

**An Roinn Oideachais agus Eolaíochta**

**Department of Education and Skills**

**Whole-School Evaluation  
REPORT**

**Mount Carmel Secondary School  
King's Inns Street, Dublin 1  
Roll number: 60853T**

**Date of inspection: 11 May 2010**



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

## **WHOLE-SCHOOL EVALUATION**

A whole-school evaluation of Mount Carmel Secondary School, King's Inns Street, 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 three subjects were evaluated in detail. The quality of teaching and learning in one additional subject was evaluated prior to the whole-school evaluation. 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**

Mount Carmel Secondary School is a voluntary Catholic secondary school for girls under the patronage of the Religious Sisters of Charity. It is situated in the centre of Dublin, at the heart of the inner city. The school participates in the Department of Education and Skills' School Support Programme under the Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) action plan. As part of this, it is involved in the School Completion Programme (SCP).

At the time of this evaluation, fifty percent of the students enrolled in the school came from outside of Ireland, from thirty two different countries. The majority of these students come from Poland, Romania and Lithuania but other countries including Mauritius, Nigeria and China are also represented. In contrast to earlier periods in the school's history, the student population is now very diverse. One third of these students study Irish despite having been granted an exemption from the subject.

There are currently 299 students enrolled in the school. In addition to the newcomer population, students come from the local primary schools in the immediate catchment area. In the last four years, enrolment has increased by seventeen percent.

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

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

According to the school's mission statement, the school endeavours "by working together as a school community, to educate the whole person by fostering a growth in knowledge and integrity in a safe and secure environment". In line with this, the school's ethos and practices focus firmly on the development of the students in a holistic way and the school has successfully created an environment that caters well for the range of student ability. The mission statement is printed in students' journals, in the teachers' manual and in school official documents. Consideration should also be given to displaying the mission statement in the school.

In its practices, the school has created an inclusive environment where all students are genuinely welcomed. The broad and balanced curriculum, the development of a range of support structures for students and the welcome extended to students of all religious faiths and of none provide evidence of this. It is suggested that the school's mission statement be amended to fully reflect the commitment to inclusion which was evident during this evaluation. The school also espouses a wish to follow the vision of Mary Aikenhead, founder of the Religious Sisters of Charity, who was renowned for her work with those less fortunate. Students are regularly encouraged to optimise opportunities to work with local charities, hospitals, members of the local community as well as participating in school

fundraising activities. Inspectors noted the good relationships and rapport between students and staff. In describing the characteristic spirit of the school, all who met with the inspectors described the school as a happy community. Reference was also made to the friendliness and the generally exemplary manner in which students conduct themselves.

The trustees provide a high level of support provided to the school and the links between both are very strong. The trustees provide two pastoral care sisters to work with students who need English as an Additional Language (EAL) tuition. In addition, a senior member of the order attends the first board of management meeting when a new term of office commences and an information pack is provided to all board members. Financial support is also made available to the school when necessary.

There is evidence that the trustees and management share a common vision for the school. This vision recognises the importance of partnership between all members of the school community. The school provides a range of courses, free of charge, for parents. These courses include computers, English and cookery and are subsidised by City of Dublin Vocational Education Committee (CDVEC). The school has established close links with various institutions within the local community. These include Dublin Institute of Technology, Bolton Street (DIT), local businesses and Henrietta Street Primary School.

## **1.2 School ownership and management**

The board of management is appropriately constituted. The current board was formed in October 2009. The chairperson is nominated by the trustees at the commencement of each term of office. The current chairperson is in his second term of office. Board members include those who have served the school in this capacity over a number of years and members who were newly appointed in 2009. Individual board members have received training for their roles and responsibilities on the board. There is a wide range of experience and expertise among the members on this board and this range of knowledge has served the school well. In order to support all members of the board in carrying out their duties and responsibilities, consideration should be given to sourcing appropriate collective training for the board of management, perhaps drawing on the training opportunities available through the Joint Managerial Body (JMB).

Meetings of the board are held every month and more often if necessary. Proper procedures are in place. An agenda is provided to members prior to each meeting and this always includes a verbal report by the principal on the operations of the school. Minutes of all board meetings are taken and decisions are reached by consensus. Time is set aside at each meeting to determine the report to be given to staff and this information is conveyed at the next staff meeting. However, often there can be a considerable time gap between board and staff meetings. Consideration might now be given to revisiting the procedures for reporting to staff so that they can be informed more promptly of issues that arise at board of management meetings.

Members of the board reported that they are aware of the statutory requirements of their role as laid down in the Education Act, 1998. They recognise that the day-to-day management of the school lies with principal and deputy principal and they entrust this responsibility to them. The board supports the planning processes in the school through, for example, consideration of draft policies. The board has ratified thirteen policies since 2003. In recent times, these include policies relating to learning support, guidance, dignity in the workplace and health and safety.

The board has established two sub-committees: one for finance and one for discipline. In 2006, the board set up a School Strategic Management Review group. The main aim of this group was to examine the sustainability of the school for the next five years. The setting up

of this group was both pragmatic and forward-looking. This group is due to remain in operation until 2011. In the strategy document subsequently developed by the board, a number of key areas to be addressed were identified. These included increasing the time allocated to Physical Education (PE), the introduction of Music as a curricular subject, the up-skilling of a teacher in the area of special needs and improvements in various facilities. It is noteworthy that much progress has been made in these areas and that almost all the recommendations made by the review group have reached completion. This would now be an opportune time for the board to develop a new strategy plan for the school with a similar timeframe once the current strategy document has expired.

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

The senior management team consists of the principal and the acting deputy principal. Both have received formal training for their roles through the Leadership Development for Schools (LDS) initiative. The senior management team has undergone much change over the past four years. This includes the appointment of the first lay principal in 2006 and the appointment of two successive deputy principals, including the current acting deputy who took up the role in January 2009. Both members of the current senior management team worked as home-school-community liaison (HSCL) co-ordinators in the school. They have acquired a high level of awareness and knowledge of the students in the school and they clearly share a commitment to the holistic development of all students.

The members of the senior management team work well together and they manage the day-to-day running of the school very effectively. While each has individual duties, it is very clear that they collaborate closely. Between them, they have retained responsibility for a high proportion of routine tasks which support the smooth running of the school. They meet informally every morning but apart from this, they do not set aside any dedicated times for any other meetings. Consideration should be given to scheduling some formal, structured time for meetings as this would give the senior management team the opportunity to focus on issues beyond the day-to-day running of the school. The senior management team maintains a prominent presence in the school.

The principal has displayed a strong capacity for managing and leading the school. This is evident by his commitment to planning; curriculum development; improving student achievement; the provision of supports for parents and students and facilitating the continuing professional development (CPD) of staff. There is scope to re-examine the range of responsibilities retained by the principal which could be delegated to other key members of staff. By so doing, the principal would have more opportunities to focus on whole-school issues. It will also allow other members of staff to more fully realise their management potential.

The middle management team comprises five assistant principals (AP) and eight special duties teachers (SD). In allocating duties to teachers, it is evident that the skills of each person are matched to the particular requirements of the post and this is good. All post holders meet as a group with senior management at the start of the year. Records of these meetings are kept and they indicate that some whole-school issues are discussed. A core aim of such meetings is to consult with and delegate responsibility to middle management. This is a very effective use of the post of responsibility structure in the school and it is very good that the experiences and expertise of these staff members are being fully optimised in this way. The duties assigned to post holders are wide and varied. A thorough review of the schedule of posts was carried out in the school in September 2009 and management is satisfied that the current schedule is meeting the needs of the school. Opportunities are provided to staff to change duties and this is good as it enables staff to broaden their skills and experiences.

Well-established systems are in place for the management of students including a code of discipline. It is very evident that the school adopts a positive approach where possible and that it rewards students and celebrates achievement frequently. The school is currently engaged in a review of this policy in line with the document *Developing a Code of Behaviour: Guidelines for Schools* issued by the National Education and Welfare Board (NEWB). This revised code should reference all the supportive practices which are currently in place in the school for the management of students. In accordance with legislative requirements, the school has an admissions policy in place. This policy should be reviewed so as to ensure that the criteria for admission to the school are clear and presented in order of priority and that parents are aware of their right of appeal under Section 29 of the Education Act, 1998.

The role of year head is clearly defined and makes some good use of the leadership capacities of each individual in this middle management team. Normally, year heads remain with their groups for the full duration of both junior and senior cycle. The evaluation team found that, individually, year heads were committed to implementing their duties but that collectively, the full potential of this middle management team to support its members and senior management is not currently being optimised. This needs to be addressed. It is therefore recommended that senior management meet with all year heads as a group to explore and agree ways in which the capacity that exists can be further harnessed in mutually beneficial ways. This could involve, for example, agreeing to meet periodically to discuss common approaches to student management.

Year heads maintain records for each of the students in their care. However, their practices in this regard vary. It is recommended that year heads collectively agree on a system for generating and storing confidential student information. It is important that there is a tangible record of information for every student in the care of the year head. This is particularly pertinent in the event that there is a change of year head. Currently, year heads have no office from which to conduct their business. As resources allow, a shared room with a telephone and filing cabinet could be made available and used by all year heads to support their work.

The school has a tutor system in place but this is under-developed. There is significant scope for developing this role as an additional support to students. It would also be very helpful to year heads as they carry out their duties.

Student attendance is monitored each day through a swipe card system. All absenteeism is promptly followed up. Information on attendance is retained by a member of staff employed under the SCP and is sometimes given to year heads. This information should be routinely displayed each day so that all staff members, including year heads, can check and follow up on the absenteeism of students more easily.

A student council has been formed and its members are democratically elected by the full student body. In the past, the council elected officers and regular meetings were held under the guidance of a liaison teacher. The council helped organise fundraising activities and also had a role in designing the new tracksuit. These achievements are significant and the students are commended for their efforts. This year, the council has not been as active. The school reports that this may be in part explained by the absence on approved leave of the liaison teacher. It is expected that the council will be re-invigorated in the next academic year. In progressing the work of the council, consideration should be given to accessing the supports available through the Citizen Education Support Team (<http://cspe.slss.ie>) and Dáil na nÓg ([www.dailnanog.ie](http://www.dailnanog.ie)) as well as documents on the websites of the Department of Education and Skills ([www.education.ie](http://www.education.ie)) and of Student Council Support ([www.studentcouncil.ie](http://www.studentcouncil.ie)).

There is also a prefect system in place in the school and this fosters student leadership. Staff and students democratically elect eleven sixth-year students who are then assigned to different year groups in the junior cycle. Each prefect acts as a mentor to a particular class groups within the year assigned to her. Prefects are also responsible for supervising students when whole-school assemblies are being held. It is now timely for the school to revisit the duties attached to the role of prefect and to consider expanding it to include a wider variety of duties.

The school is very conscious of the requirement under the Education Act, 1998 to form a parents' association and has made every effort in this regard including ongoing consultation with neighbouring schools. The school should now seek further advice to support its efforts from the National Parents' Council at [www.npcpp.ie](http://www.npcpp.ie). In the absence of a parents' association, the school makes every effort to consult with the general parent body. For instance, a system has been established at parent-teacher meetings where parents are surveyed and views are sought in relation to some policies and other school activities. During the evaluation, inspectors met with a group of parents including one parent representative from the board of management. All of the parents met with were very complimentary about the senior management team and the school in general.

Communication systems between the school and parents are effective. The principal has adopted an open-door policy and is available to meet with parents without prior appointments. An annual ceilí is held in the school for students and their parents. Documents made available indicated that there is ongoing communication between the school and parents. School reports, parent-teacher meetings and the students' journals are the main means of communication. The school, in conjunction with other schools, established a Cultural Mediation Project which provides a translation service in order to ensure that parents of newcomer students can access key policies and standard letters of communication. Although this work has yet to be completed, it is a very good initiative.

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

Overall, the current weekly instruction time is twenty-eight hours. However, at the start of the school year, one week is allocated for various activities including registration, tutor time and meetings. This is unwarranted as no curriculum-based instruction occurs during this week. The school must review this and ensure that the integrity of the school year as outlined in CL M29/95 is not compromised.

The school's staffing allocation from the Department of Education and Skills for the 2009/10 year is 23.38 whole-time teacher equivalents (WTE) and two special-needs assistants. This allocation includes one WTE for Guidance, one WTE for home-school community liaison (HSCL) and 2 WTE for English as an additional Language (EAL).

The school makes optimal use of its teaching resources. Deployment of teachers is in line with their qualifications, skills, knowledge and interests. Teachers teach a range of levels, year groups and programmes as appropriate within their subject areas. This is good practice as it helps to build capacity and ensures that the school is not overly dependent on particular members of staff. The timetabling of classes in most subjects is broadly in line with the recommendations of the syllabuses. The increased allocation of time to PE lessons achieved through the board's strategy document is acknowledged here. However, consideration should be given to the allocation of a double period each week for PE rather than the two single periods currently available.

Many improvements have taken place recently to enhance the quality of the school facilities. A particularly innovative use of space is the placement of an astro turf pitch on the roof of the school. Other improvements include the refurbished home economics

kitchen and science laboratory and in particular, the library. Great efforts have been made to develop the library so that it is very vibrant, student-friendly and organised effectively. Under the Junior Certificate School Programme (JCSP) Demonstration Library Project, the school acquired the services of a librarian who makes an important contribution to teaching and learning in the school. For instance, she plays a very active role in the provision of supports to teachers of JCSP students and, as a key member of the DEIS planning committee, in relation to literacy and numeracy.

Classrooms are generally student-based apart from practical rooms. Students have responded very well to the school's expectation that all classrooms will be maintained to a very high standard and they take tremendous pride in and ownership of their classrooms and of their school. In addition, many classrooms contain attractive displays of students' work and subject-specific material.

The members of the secretarial, caretaking and cleaning staffs provide effective and valuable support for the day-to-day running of the school. Very good efforts are made to ensure that the school building is attractive and that all visitors are made to feel welcomed. The school is very well maintained both inside and out. The cultivation of environmental awareness in students and staff is a feature of Mount Carmel Secondary School. There was a notable absence of litter throughout the school and grounds. Students are expected to play an active role in maintaining the school and this is commended. The school makes efforts to recycle waste by providing bins at strategic locations throughout the school. Consideration should now be given by the school to participating in the Green-Schools programme to further promote this environmental awareness.

A professionally supportive environment has been created for staff. Teachers are strongly encouraged to engage in continuing professional development. The board of management supports staff financially when attending in-service courses as the need arises. Planning for the expansion of the school's information and communication technology (ICT) is ongoing. The school has invested resources into developing its ICT systems and hopes to expand this further. For instance, the school is a member of the Dublin Inner City Schools Computerisation (DISC) project which has supported the art department in providing very good opportunities for students to use ICT in their art work. Each programme co-ordinator has been allocated a notice board in the staff room.

Effective communications systems are in place in the school. Regular staff meetings are held and proper procedures are in place. The staff is given prior notice of each meeting and members are invited to contribute to the agenda. Minutes are kept by the deputy principal. This role could be delegated to members of staff by rotation. The principal usually chairs the meetings. The school has recently acquired advanced ICT in order to provide computerised reports to students. Plans are in place to provide a computer for each classroom. This provision should allow the school to improve day-to-day communication such as notices, tracking attendance and monitoring student behaviour. This technology will also allow all subject departments to store planning documentation in electronic files which can then be readily accessed.

Regular fire drills are held in the school and these are logged. The health and safety statement was prepared in accordance with the Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Act 2005. At the next audit, this should include a risk assessment and hazard analysis in all areas of the school and this information should be documented and action plans devised as necessary.

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

### **2.1 The school plan**

School development planning was initiated formally in this school in 2006 and the school has engaged with the School Development Planning Initiative (SDPI). At that time, the needs of the school were examined and a five-year action plan was agreed. This plan addressed the curricular, resource and policy needs of the school. The school has also established a timeline for the development, ratification and review of several key policies. During the evaluation, advice was provided in the school with regard to the further development of a number of policies. The school could also optimise and develop its website to ensure that all policies are widely available.

The process of planning in the school is effective. In many cases, a committee was established for the drafting of a policy before it was sent out to the board of management, all staff and the students' council for consultation. Parents' input on policies was facilitated through the surveying of parents at parent-teacher meetings. This is good practice. The school has allocated a post of responsibility for the co-ordination of the school development planning process. This staff member led the development and review processes in the school until her appointment to the senior management team in January 2009. At the time of the evaluation, there was no post in place for coordination of planning. Nevertheless, the structures which had been put in place continued to support planning.

The school has many elements of a school plan as envisaged by the Education Act, 1998. It is evident that a lot of planning is ongoing in the school but the outputs of this work could be organised into a more cohesive and accessible document. The plan should then be divided into permanent and developmental sections. To support this work, a number of planning templates are readily available from the School Development Planning Initiative (SDPI) at [www.sdpi.ie](http://www.sdpi.ie). Guidelines regarding the content and layout of a school plan are also available. In compiling the necessary documents, particular attention should be given to ensuring that the good practices currently in place in the school, for example the consultative structures which have been established, are systematically recorded. Any review and evaluation practices which the school has adopted should also be included.

Subject planning is evolving. Many subject plans and the plan for the Transition Year (TY) and Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) programmes were made available during the evaluation. These plans are at varying stages of development. Further information on subject planning is available in Section 4.1 of this report. It is good that many of the recommendations in previous subject inspection reports have been implemented.

The school has devoted much time since December 2008 to developing its DEIS plan. It is very apparent that a whole-school approach has been adopted to this process and that substantial progress has been made. In line with good practice, a core planning group was established and, to date, this has met on eight occasions. There has also been much ongoing consultation with staff. Following the establishment of baseline data in nearly all of the key areas, targets across the eight core areas have been identified and an action plan established for each. The work of this planning group and all staff involved is commended. However, the board has yet to be involved in this process. As a next step, it is recommended that the board now become involved in the DEIS planning process.

All the identified DEIS targets have been based on the full three-year junior cycle. The school should now specify targets for each individual year group in the junior cycle and indicate how these targets will be achieved, measured and assessed so that the success of the plan can be fully determined. The school has, in the last year, implemented a system for the analysis of students' achievements in certificate examinations. This information as well



as uptake of subjects at higher level should be included in all subject departments' planning documentation. This would provide evidence of success rates in relation to attainment and will be useful for tracking students' progress.

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**

Mount Carmel Secondary School provides a wide range of mainstream second-level programmes. These are: the Junior Certificate Programme (JC), the Junior Certificate School Programme (JCSP), an optional Transition Year (TY) programme, the established Leaving Certificate (LC) and the Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) programme. There is also a very wide and balanced range of subjects on offer to students.

An SPHE programme, based on the approved curriculum framework, is delivered in each of the three years of the junior cycle. A relationships and sexuality education (RSE) policy has been developed. Following a recommendation made in a previous subject inspection, a teacher attended training for RSE from the SPHE support service and is now delivering a RSE module to senior-cycle students. The guidance counsellor currently is assigned to five of the SPHE lesson periods for each class group over the duration of the junior cycle. This is used to deliver those aspects of the SPHE programme which overlap with Guidance. Collaboration between the guidance counsellor and the SPHE department in this way is very good.

TY is very well established in the school and is managed effectively by the coordinator who has held this post of responsibility for a substantial period of time. At the start of each academic year, there is an induction programme for all teachers and students of TY. An information pack is also provided to all teachers regarding forthcoming trips and assessments. The TY curriculum plan is good and provides a range of educational experiences for students including some subjects which are delivered in modular format.

The LCA co-ordinator is new to this role and is managing this programme very well. She has established close links with the special educational needs (SEN) co-ordinator for those students with SEN in her care. Procedures are in place to monitor the academic suitability of students intending to apply for LCA.

Co-ordinators of TY and LCA play an active role in the organisation and monitoring of work experience and the systems that are in place are very good. Students are well supported in their preparation their work placement, while they are completing it and in their reflection on it afterwards. Documentation in relation to all of these aspects was provided to the inspection team. Employers provide a written report shortly after the students complete their work experience. In line with good practice, all students are expected to maintain a work experience reflective diary.

Teachers are deployed to deliver curricular programmes following consultation with senior management. Consequently, all programmes have a core teaching team but there is also a good level of flexibility within this system.

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

An information evening is held for parents of third-year students where they receive information regarding all curricular programmes and subjects. This is delivered by the co-ordinators of TY and LCA with inputs from the principal regarding subject choices. The guidance counsellor is available to address any queries as they arise at that information night and to meet with parents and students on other occasions. Given the good level of expertise that exists within the guidance department, it would be appropriate if the guidance counsellor assumed a more active role in the delivery of information regarding subject and programme choice and the implications of all choices.

Currently, some written information is provided to parents and third-year students regarding the content of some subjects. Following consultation with all subject departments it would now be timely to develop a more detailed and up-to-date pack of information which should accurately reflect the content of all optional subjects. This information would be very helpful for students making their selections.

The arrangements in the school for student placement in class groups in junior cycle are good. Students are placed in mixed-ability class groups in first year for all subjects, with the exception of Mathematics where a higher-level class is formed. In second year and third year, two bands are created. Students are placed in class groups within the bands according to their ability. Irish and Mathematics are concurrently timetabled in first year and English is included in this arrangement from second year onwards. All three subjects are set from second year onwards so that students may choose the level at which each subject is studied.

Good systems are in place for the transfer of primary students to the school. These include visits to the primary schools by management, an open night for prospective students and parents and an orienteering induction programme. All first-year students are met by their year head, the guidance counsellor and HSCL co-ordinator upon entry. A mentoring programme is also in place. There are very good links established between Mount Carmel Secondary School and the main feeder primary schools. The primary teachers provide detailed information which assists the school in the correct placement of students.

All first year students study French for the academic year. At the end of the year, French is not made available to JCSP students except in very rare circumstances. It is important that students be advised to discontinue the study of French only after careful consideration based on solid educational grounds. In that context, it is recommended that all students have access to French as a modern European language for the entire junior cycle.

JCSP students are integrated into mainstream settings for all subjects and this is very good practice. Additional support is provided in English and Mathematics in a small class setting. JCSP students are provided with timetabled access to the school library where a number of reading initiatives have been put in place. To date, JCSP students have participated in several initiatives. These include Make a Book, various reading challenges and Maths for Fun. These initiatives were reported to be having a positive effect on the students. The supports afforded to students participating in these initiatives demonstrate the school's commitment to the holistic development of students.

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

Students can avail of a wide range of co-curricular and extracurricular activities. Sporting, cultural and educational activities are on offer, all contributing to the holistic development of the students. These activities are managed by teachers and the success of the co-curricular and extracurricular programme is due to the commitment and dedication of staff involved. When necessary, the board of management has made some funding available to subsidise particular activities. In the next review of the school's homework policy, specific reference should be made to extracurricular activities and to the responsibility on students who miss class due to an activity to source and complete any homework assigned during the lesson missed.

Information regarding all activities is posted on a notice board in the staff room. Consideration might now be given to the development of a central file detailing the names of all students and the activities in which they are involved. Such information would provide useful records for school management, and particularly year heads, when compiling student profiles such as references for entry to third-level education or for employment.

Management and staff actively encourage all students to participate in the activities provided. Particularly noteworthy is the celebration of the diverse cultures in the school as part of the co-curricular programme.

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

### **4.1 Planning and preparation**

In all of the subject areas evaluated, teachers are organised into formal subject departments. In subjects where there is more than one teacher, there was evidence of a good level of teamwork and collaboration amongst the members of these subject departments. In addition, it is good to note that the role of subject co-ordinator is rotated amongst the team members.

As part of the school development planning process, management facilitates subject department planning through the provision of formal time for meetings. Good practice was observed in some departments where agendas and minutes were available for these formal meetings. While much of the business of subject department meetings is, of necessity, taken up with organisational matters, there is scope to allocate some time at these meetings for the sharing of good practices with regard to teaching and learning. In instances where there is only one member in a subject department consideration should be given to providing opportunities to share such practices across other similarly small subject areas.

A subject department plan has been developed for all subjects evaluated. These plans are at varying stages of development. In some subject areas the plans show evidence of a developmental approach over a number of years. The majority of the subject plans focus on both the organisational and curricular aspects involved in the delivery of the subjects. All of the plans outline a programme of work in the form of an agreed list of topics to be covered in each year group or programme. Very good practice was noted where learning objectives, in terms of knowledge, understanding and skills, were specified for each topic. Where this is not already the case, it is recommended that the lists of topics that form the programme of work be further developed to include learning objectives. Reference to specific teaching and learning strategies and resources as well as an indication of how learning will be measured should also be considered. In order to focus on how planning can impact on the quality of teaching and learning this recommendation should be considered by all subject

departments in the school. The process of developing the subject plans could be carried out on a phased basis.

Some of the subject plans presented focus specifically on the strategies used to help students with additional educational needs access the subject. This is an important practice which should be replicated across all subjects.

Subject departments and individual teachers are deserving of praise for the time and attention given to the development of a considerable amount of resources to support teaching and learning. Such resources should be retained as a shared resource and built upon over time.

## **4.2 Learning and teaching**

Overall, the quality of teaching and learning in the lessons observed was very good. In the majority of lessons visited, teacher explanations and instructions were very clear and students knew exactly what was expected of them. Most lessons began with either a written or an oral statement of the learning objectives. Best practice in this regard occurred where the learning objectives were written on the board and where their achievement was assessed as lessons progressed and checked at the end. In two of the subjects evaluated inspectors noted that there is scope to extend this practice across all lessons.

A wide variety of methodologies was used in teaching and learning the subjects evaluated. These included investigation and discovery, practical work, games, dance and drama, and teacher exposition. Information and communications technology (ICT) was used effectively in many of the lessons observed. In general, students were encouraged to be active participants in their own learning and teachers used a variety of approaches to facilitate independent learning. Of particular note in most of the subjects evaluated was the integration of differentiated strategies including pair work, graduated worksheets, activities which catered for the full range of students and an appropriate level of individual attention to students. It is to be noted that, where the provision of individual attention is the predominant methodology used, students are at risk of becoming dependent on their teacher's observations and decisions. Therefore, it is recommended that care be taken to ensure that there are opportunities for students to develop independent learning skills in all lessons.

In some of the subjects evaluated, careful consideration had been given to the language needs of students whose first language is not English. For instance, teachers used a variety of strategies to ensure that students understood the vocabulary of the subject. In addition, key words were displayed on the walls in classrooms and these pertained to relevant aspects of the subject syllabus. These are good strategies and should be noted by all subject departments. In so doing, it is important that key words be referred to by teachers throughout lessons so as to encourage students to use this vocabulary in their discussions.

Effective use of various types of questioning was noted. Teachers listened very carefully to student questions and answered them accurately and comprehensively; higher-order questions were used to help students to explore the concepts presented and quick questions were used to keep lessons lively and students engaged. Students were asked to examine relationships between concepts or to describe what they noticed. Where appropriate, games were used to provide students with practice at asking and answering questions. This approach was particularly effective in language lessons as a means of enabling students to become active participants in conversation.

In some instances teachers demonstrated appropriately high expectations for student achievement and they set high standards for student work. In other cases it was evident that

there is a need for student achievement to be monitored more closely and for targets to be set to increase higher-level uptake in the certificate examinations.

Classroom management was found, in general, to be very good. Teaching and learning took place in a pleasant, encouraging and respectful atmosphere. Where this was the case, the levels of student engagement with the work of lessons were generally high and there was a good spirit of teamwork. However, in one subject evaluated, students were not sufficiently focussed on the task-at-hand. This was largely due to the classroom management strategies being deployed. It is important that a good working atmosphere is maintained in all lessons. On that basis, it is recommended that all subject departments keep the classroom management strategies used under review to ensure their effectiveness and that opportunities be created for teachers to share the many good practices that are already in use.

### **4.3 Assessment**

A variety of assessment modes is used to determine students' progress. These include peer-assessment, self-assessment, homework and practical and oral work where appropriate. During the evaluation, questioning was commonly used to check on learning. While this included some use of higher-order questions there was scope for greater use of such questions to stimulate students into thinking analytically and applying new knowledge obtained during lessons. Homework is regularly assigned and was set in all subjects evaluated. Good routines have been established which include the correction of homework at the start of each lesson. In some of the subjects evaluated, assessment for learning (AfL) practices are used and these include constructive and encouraging comments written on students' work.

Formal house examinations are held for first-year, second-year and fifth-year students at Christmas and before the summer holidays. "Mock" certificate examinations are held for Junior Certificate and Leaving Certificate students in the spring term. Common examination papers are set for each year group in some subjects and this is good practice. It ensures that decisions with regard to the assignment of students to class groups can be guided by student achievement on common assessment criteria. In one subject evaluated, teachers differentiate the examinations they make available. This is very good practice. Reports are issued following all formal assessments. Parent-teacher meetings are held for all year groups.

In some subject departments, teachers discuss the achievements of the students in the house and in the certificate examinations. This practice is highly valuable in the context of subject development planning and of target setting. It is recommended that an analysis of students' achievements in certificate examinations be included in the plan for all subject departments together with the reports of the relevant chief examiners which can be accessed on the State Examinations Commission website ([www.examinations.ie](http://www.examinations.ie)). This information should then be used to inform planning for teaching and learning and to set targets for improving students' performance in the certificate examinations.

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

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

The school has an ex-quota allocation of one learning support teacher, 2.51 whole-time equivalent (WTE) posts to provide for special educational needs and 2 WTE posts to support students who have English as an additional Language (EAL). The evidence

gathered during the evaluation suggests the resources for learning support and for SEN are being deployed for the purposes intended.

The special education needs department is co-ordinated by a member of staff who holds a specialist qualification in this area. A second teacher has just completed training and expects to be fully qualified shortly. This is a praiseworthy development for the school and management is commended for facilitating this process. There is a clearly identifiable special educational needs team. Two formal meetings have been held this year and thereafter all other meetings were informal. It is recommended that more meetings of a formal nature take place.

The school uses the resources it receives for special educational needs in a variety of ways. In the junior cycle, support is provided through the formation of small class groups for English and Mathematics. On occasion, some team teaching occurs. Some additional support is also provided in Geography and History. Students are also withdrawn from particular subjects either in small groups or individually and support is tailored to their specific needs. In keeping with good practice guidelines, this support is discontinued when the particular learning need has been met.

Planning folders were made available to the evaluation team and it is very evident that there is much developmental planning for students taking place. The school has begun the process of developing individual education plans (IEPs) for a small number of students. This is very good practice and the special educational needs department should continue to advance this work. Currently, only year heads have access to students' Christmas and summer reports to track progress. In order for this department to determine whether the support being provided is meeting the needs of students, it is essential that the other members of the special education needs department have access to the school reports of the students in their care. This is recommended.

A draft policy on special education needs was presented to the evaluation team. This was drafted following consultation by key members of the special educational needs team with senior management and the staff. Good progress has been made. It is recommended that, as the policy develops, the school consider expanding its scope and re-naming it a whole-school policy on inclusion. This would be in line with section 2.4 of the publication *Inclusion of Students with Special Educational Needs* (Department of Education and Science/Skills, 2007). This policy could then provide guidance on a whole-school response to supporting all students with additional educational needs, including newcomer students and the exceptionally able. The National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) publications *Exceptionally Able Students: Draft Guidelines for Teachers* (NCCA, 2007) and *Intercultural Education in the Post-Primary School: Guidelines for Schools* (NCCA, 2006) are also useful sources of advice.

The special educational needs department has, on occasion, provided information to all staff members regarding students with particular learning needs and useful strategies to support the student in mainstream lessons. The department is also available to advise staff as needs arise. The school could now consider further professional development activities for all staff to equip them with the necessary skills to work with special educational needs students in their care. It is recommended that the school conduct an audit of staff training needs in relation to this and that it facilitate training as required. This would be a practical way of providing support for staff.

There is a classroom dedicated to resource teaching and learning support use. This room contains much subject-related material, resources, books and storage facilities. All psychological reports are stored in a locked cabinet where they can be accessed as the need arises by members of the special educational needs team. Every effort is made by the

school to support exceptionally able students. Each year, funding is made available by management to provide additional help for a small number of students to enable them to achieve at the highest possible level in certificate examinations. Funding has also been made available for a student to attend the Science Olympiad in Dublin City University (DCU) and two scholarships are awarded each year for Gaeltacht courses. This is very good.

English as an additional language (EAL) support is provided to students, following language proficiency assessments which are carried out in the school. The Post-Primary Assessment Kit (Department of Education and Skills) is used for this purpose. EAL support is delivered in a number of ways. For example, language lessons are timetabled against Irish from which these students are exempt and one teacher is timetabled to deliver these lessons. The school has used some of its resources to create an additional English class group in sixth year to cater for the needs of EAL students. A small number of students are withdrawn for individual support, most of which is provided in a voluntary capacity by two members of the Religious Sisters of Charity in their own time. Their generosity is acknowledged here. A Post-Graduate Diploma in Education (PGDE) student currently provides support after school to any student who wishes to attend classes, also in a voluntary capacity.

The flexibility of approaches being adopted by the school for the delivery of support is highly commended. However, it was difficult to establish whether the full 2.0 WTE allocation for EAL provided to the school by the Department is being used in its entirety for the purpose for which it was intended. The school must ensure that it uses the full allocation appropriately in accordance with the provisions of CL 15/09. This circular encourages a flexible approach but requires the school authority to deploy the support allocation having regard to the proficiency levels of individual students and in line with their evolving needs.

There is much informal contact between the EAL teachers, the volunteers and with the co-ordinator of the special educational needs department. The school should ensure that formal planning meetings take place. This planning time should be used to ensure a coordinated approach to the delivery of support and also to avoid any unnecessary duplication. This is strongly recommended. It is unclear what level of planning for individual EAL students' needs is being undertaken as no planning documentation was provided to the evaluation team. It is also unclear how the effectiveness of this support is being assessed and evaluated and whether it is enabling these students to engage with the curriculum. The school should be aware that any planning documentation should include information on these points. In addition, it is important that the English language skills of EAL students are regularly assessed and evaluated to ensure that the support being given is appropriate to their needs.

In most of the subjects inspected, it was evident that some mainstream subject teachers have developed particular strategies for EAL students to enable them to cope with subject-specific key words and terminology. This is very good practice and one that should be adopted by all subject departments. The school must now examine its practices in relation to EAL delivery to ensure that the individual learning needs of all EAL students are being appropriately catered for.

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

The school receives twenty-two hours per week from the Department of Education and Skills for Guidance. The current guidance counsellor, who is fully qualified, was appointed to the school in September 2008. One period per week is given to fifth-year and sixth-year classes and TY students receive timetabled guidance for half of the academic year. In junior cycle, students in need of individual counselling are withdrawn from Religious Education

and SPHE. In addition, the guidance counsellor meets with all junior-cycle classes during a small number of their timetabled SPHE classes as outlined earlier in section 3.1 of this report. The school should monitor this arrangement to ensure that junior cycle students are receiving a sufficient level of class-based Guidance to ensure that their educational and career guidance needs are being appropriately met. It is good to note that the guidance counsellor is facilitated to attend the local counselling supervision sessions provided to support guidance counsellors.

Year heads can refer students to the guidance counsellor and students can also self-refer. It is important that there is a record of any referrals being made by any staff member including year heads. The development of a referral template would be useful.

Guidance planning is well advanced in the school. Guidance planning to date has essentially been carried out by the guidance counsellor. In order to develop the plan and to ensure that there is a whole-school approach to guidance, it is recommended that a planning team be established which should include representatives of students, parents and the local business community.

Facilities for Guidance are good and include an appropriately equipped office and access to the school computer room. A particularly noteworthy initiative was undertaken by the guidance department in order to raise awareness among students about all the possible career opportunities available to them. This involved the organisation of a careers evening whereby representatives from local businesses, colleges and universities were invited to the school to speak to students and their parents.

There are very good care structures in place in the school. A care team has been formed for each year group and weekly meetings are held. The care team comprises the principal, deputy principal, guidance counsellor, a pastoral care worker who is a member of the Religious Sisters of Charity, the HSCL co-ordinator and the relevant year head. It is good that the focus of these meetings is kept to the support and care of students and is not on discipline. It might be useful to merge meetings so that junior-cycle and senior-cycle meetings take place simultaneously. In this way, year heads can be given an opportunity to collaborate and share expertise more regularly. Being mindful of the workload on the principal, consideration should be given to rotating attendance by the members of the senior management team at these meetings between them.

Effective support systems have also been put in place through the HSCL and SCP in the school. The HSCL co-ordinator has devised an impressive transfer programme for incoming first-year students, has worked closely with parents and has established classes for adults which are held during the day. In line with good practice, the co-ordinator is actively involved in the organisation and development of the Local Committee with other HSCL co-ordinators from the locality and has established important links with various agencies which, in turn, are a crucial support to the school. In addition, in order to support students and to foster a culture of study, she provides supervised study classes for students in her own time. The SCP officer, in addition to her role as attendance officer, arranges after-school activities and these include hip hop dancing, and health and beauty classes. A portion of the SCP funding is allocated to the school musical to support those students who are most at risk of early leaving. The school also has a Rainbows programme in place for the students.

It is clear that there is a very strong whole-school approach to the care and support of students and that the additional supports provided by the Department of Education and Skills under the DEIS and SCP initiatives are being used to good effect. Meetings held with members of the care team, with the year heads and with the guidance and learning support departments provided substantial evidence of the extent of the support and care that exists



within the school. The commitment to the students of the board, the senior management team and all members of staff is very apparent and highly commended.

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

The following are the main strengths identified in the evaluation:

- The school is very inclusive and all of its practices focus firmly on the development of the students in a holistic way.
- There are very strong links between the school and the trustees.
- The board of management has been proactive in the school. For instance, the board developed a strategy document which has now almost reached completion.
- The leadership capacity of the senior management team is strong and both members work well together and manage the day-to-day running of the school very efficiently.
- The process of planning in the school is effective. In particular, the school has carefully considered its DEIS plan with clearly identifiable targets for development.
- A very good range of mainstream second-level programmes is provided in this school.
- Good systems are in place for the transfer of primary students to the school.
- The quality of teaching and learning in the lessons observed was generally high.
- A caring and supportive environment has been created for staff and students.
- The additional supports provided by the Department of Education and Skills under the DEIS and SCP initiatives are being used to good effect.

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

- Senior management should meet with key members of staff, including the group of year heads, to explore and agree ways in which greater delegation of appropriate responsibilities for school management can be achieved.
- Year heads should collectively devise and implement a system for managing and storing confidential information for every student in their care.
- The guidance department should take on a more active role in the delivery of information regarding subject and programme choices.
- The school must now examine all of its practices in relation to EAL delivery to ensure that the individual learning needs of these students are being appropriately catered for.
- All subject departments should keep the classroom management strategies used under review to ensure their effectiveness and that opportunities be created for teachers to share the many good practices that are already in use.

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 Art – May 2010
- Subject Inspection of Gaeilge – January 2009
- Subject Inspection of Home Economics – May 2010
- Subject Inspection of Mathematics – May 2010

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# **Appendix**

## **8. SCHOOL RESPONSE TO THE REPORT**

**Submitted by the Board of Management**

## **Area 1: Observations on the content of the inspection report**

Overall we found the WSE to be a positive process. We were delighted that the welcoming and inclusive nature of our school was acknowledged and that our school was described as a 'happy community'. We very much pride ourselves on our positive school environment and the fact that we cater for all levels of abilities and have numerous structures in place to support our students. Thankfully our school population continues to grow which is a credit to our staff and our students. Our student numbers have increased by 25% in the last five years.

We found the WSE process particularly positive in that it affirmed a lot of the work we do in Mount Carmel on a daily basis. This was very welcome. We found the recommendations equally welcome and these will prove very helpful to us as our school moves forward. We have already put in place many of the recommendations since September 2010 and the remaining items will be implemented over the next year or so, or as resources allow.

I would like to thank the inspectors for the professional and thorough way they carried out the Whole School Evaluation and for the way they interacted with the staff and students throughout the week. I would also like to acknowledge the co-operation of our staff members, students, parents and members of the Board of Management during the week of the evaluation.

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

Since returning to school in September 2010 many of the recommendations have been put in place. For example the Mission Statement is now displayed in the entrance hall, the BOM has reviewed our Admissions Policy and has become involved in the school's DEIS Plan. The senior management team now meet formally twice a week on top of their daily informal contact.

The staff meetings and planning meetings that usually take place in the first week of the new school year have been scaled back as recommended. All First year students have been timetabled for a double period for PE as opposed to two single periods and all JC classes will have a double period of PE from September 2011. French remains an option for all JC students. However, students with an exemption from languages have the option of JCSP. As part of the JCSP programme basic French is taught in First Year twice a week.

In relation to guidance and student support a new system for referrals to the Guidance Counsellor is now in place. The Guidance Counsellor has also become more involved in the programme and subject choice meeting. We continue to hold separate Care Team meetings for the individual year groups as this allows more time to be spent on each student. However, attendance at these meetings is now rotated between the Principal and Deputy Principal as recommended.

All other recommendations will be addressed over the short to medium term. Many will be included as targets in our new five year plan which will put in place when our existing plan expires in September 2011.