact on the numbers of students that can be facilitated in studying those subjects.

The materials technology (wood)/construction studies workshop is particularly small and unsuited to the effective teaching of the subject. Machines are competing for space with student work benches and storage capacity is minimal. While it is understood that a new construction studies workshop is planned for the new building, it is recommended that a temporary measure be put in place until that project comes to fruition.

The school library is impressive, with its carefully catalogued collection of books and other resources. The parents' association makes funds available annually for the purchase of materials including books and parent volunteers fulfil the role of librarian on a daily basis. The library is also used as a centre for after-school study, available to students in examination years.

Information and communications technology (ICT) resources in the school include computers in each classroom linked to a central server, in excess of ten fixed and mobile data projectors and two interactive whiteboards, one of which is situated in the DCG room. The educational supports department has very good access to laptop and desktop computers, along with good software in the area of literacy. The DCG department has been upgraded with both hardware and software due to the T4 initiative and the school's computer room is stocked with twenty-five desktop computers and a fixed data projector. The computer room is scheduled for LCA and TY classes and, following request to school management, for LCVF link modules. It is available for booking outside of those times. There is a small staff work room that contains computing, internet and photocopying facilities and staff can also use the computer room for their personal research or preparation work.

Classroom resources required by teachers are available, funds permitting, on application to the principal. Some staff members expressed a lack of awareness of the steps necessary to access such resources, but the system operated in the school is clearly described in the staff handbook.

Fire extinguishers visible around the school have been recently serviced, and a fire drill took place at the end of the last school year. The school safety statement, reviewed in September 2007, was prepared in accordance with 1980s legislation. It may now need revision in light of the more recent Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Act, 2005 or its general applications (2007).

2. QUALITY OF SCHOOL PLANNING

2.1 The school plan

The formal development and review of school policies and plans has been proceeding at a slower pace in the recent past and up to the time of the evaluation. This has been influenced by the temporary changes taking place in senior management. In addition, there has been no member of middle management overseeing school planning in recent years. It is recommended that any redistribution of posts of responsibility includes the assigning of a post in school development planning to one of the middle management team.

There is currently no document corresponding to a school plan, although a 'policy booklet', last prepared for 2008/2009, contains a range of policies, draft policies and procedures that would appropriately sit in either the permanent or developmental sections of such a plan. It is suggested that one of the first tasks for the post holder in school planning would be to draft a school plan including policy and other materials already available in the school. An audit of policy development and review was carried out in 2007/2008 and again in 2009/2010. However, with a small number of exceptions, the progress made between these two periods is unclear.

Subject department planning was identified as a priority in the 2007/2008 audit and subject departments and their co-ordinators were facilitated in meeting to progress subject department plans. In October that year, department plans were to be finalised following a presentation to subject teachers and co-ordinators on planning for students with special educational needs (SEN). During the evaluation process, almost all subject department plans were presented for inspection. Although there were individual differences, plans generally followed the format suggested by the School Development Planning Initiative (SDPI) and were indicative of healthy engagement with the planning process. It is now planned that schemes of work for all subjects will be accessible on the school website. Further detail on subject department planning is contained in section 4.1 of this report.

Planning for the introduction of the LCA began, appropriately, in the year prior to its introduction. The process included the provision of information to teaching staff via input by a facilitator from the SLSS team, information for parents and students from third year and TY, and consultation with form teachers and year heads from third year and TY. The teacher who took on the role of co-ordinator was particularly suited to the position given that he had previous experience of and involvement in the programme, and he played a key role in leading the school, as effortlessly as possible, through the steps involved. Planning and preparation continued with the co-ordinator and the teachers involved attending a range of CPD activities and in the organisation of a SLSS presentation to teachers on positive behaviour.

The school's code of behaviour is currently undergoing review under the leadership of the dean of discipline. Teaching staff and the student council have been addressed in preparation for the process of consultation, which it is intended will also include representatives of the parents' association. It is proposed to form a task group, comprising representatives of school management, teaching staff, parents and students, which would be in keeping with good practice in policy development. The timeline prepared for the work involved may need tightening up in light of the time available and the time required to consult in a meaningful way with stakeholders. In addition, it is recommended that membership of the proposed task group be opened up so as to include the perspectives of a wider range of members of the school community.

Confirmation was provided that, in compliance with Post-primary Circulars M44/05 and 0062/2006, the board of management has formally adopted the *Child Protection Guidelines for Post-primary Schools* (Department of Education and Science, September 2004). Confirmation was also provided that these child protection procedures have been brought to the attention of management, school staff and parents. A designated liaison person (DLP) and a deputy DLP have been appointed in line with the requirements of the guidelines. A copy of the procedures needs to be provided to all staff (including all new staff) and management must ensure that all members of staff are periodically reminded of the procedures to be followed.

Many policies developed in the school have their date of adoption included as a footnote. Notably, some also have proposed review dates, although many of these have not been met. It is recommended that, in future, all policies include their date of ratification by the board of management, the parties involved in their development or review, and the proposed date for next review. Amendments implemented prior to formal review should also be ratified at board level and clearly documented.

3. QUALITY OF CURRICULUM PROVISION

3.1 Curriculum planning and organisation

The curricular programmes currently running at the school are the Junior Certificate, established Leaving Certificate, Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA), Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP) and Transition Year (TY). Within each programme there is a wide and balanced range of subjects and levels available to all students. The LCA was introduced on a trial basis last year following the identification of a cohort of students, now in their final year, for whom it was deemed most suited. It is to be hoped that subsequent to a wide-ranging review of all aspects of the programme, it will continue to be offered as part of the comprehensive curriculum available at Mount Temple.

Curriculum planning is ongoing, with changes and innovations introduced on an annual basis to ensure that breadth and balance are maintained. Last year it was decided to reduce the number of subjects studied by students for the Leaving Certificate from eight to seven, leading to additional tuition being offered in a number of their subjects, thus allowing students gain more benefit from their time spent in school. Also, to address issues in the uptake of continental languages at junior cycle, a system of language sampling, that appears to be successful, was introduced in first year.

TY is an optional programme in the school, but, impressively, almost all students choose to participate. Such a high voluntary uptake rate is clear evidence of its perceived value among students and parents. The elements of the programme include core subjects studied by all students throughout the year, optional subjects that provide a taste of their Leaving Certificate counterparts, and TY-specific modules such as Film Studies, Cookery or Japanese. In addition, students engage in four weeks of work experience, participate in trips abroad and to the Gaeltacht, volunteer for community work, stage a drama and complete a major year project of their choice. For a week in each of two separate months of the Christmas term, lessons for TY students are suspended as activities such as sailing, soccer training or first aid are organised. As such activities are considered to reflect the personal development aspect of the programme, participation for all students is compulsory.

Planning for TY now centres on the co-ordinator, who took up the role and availed of role-specific CPD approximately seven years ago. In previous years there was a TY development group, but due to a difficulty in scheduling meetings, the group lapsed. The co-ordinator now works closely with the form teachers who assist with organisation and preparation for activities and with the other teachers who lead many of the activities on offer during the year. The comprehensive TY plan has been prepared and is maintained by the co-ordinator. It includes organisational details, information leaflets, individually-prepared work programmes for subjects and modules, work experience details, sample letters to parents, students' comments and co-ordinator's reflections. The co-ordinator is congratulated on its content, organisation and presentation.

Work experience within TY is co-ordinated by a separate member of the teaching team, who attended a two-day CPD course run by the SLSS in 2007/2008. Discussion and documentation indicate a very well-organised programme with unambiguous aims and objectives, appropriate preparation, monitoring, debriefing and assessment of students' participation, and clear identification of challenges. Particularly impressive is the fact that the preparation of students for work experience begins with two addresses by the co-ordinator while they are still in third year, and the handbook on work experience prepared for students' information and use.

Co-ordinators of both the TY and the LCA have had input into the planning stage of the timetabling process for their respective programmes. Teachers involved in teaching the programmes have expressed an interest in doing so, and have been facilitated in up-skilling through attendance at in-service training. Minutes of LCA team meetings indicate regular positive discussion and a strong commitment to developing the programme in the school. It is recommended that the planned formal review, which, in line with good practice, is intended to include students, school management, the LCA teaching team, parents and the general body of teachers, should begin immediately so as to allow sufficient time to begin preparations for next year, should the decision be made for its continuation.

The LCVP co-ordinator takes responsibility for Preparation for the World of Work and Enterprise Education, the link modules forming part of the programme. She also arranges suitable outside speakers, organises students' projects and makes application for reasonable accommodation in the certificate examinations, as required. The LCVP requires that students study a recognised course in a modern European language other than Irish or

English. While there is considerable flexibility in the definition of such a course, it must be studied for the equivalent of one period per week over the two years of the programme. The school is currently not meeting this requirement and so steps must be taken to address this.

3.2 Arrangements for students' choice of subjects and programmes

First-year students are assisted in choosing unfamiliar optional subjects through a 'taster' programme that currently operates through first year. Prior to entry to the school, students opt to study Home Economics for the full year or, for a half year each, two of the four other available optional subjects. Given the difficulty in ensuring full syllabus coverage in subjects that are sampled in this way, the school should investigate operating a shorter period of sampling for students, allowing choices be made at an earlier stage and chosen subjects studied for a greater proportion of the first year. Such an approach would also facilitate the treatment of Home Economics in the same way as all other options. Final choices are currently made at the end of first year, following an information night for parents and the first-year parent-teacher meeting during which parents are appropriately encouraged to seek teachers' advice regarding their child's capacity for particular subjects. A change in the length of the sampling period would necessitate some amendments to this practice so care should be taken to maintain the level of supports currently offered.

Science is a core subject for junior cycle, with groups assigned to individual science teachers from the beginning of first year. However, from second year it is timetabled within blocks alongside optional subjects. This means that students who have settled into a particular group with a particular teacher are, depending on their choice of optional subjects, assigned a different science group and science teacher from second year, losing continuity. It is recommended that the school discontinues this strategy in its planning for and implementation of timetables from next year.

The generation of option bands at senior cycle is, appropriately, based on choices made by students prior to the end of TY. In the run up to choosing subjects, students and their parents are informed and advised by the guidance department and receive presentations from teachers on the optional Leaving Certificate subjects available in the school. Individual interviews with a member of the guidance team are also available to students to discuss their choices.

3.3 Co-curricular and extracurricular provision

The range of co-curricular activities promoted by teachers include competitions, quizzes, demonstrations, visiting speakers, cinema, theatre and concert trips, as well as participation in personal development and leadership awards. Teachers have been more than willing to share their passion and strengthen students' interest in their specialist subjects. There is reportedly good involvement of students with special educational needs in extracurricular activities. This can be important as a means of allowing those students experience success outside of classroom activities. The board of management expressed its satisfaction with the range of co-curricular and extracurricular activities on offer in the school and the parents' association indicated approval that there is an activity to suit every student.

Sport is particularly strong in the school, with, since 1994, a post holder, at assistant principal level taking on responsibility for sports development. 2002 saw the foundation of a sports council established to promote, develop and sustain sport in the school. It was notably farsseeing that membership of the council includes students, teachers, coaches, parents and affiliated clubs from the locality. In this way, links both within and outside school can be taken full advantage of. The sports council's success is clear from the fact that work is currently underway by members of the school community to investigate the

formation of an arts council to assist in the support, including financial support, of the arts among students.

4. QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN SUBJECTS

4.1 Planning and preparation

Good progress is being made on subject department planning in Mount Temple. Frequent, formal planning meetings are facilitated by school management in support of the planning process. Subject departments have nominated co-ordinators and, in keeping with good practice, this role is rotated. Subject teachers consult regularly on an informal basis on day-to-day issues. By engaging in this high level of collegial support for each other subject teachers have created a good sense of team spirit within their subject departments. The minutes of formal meetings were included in the department plans of the subjects inspected. It is recommended that, as a matter of course, minutes of these meetings be shared with school management.

There was evidence of a collaborative approach to planning within subject departments. It was evident that valuable discussion around the development of subject department policies and, in some cases, teaching methodologies and classroom practice has taken place. It is recommended that this practice be developed further by setting aside time in department meetings for the sharing of experience and expertise and for providing feedback from attendance at CPD courses. It is of note that some of the plans are revised and reviewed regularly so that they accurately reflect the current work of the subject departments. This reflective approach should be taken by all subject departments and all department plans should be amended to reflect changes that take place on an ongoing basis.

Curriculum planning at department level includes programmes of work that generally take the form of topics to be covered within defined timeframes. In the case of some subjects they are of high quality, including learning outcomes linked to appropriate teaching methodologies, resources and methods of assessment. It is recommended that this good practice be extended to all programmes of work. The opportunity for personal reflection and self-evaluation should also be included.

There was evidence of good co-operation between subject teachers and the educational support department in planning for the inclusion of students with special educational needs. The educational support department provides subject teachers with a list of individual students who require support and corresponding recommended support strategies. Procedures are also in place where class teachers can refer students who are experiencing difficulties to the relevant year co-ordinator for educational supports. This is very good practice.

Individual lessons were well planned and teachers had prepared all necessary resources. Handouts and worksheets provided to students were, in general, well designed and they supported learning. In some cases, however, written materials would have been more effective had they included differentiated questions and activities for students. Therefore, it is recommended that, when preparing complementary materials for lessons, teachers are mindful of the range of abilities in each class group and include exercises that gradually increase in difficulty.

Data on the school's performance in the certificate examinations is provided for subject departments by school management. Subject departments should compile and analyse such data over a three or four-year period with a view to identifying the school's strengths and areas for improvement, thus contributing to whole-team planning and review.

4.2 Learning and teaching

Short-term planning was very good in all of the subjects evaluated. This resulted in well-organised lessons that had a clear purpose, a logical sequence and were well structured. The good practice of explicitly stating the learning intention at the outset was evident in some lessons and there were some very good examples of summarising and verifying learning at the end of the lesson. To build on this good practice, it is recommended that clear statements of the learning intentions should be explicitly shared with students at the beginning of all lessons.

In a number of lessons, a variety of methodologies and teaching strategies was observed, stimulating students to engage actively with the content of the lessons. Such approaches included the use of questioning strategies that encouraged students to think analytically and critically about the topic-at-hand, group work and pair work activities. Given the wide range of preferred learning styles among any group of students, however, a more extensive use of active methodologies is recommended. This would help to ensure that students remain fully engaged with the content of the lesson and to create an appropriate balance between teacher and student input. There were some good examples of teaching approaches being adapted, during the course of the lesson, to meet the immediate needs of the students. This flexible approach to enhancing students' learning is very good.

In many cases, teachers were aware of the need to ensure that students were familiar with the language specific to the subject. The development of lists of key words displayed in the classroom is a very effective means of addressing this need. Differentiation was evident in some lessons, where resources had been designed taking the students' ranges of ability and learning needs into account. This is excellent practice and should be implemented across all subject departments.

Classroom management was effective and there was evidence of a good rapport between teachers and students. The classroom atmosphere was mutually respectful and supportive of learning. Students' contributions were warmly welcomed and they were readily affirmed in their work.

4.3 Assessment

A range of assessment strategies is being utilised by teachers, including the setting of examinations and the assigning and marking of class work and homework. Good practice was observed where teachers kept records of attendance, homework completed and test results.

Formal examinations are carried out at the end of Christmas and summer terms and students in examination years also sit "mock" examinations during the second term. Common examination papers are administered, where appropriate, and this is good practice. The results of these assessments are communicated to parents through formal written reports.

The school has a homework policy and, in line with this, homework is regularly set and marked. Teachers' acknowledgement of students' written work was evident and, in line with the principles of Assessment for Learning (AfL), both affirmation and recommendations were noted in students' copybooks. The samples of copybooks inspected indicated that, in most cases, students' work was of a good standard. Nonetheless, students should be reminded of the importance of presenting and marking their work in a structured and orderly fashion and be expected to follow up on all corrections made.

In classes in which students store materials in folders, standards regarding the organisation and maintenance of work varied considerably. It is recommended that the storage of students' resources and materials be regularly monitored.

5. QUALITY OF SUPPORT FOR STUDENTS

5.1 Inclusion of students with additional educational needs

The school's admissions policy is inclusive of students with special educational needs (SEN) or disabilities, supporting their enrolment and providing assurances of the school's intent to make full use of financial and human resources to make reasonable provision for such students. In addition, the school operates an effective system to identify students' special educational needs. This includes communication with parents and feeder primary schools, entrance assessment tests, teacher referrals, in-house screening and school examinations. These good practices have undoubtedly played a part in seeing the incidence of SEN in the school stand at approximately two students in eleven.

While it is within the remit of every teacher in the school to play their role in addressing these needs, appropriately, a dedicated team has been identified. This educational supports team, headed by the learning support co-ordinator, includes nine special needs assistants (SNAs), six year co-ordinators, four of whom have a qualification in SEN, and twelve mainstream subject teachers. There are weekly meetings between the educational supports co-ordinator and the year co-ordinators, ensuring close liaison between these key members of the team. Two year co-ordinators take responsibility for liaising with the SNAs and organise regular meetings with them. So far this year, there has also been a meeting between the educational supports team and the mainstream teachers who provide learning support. Guidance for the general body of mainstream subject teachers on how best to accommodate students with SEN in mainstream classes is provided in the form of a folder prepared by the educational supports department. In addition, any teacher can consult with the relevant year co-ordinator in relation to any student about whom a concern arises. These structures and measures currently in place are thorough and should be effective in ensuring that all staff members are confident and competent in their dealings with students who have SEN.

In line with good practice, the teachers involved in providing support for students whose needs are documented in psychological reports are currently collaborating on drawing up individual education programmes (IEPs) for their students. Programmes have, to date, been prepared for first-year and second-year students and will, in time, be prepared for all such students.

Facilities for the educational supports department are good with the recent acquisition of a dedicated pre-fabricated building containing two classrooms and an office area. In addition, two classrooms in the main building are reserved for working with students who require educational support. The rooms and office have good access to computers, including ten laptops and seven personal computers (PCs).

The model of intervention that consists of small learning-support classes and individual or small group learning-support or resource tuition has been in place in the school for a significant period of time. However, the range of strategies is reviewed on an on-going basis and in-class support is now in place. In addition, the forthcoming staff CPD session on team teaching is serving as the preamble to its inclusion in the range of educational support strategies used in the school. To further enhance the very good work being done with students with SEN, it is recommended that future discussions and planning activities include the formalisation of a structure to assess students' progress. The implementation of

such a system would help to ensure that interventions used are effective and to identify those worthy of continuing.

Correctly, at Mount Temple, SEN issues are recognised as not being the exclusive remit of the educational supports department. Whole staff involvement is maintained through planning activities, such as the forthcoming staff day on team teaching and the participation of general subjects' teachers in learning support and resource interventions. It is current policy within the school that teachers primarily involved in the provision of educational supports would also teach mainstream class groups, thus maintaining a balance in their work, for the benefit of both teachers and students.

A policy on SEN, which is under consideration at the time of the inspection, will be best developed in consultation and collaboration with team members, teaching staff, school management, parents and students. Such an approach takes time, but is as important as the policy itself. The planning process should be led by the educational supports co-ordinator, who should allow a realistic timeframe for its completion.

The school has a small allocation of language support in respect of two students for whom English is an additional language. Support is provided by a teacher who has participated in role-specific CPD and has access to a wide range of resources.

5.2 Guidance and student support in the whole-school context

Guidance is appropriately recognised as an important element of education in the school and all students are provided with a guidance programme to meet their specific needs and aspirations. Guidance counsellors meet with sixth-year students individually for educational and career guidance. The students are provided with a comprehensive information pack regarding college open days and career events. Preparation sheets which must be completed before attending such events are included in the pack. This is good practice as it ensures that students gain maximum benefit from their attendance at the events or open days.

Facilities for Guidance are good. Each of the two guidance counsellors has an office which is equipped with a telephone, computer and internet access. There is also secure storage and shelving in each office. There is a careers library and a careers section in the school library and there is a display board for guidance related notices outside the careers library.

The guidance plan is well-structured and detailed and is an excellent model of how such a plan should be developed and produced. The guidance team intends to review the plan and it is recommended that representatives of students, parents, the local business community and relevant external support services be included on the review team. On completion, the guidance plan needs to be formally ratified by the board of management.

The ongoing development of Guidance within the school would benefit from formal meetings between the guidance counsellors and the principal and deputy principal to discuss guidance-related issues. Agendas should be prepared in advance and records of decisions taken should be maintained.

A student care team, consisting of the educational supports co-ordinator, guidance counsellors, chaplain, deputy principal and dean of discipline, has been formally established this year. The team meets with year heads, on a rotating basis, to identify students in difficulty and to discuss support strategies. This very good practice links the strands of discipline, care and special needs, allowing for the effective transfer of information on students. To ensure that school management is kept fully and properly informed of care issues, students identified at care team meetings and those referred for further supports should be systematically notified to the principal.

Mount Temple has developed an anti-bullying charter that sets a standard for the school as a place where people care for each other, where differences are appreciated and where there is tolerance and kindness. The student prefects interviewed confirmed that the teachers care about student welfare and will intervene with students who come to their attention. It would now be timely for a whole-school care policy to be developed to bring all the strands of student care together and to enunciate a policy for staff care. The task group formed should be led by the care team and include representatives of the teachers, school management, parents and students.

Sports camps for incoming first-year students, organised and run during the month of August by a dedicated group of teachers, play a major role in supporting students' transition from primary school and are a credit to all involved. All incoming first-year students are invited to participate, allowing them get to know classmates and to become familiar with the school campus prior to the beginning of the formal school year.

Student effort and achievement throughout the school are supported and celebrated through the 'Eye of the Clock' awards structure. Award categories range from contribution to school life, through academic achievement, extracurricular contribution and attendance, to overall student of the year. Sporting achievements are also marked at a sports awards ceremony that takes place on an annual basis.

Student prefects are involved in the care and support of other students in the school, leading by example. They operate a 'buddy' system where ten prefects act as mentors to each first-year form group. They meet with their group once a week to listen to concerns and resolve issues. They also assist with the supervision of students at break and lunch times, ensuring problems don't develop in heavily frequented areas. The prefects who spoke with the inspection team demonstrated high levels of enthusiasm for their position and clearly took their responsibilities seriously. They play a significant and worthy part in making Mount Temple a caring 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 emphasises care, mutual respect, responsibility, growth and learning, underpinned by the assertion that all members of the school community are different and all are equal.
- The parents' association is long standing and plays a significant role in the life of the school. Members engage in fundraising to support school activities, they are partners in the policy development process and they take initiatives, most notably acting as volunteer librarians and as volunteer 'matrons' taking charge of the school's 'sick bay'.
- The code of behaviour for students is published on the school website and printed in a policy booklet. Its fundamental principles are respect for and tolerance of all members of the school community. Its aims promote self-discipline and personal responsibility and it notably makes reference to staff behaviour with respect to students as well as student behaviour.
- Strong links are maintained with past pupils, many of whom remain with or return to the school to become involved in the areas of sports, arts or business, laudably sharing their expertise and enthusiasm with current students.
- The school library is impressive, with its carefully catalogued collection of books and other resources. The parents' association makes funds available annually for

the purchase of materials including books and parent volunteers fulfil the role of librarian on a daily basis.

- Transition year is an optional programme in the school, but, impressively, almost all students choose to participate. The comprehensive TY plan includes organisational details, information leaflets, individually-prepared work programmes for subjects and modules, work experience details, sample letters to parents, students' comments and co-ordinator's reflections.
- Work experience within TY is a very well-organised programme with unambiguous aims and objectives, appropriate preparation, monitoring, debriefing and assessment of students' participation, and clear identification of challenges.
- Short-term planning was very good in all of the subjects evaluated. This resulted in well-organised lessons that had a clear purpose, a logical sequence and were well structured.
- The school's admissions policy is inclusive of students with special educational needs or disabilities, supporting their enrolment and providing assurances of the school's intent to make full use of financial and human resources to make reasonable provision for such students.
- Sports camps organised during the month of August for incoming first-year students play a major role in supporting their transition from primary school.
- Guidance is appropriately recognised as an important element of education in the school and all students are provided with a guidance programme to meet their specific needs and aspirations. The guidance plan is well structured and detailed and is an excellent model of how such a plan should be developed and produced.
- A student care team has been formally established this year. The team meets with year heads, on a rotating basis, to identify students in difficulty and to discuss support strategies. This very good practice links the strands of discipline, care and special needs, allowing for the effective transfer of information on students.
- The anti-bullying charter sets a standard for the school as a place where people care for each other, where differences are appreciated and where there is tolerance and kindness. Student prefects demonstrated high levels of enthusiasm for their position and clearly took their responsibilities seriously. They play a significant and worthy part in making Mount Temple a caring school.

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

- School management is reminded of the agreed arrangements for staff meetings (circular M58/04), under which one meeting per term is to have one half of its time allocation from outside normal school hours.
- The school safety statement needs revision in line with the Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Act, 2005 or its general applications (2007).
- It is recommended that a temporary measure be put in place to improve the physical facilities for Materials Technology (Wood)/Construction Studies.
- It is recommended that responsibility for school development planning be assigned to one member of the middle management team. One of the first tasks for the post holder would be to draft a school plan that would include policy and other materials already available in the school.
- A copy of the *Child Protection Guidelines for Post-primary Schools* (Department of Education and Science, September 2004) needs to be provided to all staff (including all new staff) and management must ensure that all staff are familiar with the procedures to be followed.
- It is recommended that all policies include their date of ratification by the board of management, the parties involved in their development or review, and the proposed

date for next review. Amendments implemented prior to formal review should also be ratified at board level and clearly documented.

- The school is not meeting its requirement to provide a minimum of twenty-eight hours' tuition time per week for all students. It is essential for school management to address this situation as soon as possible.
- Steps need to be taken to ensure that the modern languages requirement of the LCVP programme is met.
- Lessons should begin with clear statements of the learning intentions. In addition, a more extensive use of active methodologies is recommended.
- To ensure that school management is kept fully and properly informed of care issues, students identified at care team meetings and those referred for further supports should be systematically notified to the principal.
- The planning process for the development of a policy on SEN, based on consultation and collaboration, should be led by the educational supports co-ordinator, who should allow a realistic timeframe for its completion.

Post-evaluation meetings were held with the staff and board of management when the draft findings and recommendations of the evaluation were presented and discussed.

7. RELATED SUBJECT INSPECTION REPORTS

The following related Subject Inspection reports are available:

- Subject Inspection of English – 22 October 2009
- Subject Inspection of Gaeilge – 4 December 2008
- Subject Inspection of Guidance – 21 October 2009
- Subject Inspection of Mathematics – 16 September 2009
- Subject Inspection of Music – 19 October 2009
- Subject Inspection of Science/Biology – 20 October 2009

Appendix

8. SCHOOL RESPONSE TO THE REPORT

Submitted by the Board of Management

Area 1: Observations on the content of the inspection report

The Board of Mount Temple welcomes the findings of the WSE.

In particular, we welcome the recognition of

- The importance of Mount Temple’s vision, mission and future direction: including our emphasis, encapsulated in the motto “all different all equal”, and our focus on world class, inclusive, sustainable, global citizenship education.
- The excellence of teaching and learning in Mount Temple.
- The quality of care, provision, SEN and TY, LCA, LCVP, programmes
- The quality and extent of extra-curricular provision in sports, the creative arts, etc.
- Partnership between parents, teachers and students.
- An ethos of critical reflection, continuous improvement, learning from failure as from success, and mutual respect.

It is heartening to note that the inspectors recognise that this quality of provision is taking place within school buildings that are clearly not fit for purpose. The inspectors are one with the school community on this point. We look forward to immediate progress on the planned rebuild.

Mount Temple is arguably the most well-known Irish school, internationally. It is renowned for being inclusive, non-uniform, tolerant, innovative and committed to critical global education. The school has a vision for the future. The WSE process has reaffirmed that vision. To make the vision a reality, a rebuild is required.

Progress on a rebuild will see Mount Temple become Ireland’s first energy neutral school, and a prototype of excellence in educational architecture, a place where students can learn to become committed global citizens.

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

Meanwhile, the small number of findings in the evaluation that are constructively critical of particular policies, practices or provision have been noted, and will be taken into account, in future school and Subject Department planning. Those noted for immediate attention, including issues regarding timetabling; school planning, policy development, student care, tuition, and the continuing and strengthened use of active learning methodologies are already being addressed, following the informal feedback of the inspection team.

The suggestion that the mission, vision and future direction of the school might in some way be diminished by discussions regarding the success of Mount Temple’s commitment to inclusion are noted. However, there is no danger that the core values of inclusion and tolerance underlying Mount Temple’s educational vision will be diluted. The Board takes this opportunity to re-affirm the commitments made in the mission, vision and direction statement.

As the statement was developed in a participatory consultation with parents, teachers, students and informed by debates and quality frameworks nationally and internationally, the Board continues to affirm this statement, while recognising that debate about who we are continues to be part of who we are, as a school devoted to the Comprehensive ideal, informed by protestant Christian traditions, and encapsulated in the motto “All Different, All Equal”. The statement, which will periodically be revisited by the school community, is appended.