

**An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna**  
**Department of Education and Skills**

**Whole-School Evaluation**  
**REPORT**

**Coolmine Community School**  
**Clonsilla, Dublin 15**  
**Roll number: 913150**

**Date of inspection: 26 March 2010**



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

## **WHOLE-SCHOOL EVALUATION**

A whole-school evaluation of Coolmine Community School was undertaken in March 2010. This report presents the findings of the evaluation and makes recommendations for improvement. As part of the evaluation, the quality of teaching and learning in five subjects were evaluated in detail. One subject was evaluated in advance. Separate reports are available on these 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**

Coolmine Community School is a large co-educational school drawing its students mainly from Dublin 15 and is one of a number of post-primary schools serving this part of Dublin city. It was one of the first two community schools to be established in the State in 1972. The establishment of community schools marked a new departure in Irish second-level education which would provide local communities with access to an academic and vocational education. Enrolment in the school has been constant over the last four years and currently stands at 1096 students, 628 boys and 468 girls. The school caters for a wide range of academic abilities and draws its students from a variety of socio-economic and cultural backgrounds. The number of newcomer students has increased in recent years and these have been welcomed into the school community.

The school campus consists of seventeen acres on which are located the main school building, some temporary classrooms and extensive playing fields, including four astro-turf playing pitches. A sports and leisure complex, including a swimming pool is located on the school grounds which is used by students and is also available to the wider community. A further extension, consisting of four permanent classrooms, was being added to the school at the time of the evaluation.

#### **1. QUALITY OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT**

##### **1.1 Characteristic spirit of the school**

In line with the school's mission statement, an atmosphere of security and respect was evident to inspectors during the evaluation. This was considered to be a strong contributor to the environment that exists where students and teachers work together to promote the holistic development of students. The school seeks the support of each family and the wider community in the pursuit of this aim. The mission statement would benefit from some rewording in order to make its meaning more accessible to all members of the school community. It would be good practice to include the mission statement in policy documents and to display it prominently in the school.

The school fulfils its role as a community school very well and with commitment. This is evident in the provision of a wide range of subjects for students, by making its facilities available to the local community and by providing an adult and community education programme.

##### **1.2 School ownership and management**

The school has an effective and committed board of management which engages fully in the management and governance of the school. The current board was formed in autumn 2009 and is properly constituted in line with the Deeds of Trust for a Community School.

Some members of the current board have served on previous boards and bring their experience and expertise to the management of the school. The board generally meets six times per year and more often as required. Procedures are in place to ensure the effective operation of the board. A finance sub-committee has been formed and the board is kept up to date on the financial position of the school. The good practice of rotating the position of chairperson is in place as is the issuing of an agreed report at the conclusion of board meetings. Minutes of board meetings provided to inspectors indicated the wide range of issues discussed and the comprehensive nature of the principal's report delivered at each board meeting. The two deputy principals also have experience of attending board meetings. One of the two attends each board meeting on a rotating basis. Board members confirm that decisions are arrived at by consensus following extensive discussions. The board as appropriate has been involved in the recruitment and promotion of staff. Board members expressed their confidence and willingness in being able to fulfil their role in the effective management and governance of the school.

The board has been involved in the development, ratification and review of a significant number of policy documents, including the admissions policy. In line with the board's desire to be as actively involved as possible in the management of the school some members of the board have joined sub-committees set up to explore important school issues, for example a review of the exploratory first year programme. The board expressed the view that the caring ethos of the school was particularly evident in the supports provided to students and that students have a sense of ownership of the school. Priorities for future development identified by the board are the completion and implementation of a revised code of behaviour and the continued maintenance of the school's infrastructure.

The board is very supportive of the active engagement by parents in the life of the school in line with its mission statement. The parent nominees on the board report back to the committee of the parents' association and the board provides financial support to the parents' association from the voluntary contribution of families. This financial support enables a newsletter to be issued by the parents' association usually three times per year.

### **1.3 In-school management**

The in-school senior management team comprises the principal and two deputy principals. It is evident that they work very well together as a team. Their differing talents and interests complement each other and this is recognised and appreciated by each other.

The members of the senior management team share a common commitment to the running of a well organised and effective school where students are cared for and their talents are developed. They share in the day-to-day management of the school, in addition to which each has clearly defined areas of responsibility in line with their interests and abilities. They meet twice daily to plan for and to review the operation of the school. They maintain a prominent presence around the school. Duties specific to the principal include acting as secretary to the board, ensuring the continued maintenance and development of the school's infrastructure and fostering a collaborative approach amongst staff. While one deputy has a particular function in relation to the care of students, the second deputy is involved in curriculum organisation and planning and has a role in addressing the issues of punctuality and attendance.

The principal, who has considerable experience in educational management, promotes the idea of distributed leadership by encouraging the deputy principals, the holders of posts of responsibility and other members of staff to assume leadership roles in the organisation and operation of the school. The principal displays a high level of commitment to developing and maintaining positive relationships within the school community, facilitates planning at

a whole-school and subject-department level and ensures the very effective maintenance and development of the physical infrastructure of the school.

Structures are in place to facilitate effective communications between senior management and the teaching staff. These include regular staff meetings with open agendas, notice boards and a plasma screen in the staff room which is updated daily. A weekly newsletter, *Eolas Scoile* ('school information'), outlining upcoming events is distributed to staff. Senior management reported that teachers are also encouraged to present ideas and to express their views to the senior management team. Senior management is very supportive of teachers' continuing professional development (CPD) and has facilitated teachers on return to school to share their new-found knowledge with colleagues. This is good practice as it builds capacity within the school and enables teachers to share their professional expertise.

At the time of the evaluation, senior management was supported by a middle management team consisting of eleven assistant principals, a director of adult education, a programme co-ordinator and seventeen special-duties teachers. A schedule of posts of responsibility was provided. This schedule identifies the duties attaching to each post. However, insufficient evidence was made available during the evaluation to assess the relevance of this schedule in meeting the current needs of the school. Where appropriate, holders of posts of responsibility should produce a development plan for their individual areas of responsibility.

*Cinn tí* (year heads), who hold assistant principal posts, attend a weekly meeting of the care team, but apart from this there are no formal meetings held between the post holders and senior management. It is suggested that some formal meetings be held between senior management and the holders of post of responsibility so as to review the operation of the post structure, to ensure that the changing needs of the school are being addressed and as a means of promoting a culture of shared responsibility.

Coolmine Community School has in place an admissions policy which was ratified by the board in September 2009. In line with best practice this policy sets out clear and prioritised criteria for admission to the school and outlines the enrolment procedures to be followed. An appeals procedure is in place in the first instance to the board and parents are informed of their right to appeal under Section 29 of the Education Act (1998). As the policy states that it takes all students from within its defined catchment area subject to places being available it can be considered to be inclusive. Where the number of applicants exceeds the number of places available the policy provides for a process of random selection. It is important in such a process that an acceptable level of transparency be evident to all sections of the school community. Those applicants who remain without a place are guaranteed to be placed on a waiting list. The admissions policy also sets out enrolment procedures for students wishing to transfer from other schools and for students applying to participate in the optional Transition Year. This is good practice.

The school's code of behaviour is in the process of being reviewed and it is planned to introduce the revised code following ratification by the board in September 2010. The revised code is positively framed so as to encourage students' personal responsibility and a positive approach to the management of students. To ensure the effective implementation of the new code, it is essential that a whole-school approach be adopted to the operation of the revised code. A considerable amount of documentation provided during the evaluation indicated the extensive research and consultation process undertaken in this key area of policy formation. The publication of the National Education Welfare Board (NEWB) *Developing a Code of Behaviour: Guidelines for Schools* was used to support a review of the existing code. Minutes of meetings indicated the wide range of consultations undertaken within the school community. This model of research-based decision making

and of an inclusive approach to policy formation is very good practice and should inform future policy formation in the school. The *Cinn Tí* (year heads) play an important role in the management of students. A clear ladder of referral is in place and structures are in place to ensure that students' behaviour is monitored and where necessary clear sanctions are imposed. All sanctions are applied within the overall caring approach of the school.

Coolmine Community School has in place a fully representative student council from which an executive council is drawn. The creation of this smaller executive council is necessary given the size of the school and the number of students on the full council. Each class group elects two representatives to the council, one boy and one girl. The operation of the council is supported by the appointment of a special-duties teacher as the council liaison teacher. The members of the student council who met with inspectors had a clear understanding of their role in the school and have represented the views of the student body to school management, for example they were instrumental in devising rules in relation to the operation of a locker system.

Members of the council have also been involved in fundraising activities for charities and have collaborated with the parents' association in fundraising for the school. It is commendable that members of the council have been involved in *Comhairle na nÓg* and *Dáil na nÓg*. Members of the council were also consulted in relation to the revision of the code of behaviour and were familiar with school policies in relation to anti-bullying and school uniform. Measures to support the anti-bullying policy were suggested by the student council and these have been adopted by school management. This positive role for the council and the engagement with school management is very good practice. Students described the school as being 'happy, friendly, busy and a safe and secure place'. This was attributed by students to the school being well organised and to the vigilance of teachers.

A number of suggestions were made by the inspection team in relation to enhancing the role of the council in Coolmine Community School. Students could be provided with badges and their photographs could be displayed on the student council notice board as a means of making members of the council more recognisable within the school community. The council should also notify the board and the parents' association of the names of the officers of the council once elections have been completed. Consideration should be given to holding elections in May so the council can be fully operational from the beginning of the school year. First years students could elect their representatives during the first term. It would also prove useful for the members of the student council to carry out a review of their activities and provide a written report to inform the incoming council in order to provide continuity from year to year.

Information provided to inspectors showed that retention rates for students are very high and this was attributed by school management to the supportive structures and positive atmosphere in the school. Attendance and punctuality were identified as areas needing attention in the school. To address these issues an assistant principal has assumed the role of attendance officer and is supported in this by one of the deputy principals. The attendance officer is expected to check on latecomers and to track absenteeism and also attends the weekly meeting of the care team. Procedures are in place to monitor unexplained absences, poor attendance and latecomers. Documents provided to inspectors included a daily class attendance record to be completed by each teacher. Other documents provided showed that students were required to reflect on their behaviour and to take personal responsibility for their behaviour. This comprehensive approach to addressing these issues reflects the school's proactive approach to issues and is praiseworthy. Sanctions are imposed for persistent offenders and parents are contacted when appropriate. It was evident during the evaluation that latecomers were being monitored. Class rolls are taken during the first period in the morning and again in the afternoon. Returns are made as

required to the NEWB and where there is continued poor unexplained attendance the school requests the support of an education welfare officer (EWO).

The parents' association plays a key role in many aspects of school life. The association has been in place since the school was established and a new committee is elected every September. The committee meets on a monthly basis and the principal provides a short report at each meeting. Sub-committees are formed to carry out specific tasks, for example finance and communications. The chairperson of the parents' association addresses parents at a welcoming night for first-year parents; members have had an input into policy formation, attend school functions and play a major role in the organisation of the Leaving Certificate year's graduation function. Fundraising has also been a significant part of the activities of the association, notably to fund the purchase of a new school mini-bus. The contribution by parents to the development of school facilities has also been significant, for example the provision of information and communications technology (ICT) equipment. In addition to the parents' association newsletter a *Guideline for Parents* has also been produced. This outlines the work of the association and provides useful information for parents. All of these activities reflect the mission statement which seeks the support of the wider school community.

Parents' representatives stated that parents feel welcomed in the school and expressed their appreciation for the care and concern shown for students by management and staff. The generosity of teachers in organising the extensive co-curricular and extracurricular programme is highly valued by parents. They described the school as having an 'open-door' policy and being caring, supportive and friendly. They referred to the school as 'our school'. The school communicates with the parent body through its prospectus, website, and students' journal. Class tests and school reports are countersigned by parents, and formal parent-teacher meetings are held. Parents also reported that teachers and school management have been proactive in contacting parents should they have concerns in relation to students and this is very much appreciated by parents.

In a variety of ways the school maintains contact with the wider community it serves. Discussions held with school management showed that the school wants to fulfil its function in this regard as a community school. These include the use of the school's sports facilities, the community providing work placements for Transition Year students, and students engaging in charitable activities as a means of contributing in turn to the community. The provision of adult education classes further supports the school's outreach to the wider community.

#### **1.4 Management of resources**

The teaching staff of Coolmine Community School engages regularly in continuing professional development (CPD) and a number of teachers hold or are pursuing post-graduate qualifications. As well as its general allocation based on overall student numbers, the school is also in receipt of additional staffing resources in respect of students with special educational needs, language support for students whose first language is other than English, two guidance counsellors and a full-time chaplain. The principal stated that all teachers are currently deployed to the maximum number of teaching hours that their contracts allow and are teaching subjects in which they are appropriately qualified. Teachers are provided with appropriate opportunities to teach their subjects across the different levels and this helps to build capacity within the staff. A *Staff Handbook* is provided to teachers which gives information and guidance in relation to the operation of the school. An induction programme and a liaison teacher provide support for new members of staff. It is noteworthy that this induction programme continues throughout the school year and is delivered by a deputy principal and the liaison teacher.

Students are supported by four full-time and four part-time special needs assistants (SNAs). The school also benefits from the services of secretarial, caretaking, cleaning and canteen staff. This group of staff makes a significant contribution to the administrative, environmental and caring aspects of the school.

The obligations of the school with regard to the number of hours of instruction time made available per week and the number of teaching days per year, as set out by Circular Letter *Time In School*, MM29/95, are being complied with. All classes have a ten-minute meeting with their *caomhnóir* (class tutor) each day. Assemblies are held for first-year students on a weekly basis, second and third year students have an assembly every second week. Inspectors attended a number of assemblies where the principal, *ceann tí* (year head), school counsellor and school chaplain made an input. Other years have assemblies as appropriate.

The school buildings and grounds are maintained to a very high standard, with a notable absence of both litter and graffiti. The principal, supported by the board, has been proactive in seeking grants and funding to maintain and develop the school buildings and grounds. Major capital works completed in recent years included the replacement of windows and doors, roof works, fire safety works, upgrading of staff accommodation and administration area and a complete upgrade of the mechanical and electrical services. Funding has also been made available for four new permanent classrooms which will be commissioned in the near future. The Department's summer works scheme has resulted in the upgrade of the four science laboratories and their attendant storage facilities. A new suite with ICT facilities has been commissioned for Design and Communication Graphics. The refurbishment of the home economics facilities is planned for summer 2010. The display of students' art work, notice boards providing information of school events and photographs of students' achievements provide evidence of a school engaged in the process of learning. The board is also responsible for the maintenance of the leisure complex. During a visit to the complex it was noted that it is very-well maintained and the development of the astro-turf planning areas was achieved due to the initiative of the principal and the board. All of this work contributes to the creation of a positive and stimulating learning environment.

Facilities for the teaching staff include a staff room with an adjacent room with photocopying equipment and a separate staff computer room with printer and internet connection. As resources permit, teachers have been assigned base classrooms and each subject area has been provided with a work room with storage facilities. The *Cinn Tí* (year heads) and other staff members are provided with office facilities as needed. The school also has a 'sacred space' for liturgical services or meditative practices.

There is a commitment by school management to support the use of ICT in enriching the learning experiences of students. This is being facilitated in the assignment of responsibility for ICT co-ordination to an assistant principal and in the establishment of an e-Learning committee, representing all subject areas. This committee is engaged in developing an e-Learning plan for the school with guidelines set down by the National Centre for Technology in Education (NCTE). As Coolmine Community School is one of the schools involved in the 100mb broadband pilot project a major update of the computer hardware is taking place including the provision of data projectors in all classrooms. Seven interactive boards have been installed in the school. The role of the parents' association in the provision of ICT is acknowledged by school management. This commitment by the school to the development of ICT resources and its use to support teaching and learning deserves to be acknowledged.

A plan of action for health and safety in the school is being completed and will be ratified by the board in October 2010. This was devised following consultation with each subject department in the school and with the assistance of an outside consultant. The school has in

place a safety officer and a safety committee. It was reported that fire evacuations are held three times per year and an accident log is maintained in the school office. Two defibrillators are available in the school. Overall, practices in the area of health and safety are very good.

## **2. QUALITY OF SCHOOL PLANNING**

### **2.1 The school plan**

The school community has engaged with the School Development Planning Initiative (SDPI) and this has led to significant progress in the areas of whole-school planning and policy development. This is evident from the large number of policies developed. The planning process is supported by the provision of planning time by school management, by the provision of training and by the appointment of a special-duties teacher as planning co-ordinator. The establishment of task groups to progress planning in specific areas such as the review of the code of behaviour and to respond to recommendations made in subject inspection reports is further evidence of the importance attached to planning by the school community. From documentation provided during the evaluation it was evident that a thorough approach to policy development is being adopted by the task groups. It was noted that the findings of academic research and practice in other schools is being used to inform discussions and decision-making in Coolmine Community School. This is good practice. The planning process has been inclusive. Teachers, students, parents and the board have all contributed to policy development. This was evident from minutes of meetings provided to inspectors and from discussions held with some stakeholders. As a means of further developing the planning process it is recommended that the school identify very specific targets to be achieved within given timeframes and that action plans be developed for their implementation which should be subject to periodic review.

The current focus on planning at whole-school level covers five areas. These are: completing the review of the code of behaviour; improving teaching and learning through the integration of assessment for learning principles into subject department planning; the development of an e-Learning plan; a review of the 'exploratory first year' and the method of class organisation in the junior cycle. These are all relevant and highly appropriate to the school's current needs.

Subject department planning is well established and plans for individual subjects were provided during the evaluation process. Subject co-ordinators, who hold posts of responsibility, are in place for most subjects. Co-ordinators make an important contribution to planning for the development of subjects by working collaboratively with the members of the subject departments. It is recommended that the position of subject co-ordinator should be rotated, where appropriate, amongst relevant teachers on a cyclical basis. This would involve separating of the role of subject co-ordinator from the schedule of duties attaching to posts of responsibility. The success of this change would depend on the collaboration of teachers. It would provide all teachers with an opportunity to assume a leadership role within their specific subject areas and would help to build capacity within the school as teachers who are holders of posts of responsibility would be freed to gain experience in a greater range of areas. It would also enable the changing needs of the school to be more effectively addressed.

The quality of planning evidenced in the subject plans that were provided to inspectors during the evaluation varied considerably. Some subject plans were a detailed document outlining the organisational arrangements for the subject and provided a detailed statement of a long-term curriculum plan for the subject. The use of the SDPI template for subject department planning was used in most instances. However, some plans were just a



statement of topics to be covered within a given timeframe. It is recommended that all subject department planning be developed so as to include statements of learning outcomes as well as curricular content. This should then be linked to appropriate timeframes, teaching methodologies, resources and assessment. Subject department plans should be regularly reviewed and kept up to date. This approach, recommended by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA), would place the student at the centre of the planning process. It is recommended that in-school management adopt a more proactive leadership role in relation to planning for teaching and learning. The achievement of best practice consistently across subject department activities would be an appropriate area for such direction. It was noted during the evaluation that recommendations made in previous subject inspection reports have largely been implemented and this deserves to be acknowledged. Notwithstanding this, the advice and recommendations made in one subject inspection report issued to the school in 2005 were found not to have been acted upon as expected.

The school prospectus, website, students' journal, parents' association newsletters and documentation provided to parents are excellent sources of information about the school. Between them a range of policies is communicated to members of the school community. It remains, however, to compile a coherent document that can be identified as the school plan. There is sufficient material in the school to prepare both permanent and developmental sections of the plan in line with SDPI guidelines. It is recommended that this task be carried out in the near future.

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

There was considerable evidence that the school engages in self-evaluation and uses this to inform future planning and decision-making. As part of the review of the code of behaviour, for example, a detailed analysis of data relating to the suspension of students was compiled and this was used to inform the review. In addition an analysis of learning outcomes in the certificate examinations is being undertaken by subject departments and this has led the school to provide extra supports for students where needed. Documents provided to inspectors in relation to TY indicated that there is ongoing review and evaluation of this programme. This is very good practice.

### **3. QUALITY OF CURRICULUM PROVISION**

#### **3.1 Curriculum planning and organisation**

Coolmine Community School offers the Junior Certificate, an optional Transition Year (TY) and the established Leaving Certificate programmes to students. The school provides a very broad range of subjects across these programmes.

Students in first year follow what is described by the school as 'an exploratory year'. Students study fifteen core subjects: Irish; English; Mathematics; Civic, Social and Political Education (CSPE); Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE); Physical Education (PE); Religious Education (RE); Art, Craft and Design; Music; Technical Graphics; Computer Studies; Business Studies; Science; History and Geography. They are assigned

two modern languages from the following: French, Spanish and German based on their designated class group. Requests from students who may have prior learning in a language or a special reason for wishing to study a language are taken into account by the school in allocating languages to students. Students also choose one of the applied sciences: Home Economics, Materials Technology (Wood) and Metalwork. This choice is made prior to entry. These subjects are then studied throughout first year. However, should a student experience difficulty in continuing to study a subject the school will permit the student to drop this subject and receive learning support instead.

The number of subjects taken by students in first year has resulted in the time allocation for some subjects being less than optimal. For example, the time allocation to Technical Graphics and Art, Craft and Design is one double period per week only. The fact that students can take up in second year a subject not studied in first year also impacts negatively on the time allocation to subjects. This arrangement requires students to complete in two years a syllabus that was designed to be studied over three years. Documents made available during the evaluation reflected teachers' concerns in this regard.

Early in the second term in first year students choose subjects they wish to continue to study for the Junior Certificate. This means that students are required to continue to study for a considerable part of the school year a subject or subjects they will not continue to Junior Certificate. This may result in some disengagement by students with the subject and this can create classroom management issues for teachers.

It is now timely that the year-long exploratory programme be reviewed to address the concerns that have been identified. This is a key recommendation for the school at this time. It is important that students are provided with a meaningful educational experience in sampling the optional subjects. In best practice situations, this is achieved with careful planning by the subject departments concerned. All members of the department should contribute to the development of a sample programme. The plan should ensure that students gain an appropriate experience of the subject and the plans should be included in the subject department plan.

In second year students take nine core subjects and choose four subjects from a list of eleven optional subjects. The school is commended for providing students with the opportunity to sample this broad range of subjects before making the final choice of subjects that they will study for the Junior Certificate.

The school has a task group currently reviewing the effectiveness of this exploratory year. The deliberations of this task group should be concluded as a matter of priority. The following considerations should be taken into account in the final decisions taken on foot of this review: the appropriateness of the number of subjects being taken by students, the arrangements currently in place in relation to subject choice and the implications of the consequential reduction in the cumulative teaching time available for each subject that the student continues studying for the Junior Certificate.

Students in the junior cycle are divided into two bands based on ability and remain in these bands for the duration of the junior cycle. The ninety highest achieving students are placed in three class groups in band A and the remaining one hundred and twenty students are divided into five smaller class groups of twenty four students in band B. The school takes into account the views of teachers in the feeder primary schools, the results of standardised tests and its own testing arrangements when assigning students to bands. The abilities are mixed within bands. Some concurrent timetabling takes place to facilitate the formation of higher, ordinary and foundation level classes. Students in band A are expected to take all their subjects at higher level. While classes are formed for different levels in some subjects in band B all students are encouraged to pursue their studies at the highest level possible for

as long as possible. A task group is currently reviewing the organisation of class grouping in the junior cycle. This review should be completed as a priority.

The SPHE programme, based on the approved curriculum framework, is well provided for in Coolmine Community School and is well supported by school management. A plan for SPHE is in place and contains a framework document for the delivery of the planned teaching programme and some information relating to the organisation and delivery of the subject. The school does not have in place an agreed Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) programme for senior-cycle students. The RSE programme must be progressed as a priority and an agreed RSE programme should be developed and delivered to all senior cycle students. A detailed evaluation of the SPHE teaching programme is contained in the subject inspection report that accompanies this report.

Following completion of the junior cycle students may apply to take the optional TY or proceed to the established Leaving Certificate. The TY is offered to two class groups of thirty students. As the number of applications regularly exceeds the number of places available the school has set out prioritised criteria for admission to the TY in its admissions policy and has a clear enrolment procedure in place. An interview process is used to establish the suitability of students for admission to TY. This is good practice.

From documentation provided to the evaluation team it was evident that the TY programme provides many examples of very good practice reflecting a committed approach to the co-ordination and delivery of the programme. A four-layered TY curriculum is provided to students. This comprises a core layer, sampling layer, specific layer and calendar layer. Thirty-six different subjects and modules provide students with an opportunity to experience a very broad range of educational experiences catering for a wide range of abilities. Giving students an opportunity such as this is very good practice. The planning process for TY is inclusive and the co-ordinator is supported by a core team which meets on a regular basis. Senior management is supportive and is kept informed of developments by the co-ordinator. There was clear evidence in the documentation that the programme has been monitored and reviewed at a whole-school level and by students, parents and teachers in line with best practice. An analysis of TY evaluations in schools by the Department's Inspectorate has been used to identify areas for development and this has been led by the TY co-ordinator. Curricular plans for most core subjects and modules within TY were provided to the evaluation team. Commendably these outline aims and objectives, curriculum content, lists of resources, the identification of teaching methodologies and methods of assessment. However, care needs to be taken to ensure that any subject matter for the Leaving Certificate included in curricular plans for the TY is done so in the context of delivering it using different approaches and for TY-specific reasons. Some of the documentation needs to be updated and there is scope for the further integration of ICT into teaching and learning.

The organisation of TY work experience contains many examples of very good practice. The procedures for the delivery of this key element of the TY programme are clearly set out in the documentation provided to inspectors. Students are very well supported in the preparation for, the execution of and reflection on their work placements. The organisation, preparation and follow-up are the responsibility of the programme co-ordinator.

Assessment within the TY is based mainly on a system of credit accumulation. Commendably credits are available for co-curricular and extracurricular activities. Students are required to keep a weekly diary where they reflect on their learning and identify their strengths and areas for improvement. The evaluation of the programme is ongoing and informs planning. A graduation ceremony is held as a formal conclusion to the year when student achievement is acknowledged and celebrated.

For the established Leaving Certificate students study English, Irish, Mathematics, along with PE, RE and Careers as non-examination core subjects, except those with an exemption from Irish. They choose a further four subjects from a total of eighteen optional subjects provided by the school to study for the Leaving Certificate. In addition students are offered the opportunity to take a further optional subject after school hours. These extra optional subjects currently are Applied Mathematics, Religious Education, Russian and Japanese. This provision ensures students have access to a broad and well-balanced curriculum.

Coolmine Community School, offers a full and varied adult and community education programme. In autumn 2009, 682 people enrolled in this programme. School management stated that the courses offered are based on past successes, what might interest prospective students and course evaluation feedback from current students. Courses are advertised in a number of ways, through local press, leaflet drop, notices in local shops and the display of a banner in the school grounds. A new co-ordinator for the programme has recently been appointed. The current brochure shows the wide range of courses on offer in the school. These range from the creative arts, to hobbies and a variety of languages. It is noteworthy that the school includes in this programme a course in Basic English for speakers of other languages. A number of Further Education and Training Awards Council (FETAC) Level 5 courses are offered

School management reported that the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP) had been offered in the school but as uptake declined it was discontinued. It is suggested that the school keep this situation under review and that the reintroduction of this programme be seriously considered. The programme would complement the range of programmes and subjects on offer in the school and it would enable it to cater more fully for the diversity of students on its rolls.

Coolmine Community School does not offer the Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) programme. It is recommended that the school investigate the benefits of the LCA for the cohort of students that is not currently well served by the established Leaving Certificate and give serious consideration to its introduction as an alternative programme for these students.

### **3.2 Arrangements for students' choice of subjects and programmes**

The school has in place a variety of ways to effectively support the transfer of students from primary schools and to facilitate their adjustment to post-primary education. The feeder primary schools are informed in September about an open night which takes place in October in the year prior to entry. While parents attend a formal information session students visit a number of classrooms in order to get a sense of some subject areas. Registration for incoming students takes place in October and is in line with the admissions policy. Cognitive Ability Tests are administered between November and January following the acceptance of places by parents. After Easter the *ceann tí* (year head) for the incoming students and the special educational needs (SEN) co-ordinator visit the feeder primary schools and get a profile of the students. In May students sit tests based on the sixth class curriculum in Irish, English and Mathematics. In August an orientation day takes place. A meeting of first-year parents follows orientation when further information is provided. In October a review night for first year parents takes place to assess how well students are adapting to their new school. This meeting is also used to provide information to parents in relation to subject choice for second year. The school deserves recognition for providing this broad range of supports to both students and parents at this important time of transition.

Towards the end of third year students are given the choice of applying to take the optional TY or to proceed to fifth year. An open night is held for parents and students at which a deputy principal, TY co-ordinator and a guidance counsellor make presentations. Students

receive advice and support in relation to programme and subject choices from a range of teachers prior to this meeting. A fifth year options booklet is provided to parents which outlines the content of the various subjects, reasons for studying the subject and indicates possible careers related to the various subjects. A TY information evening is also held for parents and students. The decision by the school to have students take the Differential Aptitude Tests (DATs) in third year, rather than in fifth year as was the situation previously, is an important support to students in making appropriate subject choices. Option bands are generated from students' choices and this is confirmed as the subject groupings generated by students' choices vary between fifth year and sixth year. Students are also allowed to change their options during the first three weeks of September.

In summary Coolmine Community school has in place a wide range of supports to enable parents and students to make informed educational choices. Its arrangements represent very good practice.

### **3.3 Co-curricular and extracurricular provision**

Documents provided to the evaluation team indicate the wide range of co-curricular and extracurricular activities available to students in Coolmine Community School. These show the wide range of such activities that are available to the students. This positive view of the quality of such provision is supported by the views of parents, students and members of the board.

The co-curricular and extracurricular activities available include sports, talent shows, subject-related trips and exhibitions and visiting guest speakers to the school. Students are involved in charitable activities and fundraising. The school has a junior choir, a Gospel choir and a school radio – Cool FM. During an assembly attended by inspectors prizes were presented to first-year students for science projects they had completed. These projects were on view as inspectors visited the science laboratories. It was made clear to students that the organisation of these projects was to encourage them to think of participating in the BT Young Scientist and Technology Exhibition. This initiative by the science teachers is highly commended.

All students are encouraged to become involved in these activities which are seen by school management as supporting the inclusive ethos of the school. All this is in keeping with the school's mission statement of fostering the holistic development of students. It was stated by school management that a very significant number of teachers are involved in these activities. The voluntary contribution of teachers in this regard is praiseworthy.

## **4. QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN SUBJECTS**

### **4.1 Planning and preparation**

The planning process is facilitated appropriately by management through the provision of time for formal subject planning meetings. Minutes of these meetings should be maintained as an aid to continuity and as a record of progress being made by each subject department.

The position of subject co-ordinator in Coolmine Community School is part of the duties attached to a post of responsibility. At the time of the evaluation two of the subjects evaluated had no subject co-ordinator in place due to the retirement and non-replacement of post holders. This absence of a subject co-ordinator has had a negative impact on planning within those departments. The recommendation in section 2.1 of this report sets out clearly the merits for rotating the position of subject co-ordinator among the members of the subject departments.

Written subject department plans have been developed for all the subjects evaluated. In the majority of cases these plans are in need of further development. In guiding this process it is recommended that a programme of work for each year group be agreed collaboratively. To maximise the potential of these programmes each topic listed should be analysed within the plan to establish key learning outcomes for the students, resources to be used, successful teaching and learning methodologies and possible assessment strategies. Furthermore the programme of work for each year group should be subdivided into short time frames to facilitate accurate tracking of progress being made. Such detailed and integrated planning helps in the delivery of each subject in a coherent and well structured manner.

Planning for individual lessons was found to be of good quality with appropriate teaching resources prepared in advance and used effectively by teachers. This contributed to the enhancement of the learning experience for students.

Documents provided to inspectors indicated a very good approach to planning for the delivery of the TY programme. However, it was noted that the TY plans for some of the subjects evaluated had a strong emphasis on reinforcing Junior Certificate material and introducing Leaving Certificate material. In keeping with the core aims of the TY programme these plans should be reviewed to include details of how students are provided with fresh experiences of learning the subjects during this year.

Planning for resources is good with many subject departments building up supplementary resources such as reference books and DVDs to support teaching and learning. The development of ICT facilities within classrooms is seen as a priority by senior management. Almost all subject departments have access to a data projector as a teaching aid and good progress was being made in integrating this technology into lessons in some subject areas. Best practice has been seen in subject departments that create and store resources electronically, which can then be accessed by all teachers. This is to be encouraged across all subject departments.

An analysis of achievement levels in certificate examinations as well as participation rates at the various levels is carried out in most subject departments. Each subject should use this analysis to identify main strengths and areas for improvement. Any trends identified over a three to four-year period should be used to inform subject department planning.

## **4.2 Learning and teaching**

A broadly positive picture emerges of the quality of learning and teaching. There is evidence of best practice in all six subject areas included in the evaluation. In one subject area both teaching and learning are described as very good in all lessons. In a second subject a high standard is awarded in respect of many of the lessons observed. These are very affirming evaluations. In the case of the remaining four subject reports positive affirmation is also evident along with measured recommendations in areas for development. It should also be noted that variations in the prevalence of good practice are described within subjects and between subjects. The recommendations therefore have a broad application and can contribute to internal school planning and review.

The lessons observed were generally found to be well prepared and lesson content was appropriate to the needs of the class groups involved. The quality of teacher-generated supplementary material provided in many instances to assist student learning is well documented. The positive effect on student learning evident from involving students in the planning of a lesson in one particular subject area is instructive.

The communication of learning aims and the sharing of learning outcomes with students is a positive strategy noted in almost all subjects evaluated. The recommendation that sharing and revisiting the learning outcome with students form part of all lessons is appropriate for whole-school consideration. It is a strategy that can focus students' attention and enhance learning.

The range and variety of methodologies observed by inspectors is well endorsed and the examples of active and independent learning opportunities provided for students in a number of subjects receive particular affirmation. The need for a greater integration of skills into classroom practice is identified in both reports for languages, Irish and German. Attention is also drawn in the reports to instances of lesson activities that were overly led by the teacher with recommendations for introducing a wider range of teaching methodologies to support the active engagement of students. These are aimed at achieving a better balance between teaching activities and more varied activities for students beyond writing activities. These observations also provide the whole-school community with a valuable insight into the various experiences of students as passive, active and independent learners. The best outcome for students would be to experience these roles in learning within all subject areas.

Good methodologies are noted with regard to differentiation. The good attention paid to using a range of strategies to ensure that the varied learning styles of the students were effectively supported is endorsed. This is very evident in the reports of the practical subjects. On the other hand a reservation is expressed in another subject about insufficient challenge to higher-level students within a mixed-ability class. A recommendation in respect of differentiation so as to ensure that lessons are sufficiently challenging is made in three of the subject areas.

Further aspects of methodologies receive widespread approval. The first of these is the good use of oral questioning by teachers. Further development of questioning techniques is also recommended particularly where it was noted that the same students provided answers to non-directed questions. The potential of using oral questioning of students to develop higher-order thinking is also noted. Another aspect of methodologies that receives wide commendation is the good use of subject-specific terminology and the development of literacy. This good practice is illustrated by reference to teachers clearly explaining key terminology and to the evident familiarity of students with subject-specific language. A third aspect widely commended is the practice of relating lesson content to students' real life experiences. This good practice is conspicuous by its absence in another subject area and a recommendation for its use follows.

The recommendation urging greater consideration of the chief examiners' reports and associated marking schemes in a specific subject report is one that has a wide application. The use of these readily available resources to support high-quality learning merits consideration across all subject areas. Related recommendations for improving student learning through developing skills in note-taking, retaining notebooks, and proper filing of handouts also merit wide consideration.

The quality of classroom atmosphere which is defined by the learning environment, student-teacher rapport and general discipline in classes is very positively acknowledged in the reports of the lessons visited. The one exception described in one subject inspection report is in stark contrast to the overwhelmingly positive picture that emerges overall.

### **4.3 Assessment**

A variety of assessment modes, both formative and summative, is employed to monitor and assess student achievement in the curricular areas evaluated. Almost all the subject areas

evaluated had an agreed assessment policy. This good practice should be extended to all subject departments to support students' learning.

In a number of subject areas common end-of-term examination papers are administered for all classes at the same level. This very good practice provides a valid comparison of students' progress. In one of the subjects evaluated the end-of-term mark awarded included an assessment of both the theoretical and the relevant practical coursework components. This is very good practice, as the resulting aggregate mark provides a good indicator of students' progress in the subject. There is scope to extend the range of assessment modes used in other subject areas. Therefore, it is recommended that subject teams review the range of assessment modes used for in-house examinations to ensure that the assessment mark awarded is based on a combination of a written examination and other relevant examinable components such as project, practical and oral work.

In the majority of lessons observed homework was assigned to consolidate students' learning. Best practice was evident in instances where the range of homework activities assigned supported all of the assessment objectives of relevant syllabuses. There is scope for teachers to monitor more carefully students' written work. Best practice in monitoring students' work was in instances where teachers periodically provided detailed written, formative and constructive feedback on the completed work. Such developmental feedback affirms high quality work while guiding students towards achieving improved learning outcomes.

Some subject departments have begun to review students' performance in the certificate examinations. However, a more thorough analysis of statistical data relating to student participation rates at the various levels and student achievement in the certificate examinations should be undertaken. Therefore, it is recommended that subject teams carry out an in-depth analysis of student attainment in the in-house and certificate examinations. This work should include a comparative analysis with national trends whilst at the same time taking school contextual factors into account. The analysis should encompass teacher reflection on where and why issues arise. Positive trends and good practice, as well as areas for development identified should be recorded and used to inform programme planning and to extend good practice as appropriate.

During the evaluation good practice in teacher record-keeping was noted. Best practice was apparent in instances where teachers recorded student attendance and maintained detailed records of students' work and achievement. This good practice is very important to identify trends in students' attainment, to inform future teaching strategies and to address the needs of individual learners.

## **5. QUALITY OF SUPPORT FOR STUDENTS**

### **5.1 Inclusion of students with additional educational needs**

From discussions held with the senior management team and documents provided it is evident that many very good practices are in place to support and include students with additional educational needs. A policy document in relation to educational provision for students with learning difficulties and special educational needs, ratified by the board in February 2006, was provided to the evaluation team. The policy outlines the form that additional educational supports for students will take and the philosophy that underpins these supports. It is noteworthy that the policy defines roles of key personnel and stresses the need for effective communication with all partners. Procedures for identifying students with special educational needs are outlined as are the supports to be provided. The good practice of including all students within a mainstream setting wherever possible is stressed.



A co-ordinator is in place and a number of staff hold specialist qualifications in this area. School management stated that teachers' qualifications, experience, disposition and interest are considered in assigning teachers to deliver learning support or resource hours to students. A variety of models is used to deliver support to students and the introduction of team teaching is noteworthy.

Documentation provided to inspectors showed that individual education plans are prepared for some students. School management stated that allocations for resource and learning support are fully used for their intended purpose. A meeting with the education support team was scheduled by inspectors however, it did not take place and the evaluation team relied on written documentation. Minutes of a weekly meeting of the education support team known as the *Altrami group* were provided to inspectors and these indicated that there is ongoing identification of students with additional needs and a review of progress is used to facilitate future planning. An *altrami* or anchor person is in place for each year group. This teacher acts as a centre point of information for all teachers, advises teachers and deals with teachers' concerns as well as linking with students in that particular year. In line with best practice documents provided to inspectors indicated that there is a whole-school approach to supporting students with additional educational needs. Reasonable accommodations are provided to students during in-house examinations. Resources provided were evident during a tour of the school these included specialist rooms and a wide range of resources to support teaching and learning.

Documentation provided indicates that there is a significant degree of collaboration between the learning support and guidance departments and this is good practice. The school should consider developing a whole-school policy on literacy and numeracy with a view to further supporting students. These whole-school policies could then be integrated and adapted to individual subject department plans.

Coolmine Community School is developing policy and procedures in relation to supporting exceptionally-able students and a register of these students is maintained in the school. Inspectors attended a meeting where a core group of teachers reviewed procedures for identifying these students and where trips outside school were being planned. Minutes of these meetings are being maintained. A notable feature of the work of this group is the whole-school approach being adopted. A presentation was made to all staff and teachers are involved in identifying these students and in discussing and planning appropriate extra supports. A room is provided for these identified students at lunch time which has internet access and a copy of a daily newspaper is provided. The involvement of parents is good practice.

The school community includes students from over thirty different countries and the school has developed an intercultural and inclusion policy through the collaborative efforts of an intercultural committee consisting of all the stakeholders. A copy of this was provided to inspectors. This policy is set within the context of the school's mission statement, outlines the goals of the policy and indicates how these are to be achieved. Reference is made to the open admissions policy, to raising awareness of and to promoting cultural diversity. It was noted that the 'sacred space' in the school is available to all religious beliefs. The school has a co-ordinator for students for whom English is an additional language. Resources provided by Integrate Ireland Language and Training (IILT) are made available to students. The policy document outlines many good practices in relation to supporting these students. These include appropriate testing of language abilities, the timetabling of support usually in a small group setting and the use of appropriate pedagogy in subject lessons. This policy was ratified by the board in February 2006 and was reviewed in October 2008. A number of recommendations made in previous inspection reports in relation to special educational needs and English as an additional language have been implemented.

## 5.2 Guidance and student support in the whole-school context

There is very good whole-school support of Guidance and facilities and resources are of a very high standard. Parents and students indicated that they are very well supported by the work of the guidance department. The school has an allocation of 2.14 whole-time teacher equivalents for Guidance and school management stated that this is fully used to provide the guidance programme in the school. There are two full-time fully-qualified guidance counsellors, one of whom holds a specialist qualification in counselling. A third teacher who also holds a qualification in Guidance is involved in delivering the guidance programme to students. Documentation provided to inspectors outlines very clearly the complementary roles of the full-time guidance counsellors. One guidance counsellor provides personal counselling to students and the other guidance counsellor is mainly concerned with providing career information and career guidance. The third teacher supports students in relation to subject choice and in some behavioural issues.

The guidance programme is delivered in a variety of ways. Students receive individual support, there are timetabled classes for TY and for fifth year and classes are borrowed from other teachers when needed. A notable feature of the TY is a module on personal development delivered by the guidance counsellor with the counselling qualification. The guidance counsellors attend the weekly care team meeting, and make significant inputs at times of transition within the school by making presentations to parents and students. They also attend parent-teacher meetings. They are involved in testing students prior to entry and there is ongoing liaison between the guidance and the learning support departments. Referral of students to the guidance department is made by a variety of school personnel and students can also self-refer. Links with the local community are maintained through the holding of an annual college fair and guest speakers are also facilitated in visiting the school. A policy is in place relating to attendance at higher education institutions' open days thus ensuring effective monitoring of students which is good practice.

Resources provided by school management to support the guidance programme include two offices which are supplied with ICT, storage facilities and display boards. Students have access to the school's computer facilities for carrying out individual research or to prepare curriculum vitae.

The school has developed a whole-school policy for Guidance and has in place a critical incident response plan. These plans provide examples of very good practice. A student audit was carried out and teachers and members of the parents' association were provided with an opportunity to input into the draft policy before the policy was ratified by the board in 2008. The plan has identified a number of areas for development. These include increasing guidance provision in the junior cycle, the holding of mock interviews for senior students, developing links with local businesses, the development of the careers section on the school's website and the provision of extra support for newcomer students to improve their understanding of third level education in Ireland. Procedures are in place to ensure the ongoing monitoring and review of this plan and it would be important to keep these areas for development under review to ensure their delivery in a timely manner. An important development in relation to the critical incident response plan was the assigning of specific roles to teachers who made themselves available and the operation of this plan should be kept under constant review.

Coolmine Community School has in place a wide range of supports to meet the educational, behavioural and psychological needs of its student population. As well as the two qualified guidance counsellors, there is a full-time chaplain, co-ordinators for SEN and EAL, *cinn tí* (year heads) and *caomhnoirí* (class tutors), teams of teachers to provide support for exceptionally-able students, learning support, some of which have already been referred to in this report. A key element in this support is the operation of a care team.

The care team consists of senior management representatives, chaplain, six *cinn tí* (year heads), guidance counsellors, the attendance officer and the co-ordinator of learning support. This team meets weekly and inspectors attended one of their meetings. In furthering the idea of distributed leadership these meetings are chaired by one of the deputy principals. The minutes are taken by the school secretary. The commitment and dedication of the members of this team to supporting and caring for students was evident during the meeting and deserves to be acknowledged. Minutes of the previous meeting had been e-mailed to members of the group. At the meeting year heads gave a report on students in their respective groups who were in need of support and other issues sometimes relating to specific groups of students were discussed. The degree of collaboration between the members of the group was noteworthy, each had a particular expertise, and all sought to provide the best possible outcome for students. Decisions were made and actions by specific members of the group were agreed.

The school also operates a Rainbows Programme co-ordinated by one of the guidance counsellors. Eight teachers have been trained as facilitators and it was reported that the programme is operating successfully in the school. The many good practices in relation to the care of students evident during the evaluation should be documented and developed into a policy document on the care of students. This should then be included in the school plan.

The *caomhnóir* (class tutor) also plays an important role in the care of students. The *caomhnóir* and class group meet each day and documentation given to inspectors provides an insight into the duties attaching to this role, which is assumed by teachers in a voluntary capacity. *Caomhnóirí* (class tutors) have a role in the organisation and monitoring of the class groups and individual students but also in reminding students of some of the school's policies such as the anti-bullying policy. It is noteworthy that the *caomhnóir* (tutor) assigns a 'buddy' to a new student to the school in order to help the new student become familiar with school routines and to make the student feel welcome. Templates are available for the *ceann tí* (year head) to report to the *caomhnóir* (class tutor) and vice versa. This is good practice as it ensures good communications are maintained between teachers.

A further element in the support of students is the work of the full-time school chaplain. The chaplain attends meetings of the care team, assemblies and organises liturgical services notably the sixth-year graduation ceremony. He is also responsible for maintaining the school's 'sacred space' and is available to meet students either in small groups or individually. The chaplain organises training and operation of senior students who form the community care group. This group is involved in fundraising and charitable work in the local community. This again reflects the school's ethos as a community school.

A group of senior students, known as the *Meitheal Group*, act as mentors to first-year students. Their selection, training and co-ordination are the responsibility of one of the guidance counsellors. It is noteworthy that the members of this group represent the diversity of the school's population providing further evidence of the inclusive ethos of the school. These students provide ongoing support for students that begins prior to entry as they attend the open night for incoming students. They attend weekly assemblies and support first-year students in organising social events. They are also proactive in monitoring how students are settling into the school. A smaller group, known as *Contact Meitheal*, provides additional support for the most vulnerable students and work with one of the resource teachers. Both groups meet on a weekly basis.

Documentation provided by school management indicates the multi-disciplinary approach of the school in providing support for students. Contact is maintained with a number of agencies including the National Education Psychological Service (NEPS) and a range of bodies providing psychological, occupational therapy and speech and language therapy.

The celebration of student effort and achievement was evident during the evaluation. Corridors display photographs of individual and groups achievements over the years in a range of pursuits both sporting and academic. Assemblies are used to acknowledge students' successes both within the school and in the wider community. Students' art work enhances the appearance of the building and grounds. A merit awards ceremony is held annually which acknowledges the achievements and contributions of students in a wide range of activities. Teachers and students are invited to nominate students for these awards. A graduation ceremony is held for sixth year students. Students from Coolmine Community School stage a 'Feast of Talent' show in the local Draíocht theatre. All of these serve to encourage participation by all students in the life of the school which fosters the development of the diversity of talents within the school community.

## **6. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT**

The following are the main strengths identified in the evaluation:

- In line with its mission statement an atmosphere of security and respect between students and teachers was evident to inspectors during the evaluation.
- The school has an effective and committed board of management which engages fully in the management and governance of the school.
- The principal and two deputy principals work well together as the senior management team. They share a common commitment to developing a learning community within a well organised and effective school.
- The principal displays a high level of commitment to fostering positive relationships within the school community, facilitates planning and ensures that the physical infrastructure of the school is maintained and developed to a high standard.
- Students perceived the school as a happy, friendly, busy and a safe and secure place. This was attributed by students to the school being well organised and the vigilance of teachers.
- The parents' association plays a key role in many aspects of school life.
- The teaching staff engages regularly in continuing professional development (CPD) and a number of teachers hold or are pursuing post-graduate qualifications.
- There is a commitment by school management to support the use of ICT in enriching the learning experiences of students.
- Significant progress has been made in the areas of whole-school planning and policy development.
- There was considerable evidence that the school engages in self-evaluation and uses this to inform future planning and decision making.
- Coolmine Community School offers three curricular programmes and provides a broad range of subjects across these programmes.
- The TY and work experience display many examples of very good practice.
- There is a very good level of resource provision for the subjects evaluated and school management is proactive in seeking funds to ensure resources are upgraded when necessary.
- A positive classroom atmosphere was evident in the lessons observed.
- Coolmine Community School has in place a wide range of measures to support the educational, behavioural and psychological needs of its students. The commitment and dedication of members of the care team was evident to inspectors.

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

- It is recommended that all subject department planning be further developed so as to include statements of learning outcomes as well as curricular content. This should be linked to appropriate timeframes, teaching methodologies, resources and assessment.
- It is recommended that in-school management adopt a more proactive leadership role in relation to planning for teaching and learning.
- It is recommended that the position of subject co-ordinator should be rotated amongst all relevant teachers on a cyclical basis.
- The deliberations of the task group currently undertaking a review of the exploratory first year should be concluded as a priority and an alternative to the current arrangement should be seriously considered.
- The task group currently reviewing the organisation of class grouping in the junior cycle should complete its deliberations as a matter of urgency.
- The school should consider the re-introduction of the LCVP.
- It is recommended that the school investigate the benefits of the LCA for the cohort of students that is not currently well served by the established Leaving Certificate and give serious consideration to its introduction as an alternative programme for students.
- All teachers should examine the scope available to them to extend the range of teaching strategies used so as to engage students more actively in the learning process.
- The many good practices in relation to the care of students evident during the evaluation should be documented and developed into a policy for the care of students. This should then be included in the school plan.

Post-evaluation meetings were held with the senior management team 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 Gaeilge – March 2010
- Subject Inspection of German - February 2009
- Subject Inspection of Home Economics – March 2010
- Subject Inspection of Materials Technology (Wood) & Construction Studies – March 2010
- Subject Inspection of Mathematics – April 2010
- Subject Inspection of SPHE – April 2010

# **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 Management wishes to acknowledge the professionalism and courtesy of the Inspectorate in the manner in which the evaluation was carried out. Senior Management found the process very worthwhile and an impetus to further improvements in curriculum provision, planning and self-evaluation.
- Unfortunately, the joint union directive in operation at the time of the inspection meant that teachers did not engage with the process. There were no pre evaluation or post evaluation meetings with staff, staff did not attend scheduled meetings with the inspection team, and during subject inspections there was very little interaction between teachers and inspectors. One of the main processes of engagement in carrying out a WSE was therefore missing from the evaluation.
- The Board welcomes the positive affirmation of the school as having an atmosphere of security and respect, with a positive classroom atmosphere and a committed and dedicated care team. It is very pleased with the acknowledgement of the strengths and commitment of the Board of Management, the Senior Management Team, the Teaching Staff and the Parents Association.

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

- All subject departments are using the planning template as advised by the Inspector. In-service was given by the PDST to subject co-ordinators on the matter.
- In-school management will set agendas for subject meetings and meet with co-ordinators for reports back from meetings on a regular basis.
- Where subject departments no longer have a post-holder as a co-ordinator, the members of the department are rotating the position on a cyclical basis. However, the larger subject departments, who have between 10 and 15 teachers in each department, find the co-ordinator role to be an onerous one. The Board of Management will use the Post of Responsibility structure to optimum effect given the personnel who are post holders and the needs of the school.
- The task group established to review the exploratory first year has concluded its deliberations. The group generated data re students and their options. They explored what options for change could be facilitated on the timetable. Senior Management will now consult with the stakeholders with a view to the development of sample programmes in each subject area of limited duration. These will be key to a successfully modified exploratory year. Consultation and development of a sample programme will take place in the coming year, with a view to implementing the new structures for the 2012/2013 school year.
- As a result of the new possibilities for the exploratory first year, a change in class groupings will occur for first year only. This will generate school-based data that will inform the work of the task group currently reviewing the organisation of class grouping in the Junior Cycle.
- Our task group is currently considering the feasibility and benefits of LCA. We are in the process of examining our cohort of students who struggle with the Leaving Certificate, researching best practice in other schools regarding the LCA, and re-examining research by the ESRI to see if we can avoid the pitfalls of the programme.
- Teachers are continuing to develop their teaching strategies. This is supported by attendance at in-service and increased use of IT facilities.
- The Pastoral Care Policy is currently being developed.