Whole-School Evaluation
REPORT

Rosary College, Armagh Road
Crumlin, Dublin 9
Roll No: 60841M

Date of inspection: 4 May 2010
WHOLE-SCHOOL EVALUATION

A whole-school evaluation of Rosary College, Crumlin, was undertaken in May 2010. This report presents the findings of the evaluation and makes recommendations for improvement. During the evaluation, the quality of teaching and learning in four subjects were evaluated in detail, and separate reports are available on these subjects. (See section 7 for details). The board of management was given an opportunity to comment in writing on the findings and recommendations of the evaluation, and the response of the board will be found in the appendix to this report.

INTRODUCTION

Rosary College was founded in 1966 by the Religious Sisters of Charity to provide second level education for teenage girls in the Crumlin area. The school entered the Free Scheme in the late nineteen sixties. Rosary College was built in 1968. Another local school providing second level education for boys closed in recent years and the decision was taken by the Religious Sisters of Charity to admit boys to Rosary College in 2004. The school’s current enrolment is 255. The students come primarily from the immediate locality having attended one of the two primary schools adjacent to Rosary College. Rosary College is a participant in the DEIS initiative (Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools) and provides education for a wide range of students. The school is located in an area which has endured both social and economic disadvantage for many years.

1. QUALITY OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT

1.1 Characteristic spirit of the school

Rosary College’s mission statement outlines the vision for the school in terms of providing a “gentle caring atmosphere….where good relationships are fostered between staff, students, parents, management and the local community”. The school community strives to care for and nurture every student and this gentle and caring atmosphere was observed during the evaluation in every aspect of school life. The development of partnerships with parents and the wider community is evidenced by the work of the principal in the local School Completion Programme cluster and the work of the Home School Community Liaison provision in the school. This good work was seen to be an extremely effective support for students and their parents.

The mission statement also states that the school “endeavours to educate the whole person, developing the full potential of each and aiming to prepare our students for whatever role they will occupy in life”. There have been challenges in recent years following the admission of male students into the school. The school community as a whole has worked hard to ensure that the senior management and staff are in a position to develop the potential of each student and to prepare them for careers and for their adult lives. The evaluation revealed an openness and willingness on behalf of the board of management, the senior management and the staff to actively pursue and develop policies and practices that will enhance the personal and educational achievements of each individual student.

1.2 School ownership and management

The current board of management is in its third year of operation and is properly constituted. The education officer for the Religious Sisters of Charity is the current chairperson of the board. It was reported that there are strong links with the trustees both with regard to board personnel and to the reporting mechanisms between the board and the education office of the trustees. The board members have availed of opportunities for
training provided by the trustees, the Joint Managerial Body (JMB) and the Association of Secondary Teacher in Ireland (ASTI) and are aware of their statutory obligations. The principal acts as secretary to the board.

The trustees have provided the board with a very useful briefing document for boards of management and principals of voluntary secondary schools that includes relevant extracts from legislation pertaining to educational issues as well as other pertinent information. The school trustees have provided guidelines for their schools in relation to formulating a policy respecting students of diverse cultures and faiths in school. It is envisaged that this policy area will be addressed by the school in due course. The trustees provide other valuable practical supports for the school such as funding some in-service for the principal and funding some interventions for students including counselling and assessments. The board is well briefed by the principal on all matters pertaining to the school and to the welfare of students.

The board meets once a month generally but has had very frequent meetings in the past year due to a number of disciplinary issues that required board attention. The board members are very committed to Rosary College and to the provision of voluntary second level co-education in the area. The transition to co-education has been a challenging and difficult journey for the school. The initial disciplinary difficulties experienced have begun to subside and the school community in general indicated strongly that indiscipline has decreased significantly in the current school year. This improvement has been attributed by management, parents and staff to the introduction of programmes such as the Junior Certificate School Programme (JCSP), the School Completion Programme (SCP) and the Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA). The introduction of a skills room, an initiative supported by the National Behaviour Support Service (NBSS), is also making a significant contribution to addressing the needs of students with behavioural difficulties. These initiatives are seen as extremely successful programmes in the school. They are welcomed and recognised by the board as being beneficial supports for students. The successful and collaborative revision of the anti-bullying policy has also impacted very positively on student behaviour. School management and staff are commended for the work in revising and developing this policy.

The board sees its role as a supportive one in relation to assisting the school to fulfil the aims of the trustees’ mission. The board endeavours to ensure that the principal is supported in his role and that the opinions of all board members are heard, and ensures there is corporate board voice in decision-making. The board is committed to promoting respect for diversity within the ethos of the Catholic school. The board members are conscious of the role of the school with regard to inclusion and providing education for sometimes very disadvantaged students. The commitment of the board to the principle of inclusion is reflected in its enrolment policy, which provides for the integration of students from a wide diversity of backgrounds. There is a very small cohort of newcomer students who, it was reported, are supported and encouraged in every way possible.

A number of policies have been developed and ratified by the board in recent years. A collaborative approach was taken by the school community in relation to this process and staff, parents and students were widely consulted where appropriate. The board reported that there is a need to update some existing policies and there are areas of development where policies are now needed, such as specific planning for the DEIS initiative and in that regard, a DEIS plan focus committee has recently been established. This work will be the school’s priority for the academic year 2010-2011. It is recommended that the school’s admissions and enrolment policy be updated to reflect the programmes and subjects being offered by the school and any other information that is out of date should also be amended. The board should ensure that an attendance and participation policy is drafted and ratified.
The board will also need to develop and ratify policies for Special Education Needs (SEN) and Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) as soon as possible.

Other priorities for the board centre around developing information and communication technology (ICT) in the school. Some work has been carried out in the last two years in relation to providing broadband access in certain areas of the school and the upgrading of ICT hardware. It is recommended that the board continue to pursue this area of development and examine the possibilities of installing routers to support broadband access throughout the school. The upgrading of some specialist rooms is also an issue for the board. It is recommended that the board facilitate a risk audit and the updating of the Health and Safety Statement. It may be possible to apply for funding for some upgrading of rooms under the Summer Works Scheme of the Department of Education and Skills (DES).

There is an active and vibrant parents’ council operating in the school for the past five years. The council meets once a month and is affiliated to the National Parents’ Council. The council is involved in fundraising for the school and in providing practical support for school functions, such as open nights, graduation night for sixth years and school concerts. Parents were broadly satisfied with the education provided for their children. They acknowledged that Rosary College is a caring school and praised the school management and staff for their dedication to supporting students and providing a good education. Concerns were expressed, however, around the lack of practical subjects particularly in senior cycle and the fact that students could give up the study of a modern language early in first year, resulting in limited choices later in relation to accessing third level education. Curriculum provision should also be discussed by the board in light of these concerns.

The communication strategies in place between the board and the school staff and between the board and the parents’ council were described as working well by all parties. The parents’ and teachers’ nominees on the board provide agreed oral reports on board of management issues to the parents’ council and to the staff, respectively. Consideration should be given by the board to providing an agreed written report to all the relevant partners.

1.3 In-school management

The duties of senior management are clearly delineated with the principal taking responsibility for areas such as timetabling, September returns, discipline, liaising with the board of management, maintenance of the school plant, teacher contracts, continual professional development of staff (CPD) and chairing the local School Completion cluster meetings. The deputy principal has a considerable teaching role in the school and also takes responsibility for areas such as the October returns, working with year heads on discipline and related issues, a tracking system for parent-teacher meetings and the supervision and substitution roster. Both are highly commended for their hard work and commitment to the school and to the students. It is clear, however, that the role of the deputy principal has not been developed or exploited to its full potential. It is recommended that senior management explores ways in which the managerial functions of the school can be shared in a more collaborative and effective way through distributed leadership. It is important that the senior management has a shared vision regarding the developmental priorities for the future of the school. A regular formal meeting should be scheduled to ensure that Principal and Deputy Principal remain fully briefed on all areas of school organisation and management and of the progress being made in each other’s assigned areas of responsibility.

Senior management is supportive of staff and there was evidence of mutual respect between staff and senior management during the evaluation. Post-holders and teaching staff did not avail of the opportunities provided to meet with the inspection team.
A review of the schedule of posts of responsibility was undertaken in 2008 and the principal reported that the revised schedule is working very well. Staff were reported to be flexible and accommodating in relation to working with management to devise a schedule of posts to suit the school’s needs. The middle management structure consists of four assistant principals (AP) all of whom have taken on the responsibility of year head. This is a relatively recent development and, again, the principal reported that the new system was working well. Two of the year heads have also taken on other responsibilities, one in relation to the co-ordination of LCA and the other in relation to the co-ordination of provision for students with special education needs (SEN). Assistant principals do not meet with senior management as a group and it is recommended that such meetings be introduced with a view to developing the middle management structure further. AP’s should be included and consulted in relation to identifying priorities for school development and student welfare.

There are six special duties teachers (SDT) posts in the school. SDT responsibilities include co-ordination of programmes, co-ordination of planning for subjects such as Social Personal and Health Education (SPHE), organisation of extra-curricular activities, examinations secretary and organisation of school lockers. Two SDTs also share the responsibility of year head to fifth years. It was reported by the principal that this schedule of posts is currently meeting the needs of the school.

Year heads play a key role in monitoring student behaviour. The first-year year head liaises closely with the class tutors for this group and with the senior management in relation to promoting positive behaviour. The deputy principal reported that there is a clear ladder of referral and defined sanctions for breaches of the code of behaviour. The present code of behaviour has been identified for review and redrafting as part of the current school planning priorities. It is recommended that this work be progressed in line with National Education Welfare Board guidelines and as expeditiously as possible.

The absenteeism, late coming and poor attendance of some students pose significant challenges for staff in Rosary College. Concerted efforts have been made by school management to address the problem through the introduction of a swipe card system for students at a considerable cost to the school. It was reported by several parties that the system has been largely unsuccessful due to lack of acceptance by the wider student body. There are funds available from the SCP to fund a school attendance monitoring system. There has been some discussion around this issue by staff and decisions of the principal in relation to personnel and implementation were imminent at the time of the evaluation. It is recommended that all issues in relation to attendance be discussed by senior management and staff with a view to implementing the most effective system possible. Effective daily monitoring and meticulous completion of school roll books also need to be addressed as a matter of urgency as these form part of official school records. Attendance statistics forwarded to the NEWB do not reflect the high levels of absenteeism observed during the subject inspections carried out as part of the whole school evaluation. The high levels of suspensions and expulsions in the NEWB data for the school are also a matter for concern. Effective strategies should be developed to help address these issues within the context of DEIS action planning and target setting.

Student behaviour and management is raised as a key issue at all regular staff meetings, of which there may be three a term. Staff members are also given the opportunity to input on various interventions in the school. For example, the home school community liaison (HSCL) co-ordinator, the skills room co-ordinator and the SEN co-ordinator have all given inputs at staff meetings and it was reported that staff found the information received to be extremely useful. Given the number of outside agencies and personnel visiting the school regularly, it is recommended that staff be informed at the beginning of the year of all that will be happening in the school for the coming year. This will help to develop a whole
school approach to all areas of pastoral care, student management, staff awareness and effective co-ordination of interventions.

The principal reported that new teachers are supported in the school and an experienced staff member is responsible for teacher induction. An induction pack is available for new teachers with information on school organisation, administration and student management. The provision of the pack is commended. In further developing the pack, it should include reference to existing school policies to inform and guide new staff in working to agreed procedures. It should also contain information on the role of various school personnel and on the different interventions such as SCP, psychologists in primary schools (PIPS) and the Clanwilliam Counselling Group.

The student council was reactivated in 2010 and there was a provisional council in operation during the evaluation. Inspectors met with two representatives from each year group up to fifth year and with three representatives from sixth year, one from the established Leaving Certificate and two from the Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA). Elections were scheduled for early May 2010, to establish the new council for the next academic year. Students interviewed were enthusiastic about the school and were appreciative of staff and of the care they received. The students raised concerns about access to a modern European language, and access to higher-level Irish at both junior cycle and senior cycle in relation to limiting their choices for third level education. However, students were very appreciative of the fact that higher-level Mathematics was being offered for the current established Leaving Certificate class. Students reported that they felt they were being steered in the direction of post leaving certificate courses (PLCs) rather than being encouraged to aim for courses in third level institutions. Students mentioned the high quality of extra-curricular activities in the school in general. All said that the re-establishment of the student council was a positive initiative in relation to ensuring a voice for the student body. As it was reported by senior management that recycling is taking place in the school on a regular basis, it is recommended that a focus on gaining recognition as a green school be considered as a worthwhile project for the student council to undertake when it is properly constituted.

The management of Rosary College makes strenuous efforts to form and develop relationships with the parent body. These efforts are effectively supported by initiatives such as SCP and the HSCL provision. A booklet for parents of first year students on settling into second-level education is provided by the HSCL personnel and states that all parents of first-year students are visited in order to ensure their successful transition from primary school. This is a very worthwhile guide but it should be updated in relation to current school personnel and curriculum provision. Parents of students who are deemed to be at risk of early school leaving or who have poor attendance records are contacted regularly by the HSCL co-ordinator. This is good practice.

The principal plays a central role in the local School Completion cluster group as the chairperson of the steering committee. Other school personnel such as the School Completion and HSCL co-ordinators are also involved in the steering committee. This work is extremely important and has been pivotal in forging links between the primary feeder schools and Rosary College. These links have helped to encourage parents to partake in a range of courses provided for them by the HSCL provision in the different schools within the school cluster. Courses observed during the evaluation were effectively run and were very well attended by parents. The co-operation between the schools has also helped the transition of students between primary and second level education.

Other initiatives in the school such as the Stay in School Project (SIS), the School Completion Programme (SCP) and the Psychologists in Primary Schools Ltd. (PIPS), which also provides services for secondary schools, are providing valuable supports for
students. Through these initiatives the students have access to a range of activities and extra-curricular classes. These include dance classes, a gardening club, a breakfast club and a homework club. These different initiatives target cohorts of students who are identified by the school and by the HSCL co-ordinator. The staff of SIS and SCP and the HSCL co-ordinator are in constant contact to ensure that students who are at risk of early school leaving and poor educational attainment are identified and targeted for support and specific interventions both inside and outside of school. This work is extremely well co-ordinated and is effective in addressing many issues for students at risk. It was noted that many of the activities provided through SCP take place during school time. Students are targeted for attendance at activities such as the gardening club which erodes contact time with their timetabled subjects. It is recommended that the methods of delivery of activities as part of various interventions be re-visited and discussed with relevant personnel, with a view to maintaining the integrity of students’ access to tuition time in the curriculum.

Staff members involved in the area of student support are commended for their collaborative work and, in particular, for their culture of self-evaluation and review. Evaluation has included a review of the homework club which has been unsuccessful of late in attracting students. It is intended to re-launch the club with a new name and a new focus for the coming school year in order to attract students who really need to avail of this service. Another example of self-evaluation is the intended review of the unsuccessful swipe card system by senior management in consultation with the relevant personnel.

The school also has links with the Bru Youth Service which offers a drop-in centre for young people in the Crumlin area. Students in Rosary College who are deemed to be at risk of early school leaving are referred to this service.

Parent-teacher meetings for each year group are organised annually. The deputy principal organises a tracking system of parents who attend in order to ensure that the school can contact parents through the HSCL co-ordinator if they have been unable to attend.

1.4 Management of resources

Rosary College has an allocation of 26.24 wholetime teacher equivalents (WTE). This allocation includes ex-quota posts for the principal, a guidance counsellor, one post for remedial work, one home school community liaison teacher and 0.5 of a post for a disadvantaged area. The allocation also includes 11 WTE for ordinary enrolment and some allocations for the LCA, the JCSP, curricular concessions, English as an additional language (EAL), traveller students and special needs. The school also has five special needs assistants (SNA). It was clear during the evaluation that the allocations were being used effectively and for the purposes for which they were intended. The teachers’ timetables should reflect their full deployment including any resource or learning support hours.

Rosary College is complying with circular M29/95 Time in School and all classes have 28 hours contact time every week. Rosary College operates without a break in the morning. It was reported by the principal that this situation has been in place for a long number of years. It enables the school to close a class period early on certain days of the week. This lack of a break in the morning is potentially difficult for students in that they have over three hours of unbroken class contact time. It also has implications for staff communication, peer support and discussion in general as a morning break can facilitate the dissemination of information informally. It is recommended that this practice be revisited with a view to making an informed decision in the best interests of the staff and students.

Staff members are generally deployed to teach the subjects they are qualified to teach. Due to timetabling constraints staff may be asked to teach other subjects they are not qualified
to teach. This situation is not ideal. It is recommended that this be avoided if at all possible, particularly when other qualified teachers are available in those subject areas.

Rosary College has been well maintained in general over the years. The changeover from oil to gas heating in 2004 incurred significant cost which was met by the DES and with some monies provided by the Trustees. In recent years, the school accessed some funds through the DES summer works scheme for the installation of a lift and the upgrading of toilets in 2005 following the admission of boys to the school. The school plant and grounds were observed to be well maintained. Graffiti and vandalism have been experienced by the school in the past and presented difficulties in some areas of the school, the toilets in particular. Acts of vandalism or graffiti are addressed immediately and it was reported that in general both problems have improved significantly over the past couple of years. This is an area where the students’ council might have some influence in changing attitudes and behaviours among the wider student body. It would be worthwhile canvassing the students’ views in relation to devising solutions to these problems. Rosary College has a committed and capable ancillary staff that is a valuable asset to the school community.

The school has a number of specialist rooms including a science laboratory, two home economics rooms, an art room, a technical graphics room, two music rooms and a computer room. One of the home economics rooms is used for parent cooking courses, some courses for students as part of SIS and SCP and for the breakfast club. The computer room has had some significant upgrading in recent years and parts of the school are broadband enabled. The area of information and communications technology needs to be further developed as soon as resources allow. This has already been identified by the board of management as a priority development issue. Some specialist rooms in the school, such as the science laboratory and the home economics room are now in need of upgrading and the school could possibly apply for grant aid under the summer works scheme.

Two classrooms are currently used as reading rooms for students in the JCSP when they are timetabled for English. Senior management plans to adapt one of those classrooms as a permanent reading room. This arrangement will be in place for September 2010 which is in line with the programme’s recommendations and is commended.

The school has a health and safety statement and the principal is at present responsible for health and safety in the school. The appointment of a staff representative for health and safety was imminent at the time of the evaluation. The health and safety statement, as it is at present, lacks some important details. A risk assessment should be included for all areas of the school in particular the practical subject areas and the school gym as well as all outdoor playing fields and courts, in order to minimise the risk of injury and reduce hazards. The statement should also contain a risk audit as well as details about when work identified in the audit has been completed. Management has included a risk assessment in relation to the home economics room as recommended in a previous subject inspection and this is commended.

2. QUALITY OF SCHOOL PLANNING

2.1 The school plan

The school has been involved in school development planning for a number of years and has developed a number of key policies. All school policies have had to be adapted following the admission of boys to the school. The admissions and enrolment policy was formulated in 2005 following this new development. The school carried out a very successful review of posts in 2008 and this was facilitated by the School Development Planning Initiative (SDPI). A mini-review of posts was initiated last year by the principal
following the retirement of key staff members and this worked very well in relation to filling these vacancies satisfactorily. Other school policies include an anti-bullying policy, a policy on alcohol, tobacco and drug use and a dignity at work charter.

The school is currently involved in developing new plans and revising others to meet the current needs of the students and the school. For example, the anti-bullying policy was revised last year following wide consultation with staff, parents and students. This has impacted very favourably on students’ behaviour and management as previously mentioned. This is commendable. The code of behaviour is being revised at present and all parents and students have been surveyed for their views and a focus committee has been established to redraft the policy. The commendable work of HSCL provision in the school was pivotal in involving parents in this process. Senior management is aware that DEIS planning in the school is a priority and is committed to leading staff in relation to this planning area for the 2010-2011 academic year. Teaching staff have had in-service in this area during the past academic year. Effective DEIS planning will help the school establish baseline statistics in relation to key areas of student development and management such as attendance, achievement, retention and literacy and numeracy levels. Staff and management will then be in a position to set achievable goals on a yearly basis and measure their successes against the baseline data in a planned and coherent way. This will further inform priorities for school planning and development in the future.

Although there are positive elements to school planning as previously outlined, the school does not have a formal school plan as such. Senior management acknowledges that overall school development planning is still very much at a developmental stage in the school. Many of the elements of the permanent policy section of a school plan are in existence and need to be collated and updated. DEIS planning and other policy review and development should inform action planning in the school in the future. An action plan centred around short-term priority planning and long-term planning in relation to curricular needs and school resources should form the basis for the development section of the school plan. Planning should allow for policy review and for considerable self-evaluation on the part of the school community in relation to goals set and achieved.

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.

3. QUALITY OF CURRICULUM PROVISION

3.1 Curriculum planning and organisation

The principal reported that every effort is made to provide as wide a choice of curriculum and subjects as possible for the students within the resources available. Students in first year are provided with a wide range of taster subjects in order to encourage and facilitate them to make informed choices for junior cycle. All first-year students study the core subjects English, Irish, Mathematics, Civic Social and Political Education (CSPE) and Social Personal Health Education (SPHE), as well as History, Geography, Art, Business, Technical Graphics, Music, Home Economics, French and Physical Education (P.E.). Home Economics and French are provided for all students for a period of ten weeks only,
as a result of staffing provision in these two subject areas. Both of these subjects are provided as open options for second-year students as well as Science, Business Studies, Art, Music and Technical Graphics. While this works well for the majority of the subjects it does pose problems for French and Science where the uptake in second year for these subjects is typically quite low. The lack of a modern European language can impact on students in senior cycle in relation to third-level career options. It was reported that the uptake of French for second year for 2010-2011 was likely to be far higher than in previous years. This is a welcome trend. It is recommended that senior management revisit this question again in the future with a view to providing French as a core subject in first year initially and then as a core subject to Junior Certificate level. Overall, the operation of the current taster system should be re-evaluated as it provides minimal contact time with subject option choices.

Senior cycle students are offered a range of exam subjects in two stages. Initially the following subjects are offered to students: History, Geography, French, Home Economics, Business, Music, Art and Biology. The subjects are arranged in four option bands depending on the students’ choices. The principal reported that ninety five per cent of students are accommodated in relation to their subject choices. Where students are not totally happy with the option bands, their parents are consulted. Every effort is made to accommodate them within the schools’ resources.

The efforts of the principal to provide a wide and fair subject choice within the restraints of teacher allocation are acknowledged and commended. Notwithstanding this good work, choices for the students in the school in relation to practical subjects are limited, with particular implications for students wishing to take technical subjects. For example, all first-year students study Technical Graphics and have the option then to choose that subject again in second year as an exam subject for the Junior Certificate. However, the subject Design and Communications Graphics, the follow on subject for Leaving Certificate, is unavailable in senior cycle. It is recommended that the school re-examine this issue with a view to providing the subject as far as Leaving Certificate. It is further recommended that the school examine the possibility of providing Technology as a subject and pursue the question of grant aid for classroom adaptation from the DES building and planning unit.

Students coming into first year in school are divided into three class groups, two of which participate in the JCSP. The formation of the class groups in junior cycle is designed to meet the needs of all the students as fully as possible. The small class groups are of benefit to all students. Classes are generally taught at ordinary level and foundation level in junior cycle with a small number of students taking higher level in some subjects.

Class groups are re-formed again in senior cycle depending on students’ choices in relation to the programme they wish to follow. A higher-level Leaving Certificate mathematics class was provided this year and while this provision is extremely resource-intensive, school management are commended for endeavouring to meet the needs of more able students. It was reported that higher-level Irish is not available at either junior cycle or senior cycle and this has been the case for a number of years, with potential implications for students’ career choices. Management is advised to consider a policy that those who wish to follow a higher-level course in any subject area, either in junior or in senior cycle, should be accommodated as far as possible. Creative use of the learning support hours could be used to support the provision of differentiated learning.

The subject inspection of Science identified a link between low uptake of Science at junior cycle, students’ readiness to study Biology at senior cycle and levels of student attainment in that subject and, overall the need to raise the profile of Science in the school.
Management needs to look also at the time allocation in some subject areas where provision is clustered over two or three consecutive days. Time allocation for subjects should be spread evenly throughout the week, if at all possible.

3.2 Arrangements for students’ choice of subjects and programmes

Students have access to a range of programmes including the Junior Certificate School Programme, the Junior Certificate, the established Leaving Certificate and the Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA). Students going into fifth year are consulted about the choice between the established Leaving Certificate and the LCA. Transition Year (TY) is no longer available in the school due to low uptake. The current choice of programmes is seen to be meeting the needs of the school effectively and it was reported that the introduction of both the LCA and the JCSP have had a very positive impact on student engagement with education. Should enrolment grow in coming years it would be worthwhile investigating the possibility of introducing the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP).

The guidance counsellor meets with parents in relation to key transition stages for the students, beginning at the end of first year where students choose subjects for the remainder of junior cycle and for the Junior Certificate examinations. It was reported that the implications of subject options are explained fully and carefully to parents in order to enable them to help their children make informed choices. As previously mentioned, the option to give up a modern European language at the end of first year after only ten weeks spent studying the subject is cause for concern. Another option that has not had a high uptake in recent years is Science. It was reported that the subject is under threat in the school as a result. This will have serious implications for career choices for students in the future.

Overall, the provision of subjects and subject choices needs to be re-visited in order to ensure that the school is meeting the needs of all its students and in order to ensure appropriate curricular provision in the short, medium and long term. It is recommended, therefore, that a curriculum advisory group be established to look at the options available and to re-examine the way in which subjects are offered and delivered in junior cycle in particular. This group should also have a function in advising on the long-term curriculum planning needs of the school.

3.3 Co-curricular and extra-curricular provision

Rosary College provides a wide range of extra-curricular activities. The organisation of such activities is a special duties post which also includes responsibility for contracts with students and outside parties, permission slips from parents for participation in events, health and safety during activities and the filing and monitoring of incident reports. Extra-curricular activities and events are an important part of the educational and pastoral provision. They are a crucial means of including all students especially those who are at risk of leaving, and in helping to maintain and increase attendance at school. The provision of a special duties post for this important part of school life is, therefore, commended.

Activities in the school include athletics, badminton, Gaelic football, hurling, soccer, camógie, basketball, netball and volleyball. The school also has a very successful choir which sings and performs at all school events.

It is recommended that different subject areas look at raising the profile of co-curricular activities. Activities as part of Seachtain na Gaeilge, a French week or a Science week should be investigated and developed over time in order to support the work of teachers in the classroom and to support teaching and learning in general.
The school is involved in fundraising for many local charities including the local hospice and Our Lady’s Hospital for Sick Children in Crumlin.

4. QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN SUBJECTS

4.1 Planning and preparation

The quality of subject department planning observed varied from poor to high quality. Subject department planning is ongoing within the context of school development planning and management facilitates formal subject department planning meetings, usually once per term. It was reported that teachers also meet informally and work collaboratively to further advance the subject department planning process. A varied approach to the subject department planning process was evident, with good practice observed in subject departments where a convenor had been appointed, minutes of formal planning meetings were recorded and retained and members worked collaboratively to develop a comprehensive subject plan. It is recommended that a consistent approach be taken to the subject department planning process. A subject convenor should be appointed to all subject departments and the duties of this position should be clearly documented. This role should be rotated on an agreed basis as a means of sharing the associated responsibilities and to ensure that all members of the subject department benefit from the professional experience of undertaking this role. Minutes of formal meetings should be maintained, with a copy retained in the subject file as a record of the items discussed, tasks assigned and the progress of the planning process. A copy of the minutes of subject department planning meetings should also be given to senior management. This will ensure that senior management is fully aware of the work of each subject department, the tasks assigned and being developed, the issues of concern and the needs of teachers and students.

Some subject plans presented are commended for their detail and considered approach to outlining the various aspects related to the organisation and delivery of the respective subjects. Consideration should be given to making all subject plans available in one central area to facilitate an overview of planning by teachers in other subject areas, which will promote consistency of practice and also support planning for cross-curricular work. Specific recommendations are made in the various subject inspection reports in relation to future planning with a view to focusing subject development in the area of learning and teaching. It is suggested that key learning outcomes be incorporated into yearly and modular plans and that these be expressed in terms of the specific knowledge and skills that students are expected to acquire and develop as a result of their learning. Improving attendance, participation and attainment were identified in many subject inspection reports and these are areas that require a focused whole-school strategic approach. An increased focus on strategies to raise uptake of higher level and improve attainment in the certificate examinations should also be included as part of the long-term planning process in all subjects. Such strategies should focus on the greater integration of assessment practices as part of the learning process. A focus on pedagogy that establishes high expectations of students, that actively engages them in the learning process, and that challenges and motivates them to assume responsibility for their learning should form part of the discussions within subject departments.

Collaborative development of teaching and learning resources was observed in a number of subject areas, particularly in relation to the work of the JCSP. The planning of co-curricular and extra-curricular activities as part of the programme of work in some subject areas was commended. Subject departments are encouraged to identify the range of possible additional opportunities that would further support students to apply and consolidate their learning. The organisation of, and participation by the school in a range of co-curricular activities may help to raise the profile of the relevant subjects amongst students.
Planning for the greater integration of ICT and interactive technology into the teaching and learning process was recommended in all cases. Consideration should be given to providing opportunities for teachers that successfully use ICT as a means of supporting students’ learning, to share their practice with those who would benefit from this experience.

Individual planning documentation made available by teachers during the various subject inspections reflected a good degree of short-term planning. Individual lessons observed reflected syllabus requirements and showed evidence of careful preparation of resources such as handouts, materials and equipment.

4.2 Learning and teaching

There was good quality teaching and learning in many of the lessons observed. The practice of beginning lessons by revising previous learning was noted and commended. Good practice was observed where teachers shared the intended learning outcomes of the lesson with their students at the outset. In some instances the board was effectively used to display these learning goals. This practice should be extended to all lessons as it provides tangible targets for students’ learning and helps to keep them focused and engaged throughout.

A variety of methods was employed by teachers to promote students’ engagement and learning, including whole-class teaching, demonstration, pair and group work and task-based activities. Learning was particularly effective when students were actively engaged in purposeful tasks. Good examples were noted when students participated in pair and small group work and practical work. Group work was most effective when the size of the group was appropriate to the task and ensured that all students were purposefully engaged. In some instances, teachers successfully and commendably differentiated their practice and set tasks for the varying ability range in the class. Many teachers made good use of the board, worksheets and demonstration as methods to highlight specific points and develop students’ understanding of the focused topics. The use of ICT as a means of further developing students’ engagement with the focused topics is recommended.

Questioning strategies were used in most lessons to good effect. In many instances, teachers used a combination of global, targeted, recall and higher-order questioning, which had the benefit of including students who may have been reluctant participants or lacked confidence to contribute to the lesson. There were some lessons where questioning did not feature as a strategy to engage students. The greater use of this strategy is recommended in such instances, particularly to ensure that students are engaged in their lessons and to help them develop a deeper understanding of the purpose and application of their learning. A need to set higher expectations for students’ engagement and participation in their lessons, for the quality of the presentation of their work and for their level of attainment in class was identified in most reports. Strategies that provide students with opportunities to assume more autonomy for their learning should be deployed, where appropriate.

Classrooms were well maintained and suitable to support the variety of learning strategies employed. In some cases, teachers have made good efforts to create a print rich and visually stimulating environment in their classrooms by displaying posters, charts and keywords on the walls. This good practice is worth extending to all classrooms as a means of further enhancing the learning environment to engage students and support their learning. Examples of student-generated work that is deemed to be of a high standard should also be displayed on the walls, as a means of affirming their efforts and providing examples of acceptable standards.

Teachers demonstrated a good knowledge of their students and a good rapport was noted between teachers and their students in all lessons. Inspectors commented on the positive
learning atmosphere that was observed in lessons. Classroom management was firm but effectively implemented, with students generally well behaved. Students were regularly affirmed for their efforts and many responded positively to such praise.

Good practice was observed at the end of some lessons, whereby teachers ensured that sufficient time was available to consolidate learning. Teachers should revisit the intended learning outcomes at the end of the lesson as a means of ensuring that students attained the standards set at the outset.

4.3 Assessment

In most cases, inspectors noted that there were effective systems of monitoring student attendance and participation in the lessons observed. In some cases teachers did not record attendance and this should be addressed, especially given the need for a more comprehensive whole-school attendance strategy.

A range of formative and summative assessment methods is used to determine students’ progress in the subjects inspected. Students’ learning is determined through observation, questioning, assignment of practical project work and correction of students’ written work. There was evidence that regular class tests are set to assess students’ learning. Formal examinations are held at Christmas for all classes and in the summer term for all non-state examination classes. Pre-examinations are held in the spring for classes sitting state examinations. Good practice was noted in subjects where students’ practical work, contributed to their overall grade in their formal assessments. The setting of common assessments for each year group based on the identified learning outcomes should be adopted by all subject departments.

Homework was often assigned in the lessons observed. The completion of assigned homework and the standard of completion and presentation of this work have been identified as problematic by many of the subject departments and subject inspectors. Student journals are not consistently used and require greater monitoring to ensure that students develop the habit of recording all of their assigned homework. A school homework policy should be developed. Each subject department should adopt and apply this policy and implement agreed strategies to improve students’ adherence to the completion of assigned work. A more innovative approach to the range and type of homework assignments is recommended. Consistent practice and expectations for students’ adherence to acceptable standards of completion and presentation of assignments should be adopted.

There was a significant variation in the quality of students’ work and in the levels of presentation and monitoring. In some instances, teachers give written formative comments on students’ work, which provides valuable guidance to students on areas for improvement. This approach is commended as it ensures that assessment forms part of the learning process and this should be extended in the case of all substantial assignments. Greater use of assessment for learning strategies is also recommended, as a means of empowering students to take greater ownership and responsibility for their learning.

Appropriate systems are in place to communicate with parents regarding students’ progress and these include formal school reports twice per year, parent-teacher meetings, the use of the students’ journal and additional meetings with parents when required.

Trends in relation to the attainment of examination-year students in the certificate examinations display some recent improvements. As signalled above, the poor uptake of higher level in some subject areas should be addressed. It is recommended that senior management and individual subject departments develop a system to analyse trends in the
uptake of levels and the results achieved. This analysis should then be used as a basis for future subject department planning to raise expectations and attainment.

5. **QUALITY OF SUPPORT FOR STUDENTS**

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

Rosary College has a significant cohort of students with special educational needs and has an allocation of 3.27 WTE and five Special Needs Assistants to meet the needs of these students. The allocation for learning support is used in a variety of ways. Some of the allocation is used to reduce the size of classes participating in the JCSP, the rest being used for withdrawal of students in pairs and in small groups. The school has a SEN co-ordinator who organises the classes and the withdrawals in consultation with the principal. Some students are provided with special classes in English and History and other students are withdrawn in pairs or in very small groups for support in English and Mathematics.

The school’s five Special Needs Assistants (SNAs) have a clear job description and their responsibilities and functions are outlined in school documentation. The SNAs displayed a collaborative approach to the support of children to whom they are assigned. The SNAs work closely with the principal and other relevant personnel in the school and can be assigned to different students awaiting assessments if their own assigned students are absent from school. This is good practice. It was reported that one SNA did have the responsibility as co-ordinator for the group but that the practice lapsed this year. It is recommended that the practice be re-instated.

The school does not have a special educational needs policy. While custom and practice is well established in the school, a policy is needed. It is recommended that school management and relevant personnel work to rectify this situation as soon as possible.

Teachers, SNAs, senior management and other relevant personnel work closely in relation to supporting students with special educational needs and a case conference approach is taken to discussing the needs of individual students. It was unclear whether there is a dedicated SEN team who meet regularly to monitor and plan for the needs of individual students but a regular meeting of staff directly involved in SEN is recommended. The meetings between the principal and the SEN co-ordinator, generally on a daily basis, are commended as good practice. It was reported that the SEN co-ordinator informs teachers in relation to students who have difficulties. Staff members are also briefed by the co-ordinator on different strategies and teaching methodologies to use with classes. This is good practice.

It was reported that the establishment of the skills room with the support of the NBSS has been of very significant benefit to the school and to the students. Students are identified for the skills room by year heads, teachers and school management and are supported in adapting their challenging behaviour and developing social skills. It is good practice that students’ learning in subjects is maintained and supported during time spent in the skills room. The skills room and associated initiatives such as the sanctuary programme were seen to be working effectively during the evaluation. The work being done in relation to supporting students who are experiencing difficulties is highly commended.

The school has a small number of newcomer students and has .45 WTE of an allocation for English as an additional language (EAL). The students are withdrawn from Irish and are taught by the TEFL (Teaching English as a Foreign Language) method. The SCP co-ordinator also takes these students for a class.
The school has a pastoral care team comprising the HSCL co-ordinator, the skills room co-ordinator and year heads. This group came together to work primarily on the anti-bullying policy. A formal pastoral care team should be established comprising key school personnel with clearly identified aims and objectives, which would meet on a weekly basis. Ideally, a member of senior management should attend these meetings. A pastoral care policy that includes information on a whole school approach should be drafted and ratified.

Each class group has a class tutor who fulfils this duty in a voluntary capacity. The only year group to meet with their class tutors is first year. First-year students are timetabled for one period per week with their class tutor on Monday mornings. This time is spent checking school journals, checking attendance and notes and looking at any other related pastoral care areas. This is reported to be working very effectively with positive impacts on attendance and behaviour. Although all other class groups also have a tutor, students from the other year groups appeared to be largely unaware of their existence. It was acknowledged by senior management that the system is not sufficiently formalised and consequently is not working effectively. It is recommended that the class tutor system be actively implemented throughout the school, that students be made aware of its existence and that the class tutor be an effective and identifiable part of the ladder of referral for disciplinary issues.

School management maintain close links with the appropriate agencies to support student welfare and well-being.

5.2 Guidance and student support in the whole-school context

The school has an allocation of 1WTE for guidance. The guidance counsellor has a dedicated office with some ICT facilities. While the school has a computer room, timetabled access to this room can often be problematic. It is recommended that additional networked terminals be provided in the guidance office when school resources allow. Six hours are timetabled for the provision of guidance to classes and three hours are timetabled for life skills classes with targeted junior cycle classes. The remaining eleven hours are spent on student counselling and meetings with individuals and groups of students in relation to guidance.

There is a school guidance plan and this is commended. It was reported by senior management that the guidance plan is a work in progress. As the plan is being further developed it should include information on guidance delivery to parents who attend meetings in the school in relation to second-year options and information on the choice between the established Leaving Certificate and the LCA.

The development of the Behaviour Management Programme in the school has reportedly been very successful. Students can access the assistance of a psychologist through the PIPS programme. Individual students can make an appointment with the psychologist with the permission of their parents.

Students are facilitated to attend open days at various universities and colleges. The school is involved in the Proctor and Gamble Programme which was reported to be an important support for students in fifth year in relation to accessing training for the world of work.

It was not clearly established during the evaluation that the school has a tracking system for students who have left the school, either early school leavers or those who have completed their second level education. It is recommended that such a tracking system be put in place so that the school can monitor students’ access to third level education, trades and general employment.
6. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT

The following are the main strengths identified in the evaluation:

- The school community strives to care for and nurture every student and to foster relationships and partnerships between the school, the parent body and the wider community.
- There is an openness and willingness on behalf of the board of management, the senior management and the staff actively to pursue and develop policies and practices that will enhance the personal and educational achievements of each individual student.
- The board of management is very committed to Rosary College and to the provision of voluntary second level co-education in the area as well as promoting respect for diversity within the ethos of the Catholic school.
- Initiatives such as the JCSP, the SCP and the skills room supported by the NBSS are extremely successful programmes in the school and are welcomed and recognised by the board as being beneficial for students.
- The skills room and associated initiatives such as the sanctuary programme were seen to be working effectively and the work in relation to supporting students experiencing difficulties is commended.
- Senior management works extremely hard and is commended for its commitment to the school and the students.
- The principal of Rosary College plays a central role in the local school completion cluster group as the chairperson of the steering committee. This work has been pivotal in forging links between the primary feeder schools and Rosary College.
- The current choice of programmes in Rosary College is seen to be meeting the needs of the school effectively. The introduction of LCA and JCSP in recent years has impacted positively on student engagement with education in the school.
- The quality of teaching and learning in many of the lessons observed was good. Teachers used a variety of methods to promote students’ engagement and learning.

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

- The board of management and the school community in general need to focus on specific planning for the DEIS initiative in the school. Effective DEIS planning will help the school to establish baseline statistics in relation to key areas of student development and management such as attendance, achievement, retention and literacy and numeracy levels.
- Senior management should explore ways in which managerial functions can be shared in a more collaborative and effective way through distributed leadership.
- All issues in relation to attendance should be discussed by senior management and staff with a view to implementing the most effective solutions possible.
- In order to maintain the integrity of students’ access to tuition time in the curriculum, it is recommended that the methods of delivery of student activities, as part of various interventions, be re-visited and discussed with relevant personnel.
- A formal school plan should be put together as soon as possible incorporating DEIS planning and action planning for the future development of the school.
- Overall, the provision of subjects and subject choices needs to be re-visited in order to ensure that the school is meeting the needs of all its students and in order to ensure appropriate curricular provision in the short, medium and long term. A curriculum advisory group should be established within the school to look at the options available.
It is recommended that appropriately high levels of expectations in relation to behaviour and achievement be communicated to students on a regular basis to encourage them to achieve their potential.

A formal pastoral care team of key school personnel should be established, with clearly identified aims and objectives. A pastoral care policy should be drafted and ratified in due course.

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 Music – 28 April 2009, published January 2010
- Subject Inspection of Science – 5 May 2010
- Subject Inspection of Mathematics – 7 May 2010
- Subject Inspection of Physical Education – 7 May 2010

Published May 2011
Appendix

School response to the report

Submitted by the Board of Management

Area 1: Observations on the content of the inspection report

The Board of Management has welcomed the reports by the Inspectors as presenting a school which is welcoming and determined to cater for the educational needs of all our students through dialogue, co-operation and collaboration. The Board notes that the visiting Inspectors recognised the tremendous effort being made by all who work and study in Rosary College. While the Board acknowledges the strengths of our school identified in the report, it finds the recommendations realistic and fair and will do everything possible to follow though and implement the recommendations over the next three years in the interests of the students in our care. Some of the recommendations have already been implemented.

The Board felt that the timing of the Whole School Evaluation created serious pressure and stress on the school community, coming, as it did, at a time when students were preparing for the State Exams in June.

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

The following recommendations and improvements have been implemented since the visit of the Whole School Evaluation Team from the 4th to the 7th May 2010

1. The tennis court area has been resurfaced to provide three new tennis courts, two basketball courts, a netball court and the facility to play 5-aside soccer. The old fencing has been replaced. The Board are very grateful to the Religious Sisters of Charity for funding the project.

2. The gym floor has been repaired, sanded, varnished and marked to provide, one basketball court, one volleyball court, 3 badminton courts and a 5-aside soccer area. A Whiteboard has been erected in the gym.

3. The Care team now meets on a regular basis to discuss the care needs of the students.

4. The Admission’s Policy has been updated and ratified by the Board of Management.

5. Teacher In-service in Project Maths is ongoing in preparation for the introduction of changes to the Maths Syllabus.
6. Further development of the DEIS Plan in the areas of Attendance, Punctuality and Literacy have taken place this school year with the introduction of the Attendance Monitoring Service, with the assistance of the School Completion Programme and the various Literacy Initiatives implemented by the Behaviour Support Classroom teachers and the Junior Certificate Schools Programme teachers.

7. The school has introduced Design and Communications Graphics to the Senior Cycle Curriculum, enabling our students who have studied Technical Graphics to Junior Certificate Level to continue into the Senior Cycle and sit DCG for the Leaving Certificate.

8. The IT Grant from the Department of Education and Skills has enabled the school to upgrade the IT facilities in the school. This work is ongoing and should be completed by the end of this school year.

9. In the Science Department new ICT equipment has been provided and is in use. The Science Safety Statement has been drawn up and new flammable cabinets are in place.

The above improvements and developments certainly show that Rosary College is progressing in the academic and non-academic areas and highlights the co-operation and collaboration between parents, students and teachers that is needed to run a successful school.