

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

**Whole-School Evaluation
REPORT**

**Saint Patrick's College
Cavan, County Cavan
Roll number: 61060M**

Date of inspection: 27 March 2010



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

WHOLE-SCHOOL EVALUATION

A whole-school evaluation of St Patrick's College Cavan was undertaken in March 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 report, and the response of the board will be found in the appendix of this report.

INTRODUCTION

St Patrick's College, Cavan, was established in 1874 as a diocesan voluntary secondary school for boys, under the trusteeship of the bishop and diocese of Kilmore. The school is situated on a large site on the outskirts of Cavan town. The school has a large number of feeder schools from Cavan town and the general locality. The school has seen many changes in the last number of years including the end of boarding at the school, the establishment of a board of management and the development of a parents' association. Currently, 580 students are enrolled at the school and there are indications that student enrolment is on an upward trend. Planning permission has been granted for a new school building and during the evaluation the school building project was put out to tender. The school offers the Junior Certificate, an optional Transition Year (TY) programme and the established Leaving Certificate.

1. QUALITY OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT

1.1 Characteristic spirit of the school

The mission statement of the school places emphasis on Catholic values, the personal and academic development of each student and contact for students with the wider Christian community. School management and members of the school community are committed to ensuring that the Catholic ethos is very real in the lives of the students. The role of the chaplain, whose services are provided by the patron, is pivotal both in the organisation of liturgical events which mark important moments in the school year and of retreats which are provided for students in all year groups. The school's curriculum also supports the ethos of the school in that all students are provided with Religious Education (RE). It is a core subject for all students in junior cycle and these students are prepared for Junior Certificate examinations in the subject. At senior cycle, RE is a core subject and is also available as one of the optional subjects to those students who may wish to sit Leaving Certificate examinations in the subject.

The school's policies reflect the characteristic spirit of the school by supporting the development of students in a variety of ways. Policies such as the homework policy, anti-bullying policy and healthy-eating policy support and reflect the school's concern for students' academic, emotional and physical development. The school facilitates the personal development of students through developing an awareness of the needs of those less fortunate. As a result, students have developed a commitment to fundraising for various charities and have initiated and organised a number of fundraising activities themselves. This is a praiseworthy approach.

The school's mission is expressed and reflected in the normal day-to-day activities of the school. It is also reflected in special events and activities which celebrate the characteristic spirit and ethos of the school. Members of staff described the atmosphere at the school as one which was open and welcoming. Students remarked very positively on the school's

friendly and relaxed atmosphere, commenting that activities and events provided ensure that life at the school is always busy and interesting. During the evaluation, the school's long history and tradition was also cited by board members and staff members as informing the school's characteristic spirit. This was echoed by students who are very proud of their school.

A well developed and well informed vision for the school was clearly articulated in the course of the evaluation and shared and supported by all members of the school community. This vision prioritises the development of the very best environment in which each student's spiritual, intellectual, physical, personal and social development is nurtured and where students are valued and cared for as individuals in a supportive community. The provision of excellent resources and support for learning and teaching are crucial to achieving this vision. This shared vision appropriately motivates and informs development at the school.

1.2 School ownership and management

The school's patron is very supportive of the school and its mission. In financial terms, the patron has given the school a site for a new school building and intends to contribute to the building of facilities, such as a stage and a green room on the new site. The principal meets the trustees at least three times each year to report on the operation of the school. This ensures that the trustees remain familiar with the challenges and successes of the school. In addition, the bishop attends some of the school's events such as musicals and retirement functions.

The board of management was first established in 1999. The current board is appropriately constituted and all members have been trained in the function and duties of boards of management. Members of the board are very aware of their obligations and agreed that a good level of collaboration characterises their deliberations. They are very experienced and have a range of skills available which is of benefit to the school. The board is very visible in the life of the school, members of the board attend events such as the school's musical and staff retirement functions. The good work of the board is acknowledged.

The board has developed a clear set of priorities which has been shared with the school community. While the main developmental priority of the board has been the application for a new school building, a focus on the development of core educational aspects of the school, for example teaching and learning, has been maintained. The board has prioritised the improvement of the school's information and communications technology (ICT) facilities and the use of ICT in teaching and learning. This is to be praised. The board has also been supporting the development of a homework policy. The school has achieved very significant progress in advancing their identified priorities. All involved are commended.

The school's enrolment and admission's policy is open and inclusive and these values were espoused by the board and the principal during meetings with the inspectors. The school has identified that the admissions policy needs to be reviewed especially in light of the fact that the numbers enrolling for the next academic year exceed the number of places available. School management provided evidence that this review is underway. It is recommended that all aspects of the enrolment and admissions policy and process be examined in this review.

The board of management reported a good relationship with the trustees and during the evaluation commented favourably on the trustees' ongoing positive support for the school. The board of management also reports an excellent working relationship with the principal.

It is good to note that the chairperson of the board is available informally on an ongoing basis to support the principal, when necessary.

1.3 In-school management

There is evidence of clear leadership and a positive vision for the school's future which places students at the core of all activities. All members of the school community interviewed as part of the evaluation expressed their confidence in the abilities and leadership strengths of the principal. His leadership approach is open and transparent and provides a guiding presence in the day-to-day management in the school. The principal communicates a clear agenda for improvement in the school while being mindful of the supports that are needed to affect this. The principal is supportive of his staff and collaboration, openness, transparency and encouragement are positive features of his leadership style.

The deputy principal's role involves leadership, planning and timetabling as articulated by the principal and the board of management during the evaluation. Evidence from the evaluation indicates that the principal and the deputy principal work very well together and share a common vision for the school. It was also reported that they have different strengths and skills which form an effective partnership.

The middle-management team consists of the four assistant principals and thirteen special duties teachers. In recent times, four assistant principal posts have not been filled due to the current moratorium on the filling of posts. In this context, school management and staff have been proactive in reviewing and amending a number of duties and procedures associated with the schedule of posts. The principal has led this initiative. This re-organisation of posts was carried out in an appropriately consultative manner and priority was given to key areas in order to make best use of the resources available and to ensure that students are provided for in the most effective way possible. The contribution of all involved in devising an effective solution is acknowledged.

It is very positive that the school's commitment to the care and well-being of students and their education has been maintained. An outcome of the recent reorganisation is that administrative staff have taken on some of the duties which were carried out by post holders in the past. The principal too has taken on additional tasks. The burden of the extra duties taken on by the principal may not be tenable in the long term. Therefore, the revised arrangements should be reviewed in the short and medium term. Consideration could also be given to further examination of the duties assigned to post holders in order to maximise the potential of post holders to assist in the running of the school. This would strengthen the role of the post holders in taking on delegated responsibilities and would afford opportunities to individuals to demonstrate their distributed leadership capabilities. The current arrangement of holding weekly year-head meetings represents the initial stages of an active middle-management structure in the school. It is recommended that this be developed further. The potential of sharing duties and responsibilities among staff members, including non-post holders, should also be explored for its value in developing a collaborative and cohesive school community.

Students are managed on a day-to-day basis by year heads and class tutors. Class tutors act in a mainly pastoral role whilst year heads attend to discipline issues. The board and the principal reported that student discipline in the school is good. The evaluation team found that in their interactions with students on the corridors and during lessons, students were very well-behaved. A whole-school focus on discipline in recent times has contributed to students' positive behaviour and students articulated the view in discussion with inspectors that the implementation of the code of behaviour was fair and ordered. However, the

school's code of behaviour should be reviewed as there is scope to highlight the many positive aspects of the discipline process in the school. The document *Developing a Code of Behaviour: Guidelines for Schools* available from the National Educational Welfare Board (NEWB) will be of benefit in this review. The expulsion, suspension and anti-bullying policies should be added to the code.

A meeting of all year heads which the principal and the guidance counsellor attend is held each week. This meeting is used to share information and work out strategies to help students. The year head maintains responsibility for his or her year group from first year to sixth year. This is good practice. Currently, the administrative staff is involved in first-year enrolment processes, whereby, together with the guidance counsellor, the administrative staff makes decisions regarding the assignment of students to class groups. This is not appropriate. As the year heads will be working with these students from the outset, it is recommended that year heads take on this role. All students have a student journal which is designed and produced by the school. It is very informative, attractive and updated each year. This high quality publication is a very valuable means of communication between teachers and parents and helps to support the good management of students.

Communication between senior management and staff is open and forthright and transparency in decision-making is prioritised by the principal. Indeed, the board stated that openness is encouraged by the principal at every level. Teachers have an opportunity to add to the agenda for staff meetings which are held each term and these items are addressed as priorities on the agenda at each meeting. In recent times, staff meetings have been kept short in order to leave more time for subject department planning. Senior management uses a number of measures including digital and traditional notice boards, intercom, and announcements in the staffroom at break time to ensure that messages are communicated clearly and in a timely fashion. This approach was seen to be very effective by the evaluation team. An induction programme for new teachers is carried out by the guidance counsellor who acts as their mentor. In addition, an induction pack for new teachers has been developed to help their integration into the school community.

Whole-school continuing professional development (CPD) has been provided in a range of areas including the child protection guidelines and in first aid and fire training. It is good to note that members of staff are expected to complete an evaluation following any CPD activity to ascertain its effectiveness. Individual teachers' CPD is supported by school management. It is commendable that in recent times a member of staff provided training in ICT for a significant number of teachers after the school day. Such sharing of expertise is very good practice. As the formation of class groups has been redirected from strict streaming to the present system of mixed ability, consideration should be given to whole-school in-service on inclusive practices and methodologies for mixed-ability teaching provided by the Special Education Support Service (SESS).

The school has an attendance strategy and effective procedures are in place to monitor student attendance. This is largely carried out by the deputy principal and the administrative staff. Student retention is not an issue for the school. The administration staff is very much aware of the work of the school, its mission and future vision. The maintenance staff makes a very positive contribution to the school and is proactive in making improvements within its remit when possible. It is good to note that they are included by management in consultations on the plan for the new school building.

The school has a student council which was established in 1995. It is supported by a liaison teacher and as appropriate students are elected by their peers. The council sees its main role as organising events for the student body. It is good to note that it also had a role in the review of some policies such as the suspension and expulsion policy and the anti-bullying policy. The student council is also very active and successful in raising funds for charity,

such as a soccer game for Haiti. Their community and environmental spirit should now be further enhanced by active involvement in the achievement of the Green Flag, which would also address the approach to litter at the school. As a further support, it is suggested that the student council refer to www.issu.ie.

A parents' association was established in the school in 2003. The members who met the inspectors during the evaluation were very well informed about the work of the school and were very loyal to and supportive of St Patrick's College. They are highly involved in fundraising and their efforts in this area have significantly enhanced facilities available at the school particularly in the area of ICT. This is a very good example of the school's approach to planning where members of the school community work together for a common goal. It is noted that the principal provided the parents' association with opportunities to see at first hand how its efforts have improved facilities in teaching and learning at the school. The parents' association has also been involved in policy review. It is notable that it has been involved in enhancing the curriculum in TY by, for example, organising work experience for students. This is very good work.

Evidence was provided to show that parents are regularly updated and informed on the general activities of the school. Parent-teacher meetings are held for students in each year group. A progress report which gives a very full outline of the students' ability, behaviour and application to work can be requested by a parent. This is effective practice. At the time of the evaluation, the most recent communication issued to parents was with regard to a survey on homework. This gathered information on parents' attitude to homework, the frequency of homework and the time spent on homework by the student. This good work provided a good grounding for the development of the policy on homework.

The school maintains good links with outside agencies to augment the facilities available at the school. Members of the school engage with outside agencies from time to time to add to the opportunities offered to students in different subject areas. For example, collaboration with the Cavan Arts Office and members of the wider school community resulted in students designing a piece of professionally made sculpture for the school grounds. Students and teachers in more recent times have been involved with BT Young Scientist Awards and The Cavan County Enterprise Board Ltd.

1.4 Management of resources

There are currently thirty-eight teachers on the staff and based on the evidence provided, deployment of teachers is in line with their qualifications and interest. The school's classrooms are assigned to individual teachers whenever possible. In some cases teachers have developed their rooms as stimulating learning environments for students. For example, one of the rooms has on display a very wide-ranging collection of documents and artefacts to stimulate students' interest and curiosity in History. In some of the specialist rooms visited students' work was on show. It is recommended that this very good approach the provision of good teaching and learning environments should be extended to all classrooms.

The school is situated on a large campus which is well maintained and attractive. In addition to indoor facilities the school provides a number of playing pitches for students. Some parts of the school's building dates to the 1940s and another part of the building is listed as a heritage site. School management has endeavoured to develop parts of the building and over time has provided facilities such as a new gym, an improved canteen and students' recreation rooms. In addition, the school is keen to provide further academic amenities for students. The school has recently set up a new library which is open to students at lunchtimes. It is supervised by a teacher and is proving very popular.

The school considers the use of technology to be a very important way to stimulate student engagement and progress. For this reason, the school has invested significantly in ICT to enhance teaching and learning. This investment includes laptops for teachers and digital projectors in classrooms as well as broadband for the majority of the school building. There are also a number of computers in various classrooms in the school such as the Design and Communication Graphics room, the library and the staff room. To ensure that teachers are fully supported in making the best use of the ICT facilities available, significant training has been made available to teachers in the school in their personal time. Teachers' attendance at this training is an indication of their commitment to support students. During the evaluation a demonstration using mobile phone technology with students to communicate relevant information was observed. This progressive approach to encouraging students' engagement is commended. It is suggested that in the future an audit of the use of ICT in teaching and learning be carried out to establish routes to further improvement.

The school has developed a health and safety statement. This was completed in October 2008 and is due for review. The document should be updated and include a risk assessment and hazard analysis carried out by the staff of the school in their own working environments. This will fully establish the issues particular to the school and to individual areas of work and responsibility. Regular review of this document should then be planned for.

2. QUALITY OF SCHOOL PLANNING

2.1 The school plan

School development planning is very well-established in the school. A record of school development planning, provided to the evaluation, traced the development of policies in recent years and provided evidence of good collaboration which involved members of the whole school community. It is particularly good to note that the student voice is used to inform planning and to review the operation of the school.

Responsibility for co-ordinating school development planning had been assigned to a special duties teacher (SDT) post, however, since the schedule of post duties was restructured in 2009 this post is no longer available. The planning process is currently co-ordinated by the principal. During the evaluation, the plan for 2009/10 was presented and it was noted by the evaluation team that many of the school's action plans, all of which involved significant work by senior management and teaching staff, had already been implemented. This is very effective practice. Notwithstanding the full commitment of the principal to the planning process, the loss of the post of co-ordinator has inevitably resulted in less than satisfactory record keeping of decisions made and actions taken. Accurate and up to date records are invaluable in directing future planning. Senior management employs the very good practice of self-review to establish the success of various initiatives and processes. In 2009/10, a survey was carried out to establish the effectiveness of homework and teaching staff were surveyed on the effectiveness of staff meetings. This is a very good and laudable approach.

A list of policies and plans was made available to the evaluation team. Some are in need of updating, for example, the critical incident policy, the anti-bullying policy and the safety statement. A process for the ratification for policies should be established including signing of the document, clearly stating the date of ratification and the policy's date of review. To ensure clarity for all readers, relevant dates and the status of the policy should be clearly included on all copies available to the school community. It is acknowledged that the school is very much aware of the need to establish such procedures.

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. A designated liaison person (DLP) and a deputy DLP have been appointed in line with the requirements of the guidelines. New members of the teaching staff are provided with information and guidance on Child Protection Guidelines during their induction to the school. It is recommended that all members of staff be reminded of the guidelines on Child Protection Guidelines once per year.

3. QUALITY OF CURRICULUM PROVISION

3.1 Curriculum planning and organisation

Three programmes are currently offered at the school. These are the Junior Certificate, an optional Transition Year (TY) programme and the established Leaving Certificate. It is good to note that the school is open to review of the curriculum.

The school is encouraging students to take higher-level Mathematics, English and Irish in junior cycle where appropriate. To promote this, a third higher-level class group in each subject was formed specifically for students who need extra help in these subjects. This is good work. The structure of the school timetable was completely revised in 2009 by senior management. This revised timetable provides for concurrent English, Mathematics and Irish in all year groups other than first year so that separate class groups in ordinary and higher level can be formed. This is very good practice.

The evaluation team found that there are a small number of students each year who do not succeed in one or more core subjects in the certificate examinations at junior cycle and senior cycle. This suggests that there is a cohort of students who would benefit from an alternative programme, such as the Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) Programme. It is recommended that the progress of students who are at the lower end of the ability spectrum be monitored and, if required, a feasibility study should be carried out to see if an alternative programme should be implemented. It was suggested by the principal during the evaluation that the identified needs of this group of students could in future be best accommodated by creating smaller class groups. This would be a welcome support to their learning. In the interim, the school's analysis of students' results in the certificate examinations and house examinations should be used to plan support for these students.

The school's transition year (TY) programme has been available in senior cycle for the past four years. Uptake of the programme is good, whereby there are now two class groups of TY students in the school. The TY programme is very well co-ordinated, planned and documented. A robust application process applies which is based on students' attitude and potential for benefit from the programme. The TY programme is very-well developed and takes advantage of the potential of the TY programme to explore a variety of learning strategies with students. Students described their approach to their subject learning in the TY programme as project-based which is in line with the philosophy of TY. Students also have the opportunity to sample the range of subjects available to them for their Leaving Certificate. In discussions, students spoke highly of their TY experience and said that it had been beneficial for them.

The school's mission statement specifically mentions the creative arts as being an important feature of students' education at the school. A range of learning experiences for students in

the fields of Art and Music is provided on the timetable and Drama is provided for students as an after-school activity. The school has a very fine heritage in terms of each of these disciplines.

3.2 Arrangements for students' choice of subjects and programmes

There is a broad range of subjects available in both junior cycle and senior cycle at the school. All students including those with special educational needs have full access to all subjects. The school makes very good efforts to accommodate students. For example, students may take up the study of a subject for the first time in senior cycle and class groups are formed for subjects even when the uptake for these subjects is low. School management is praised for supporting student access to subjects in this way.

At times of transition, very good arrangements are made by the school to ensure that parents and students are very well consulted. These include information evenings and written documentation on the implications of subject choice. In junior cycle, the school provides a taster period of three months for first-year students. This allows students to sample all optional subjects in order to help them to make informed subject choice decisions. While school management is currently reviewing this arrangement, it was evident that students believe that the sampling process is useful. In senior cycle, students are offered an open choice of subjects. Surveys are carried out by the deputy principal and guidance counsellor to support the design of option bands which facilitate the widest access to the subjects available.

3.3 Co-curricular and extra-curricular provision

The school provides a wide range of co-curricular and extracurricular activities for students. These include a variety of sporting activities, such as volleyball, handball, pool, soccer, Gaelic football, poker club, and table tennis. Students in the school have achieved considerable success in national sporting competitions, most recently handball. The school also provides ample opportunities for cultural pursuits such as drama and music. For example, the school produces a musical every second year and a number of concerts and musical events are organised each year at which the school's jazz band and traditional music group can play. Opportunities for students to engage in academic pursuits outside of the classroom are facilitated. These include visits to important historical and geographical sites as well as debating and a wide range of other activities.

The commitment of teachers who give of their skills after school to provide this wide range of activities is commended. In discussions students reported that they were very pleased with the extracurricular programme. Students believed that most students were engaged in some way with extracurricular and co-curricular activities and that this was a very positive feature of their experience at the school.

4. QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN SUBJECTS

4.1 Planning and preparation

School management has placed an emphasis on subject department planning in the school and this is welcomed, as it offers teachers the opportunity to collaborate and share best practice with their colleagues. The structures in place to facilitate and support this work are commendable. In relation to the subject areas evaluated during the WSE, all subject departments have a subject co-ordinator in place and this role is rotated among the subject

teachers in most cases. Formal subject planning meetings are held at least once per term with minutes of meetings retained and, in line with good practice, copied to school management.

During the evaluation, limited evidence of subject department planning was made available to the inspection team. It is recommended that all subject departments, if they have not already done so, should develop a curriculum plan for their subject. This should address organisational issues such as deployment of teachers, time allocations, grouping of students and access to subject level. It should also prioritise agreed learning outcomes for each year of the course and establish best practice in relation to methodologies which will lead to the achievement of these learning outcomes. Best practice would see all members of a department contributing to the development of detailed and integrated planning documents, as well as the generation and sharing of teaching resources through the planning process. Given the ICT facilities available to teachers, consideration should be given to creating and storing resources electronically, which can then be accessed by all teachers

It was reported that subject departments carry out an analysis of students' results in the certificate examinations. It is recommended that the board encourage the use of this analysis as a starting point for the development of an action plan by each subject department.

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

4.2 Learning and teaching

The quality of learning and teaching in the lessons observed varied from good to very good. Where teachers had high expectations of students' abilities and were aware of the students' learning preferences, students' progress was pronounced.

In all classrooms visited, teachers were caring and supportive of their students. Mutual respect characterised all of the interactions and this led to a positive learning environment where students were comfortable answering teachers' questions and putting forward questions. Students were well-behaved, motivated and engaged in the work being done. Discipline was maintained in an easy and relaxed manner.

The practice of sharing the expected learning outcome was used in every lesson in some of the subject departments visited and much less regularly in others. Where this strategy was used, it helped the students to focus on learning. In one example of good practice, students were asked to summarise learning at the end of lesson. This reinforcing activity was effective. It is recommended that all teachers make it their policy and practice to clearly identify and explicitly state the learning objective at the beginning of each lesson.

In the lessons observed, there were a number of very good examples of probing questions being asked, challenging students' understanding and guiding them through solutions. This commendable practice can help students to consolidate their learning, maintain engagement with the topic and foster a problem-solving approach. It is recommended, therefore, that all teachers increase their use of higher-order questions where possible to appropriately challenge students, actively involve them in the work of the class, check for understanding, and support them in developing the important skills of thinking and communication.

In all of the subject departments visited, teaching methodologies were given some consideration and teachers had prepared for their teaching. Where appropriate demonstrations, brainstorming, the use of visual imagery, concrete examples and

mnemonics were all used effectively to promote learning. This is good practice. In some subject departments a more traditional approach including direct instruction and guided learning was preferred. In these departments examples of problems were worked out on the board by the teacher or in student copies with each step explained in detail. Student handouts, worked examples and homework solutions, sometimes in digital format, teacher-generated and commercially-prepared worksheets as well as text books and past exam papers were also used for both demonstration and practice. Whilst teachers' efforts in these areas are acknowledged, to enhance learning the employment of a broader range of methodologies is suggested, such as co-operative learning activities and those methodologies which recognise students' different preferred learning styles.

4.3 Assessment

An appropriate range of methods is used to assess students' progress. Assessment of practical work, where applicable, is in line with good practice and carried out in accordance with marking criteria used in the certificate examinations. Teachers maintain records of students' achievements in work assignments. However, records reflecting the assessment of practical work are under-developed.

A review by inspectors of students' copybooks, handouts and worksheets revealed a variety of standards and practices. In some cases, student work was very good, reflecting high expectations on the part of teachers and a willingness to follow advice and guidance on the part of students. In others, students' standards of organisation, presentation and correction were lower than expected. Given that students' ability to manage their work varies, the establishment of a structure or routine within each subject area would be of benefit to all students. Accompanied by closer monitoring of copybooks and folders, this would increase the likelihood of students achieving their potential.

Progress is communicated to parents through school reports, journals, homework and test corrections, annual parent-teacher meetings and by phone calls, when considered necessary. There is scope for the school to provide parents of students with special educational needs and those receiving learning support with some formal written record of their child's progress. This could be achieved either by an addition to the existing college report form or through the use of an independent form designed solely for this purpose.

Homework is allocated, collected and corrected regularly in the majority of cases. Homework supports the work students do in school and is an important part of the learning process. These procedures are very supportive of student work and are commended. There were examples of the effective use of assessment for learning techniques and strategies, including the provision of feedback to students on written work. However, such strategies were not widespread and there is scope to further develop this important area. Further information is available on www.ncca.ie. The school homework policy is currently in draft form and before this document is finalised, the resource teachers should agree on an approach to homework and include it in the policy.

5. QUALITY OF SUPPORT FOR STUDENTS

5.1 Inclusion of students with additional educational needs

The school has a total allocation from the department of fourteen teaching hours to support the students identified with special educational needs (SEN). In addition, the school has a learning support allocation of 1.0 whole-time teacher equivalent (WTE) as well as a full-time learning support teacher. These additional support hours are used principally by the school to support students experiencing learning difficulties in Mathematics and English.

Provision for students with special education needs is discussed further in a subject inspection report appended to this report.

The special educational needs department is staffed by four resource teachers with post-graduate qualifications in relevant areas. These teachers provide most of the support teaching. Commendably, there is only minimal use of other non-qualified staff in providing support. All support provision in St. Patrick's College is through withdrawal and a number of issues arise from this practice. It is highly recommended that the school examines other options including the use of team teaching or the creation of smaller classes, possibly foundation level classes, timetabled at the same time as the subject classes. The school has a practice of encouraging students to take a reduced curriculum, if they are finding the full curriculum too difficult. Students are encouraged to avail of extra support at this time. The rationale for withdrawing students from subject areas in favour of support needs to be reviewed. If students are experiencing difficulties in Science or any other subject, these difficulties should be addressed through differentiated instruction or through the provision of in-class support such as team teaching.

The organisation of the provision for resource and learning support is outlined in the school's resource department policy. This document provides information on the modes of intervention and also details the school's identification, screening and referral procedures for students in need of support. When next reviewed, the details of the agreed role of the co-ordinator should be added and the role of the class teachers should be expanded to include the use of inclusive teaching practices such as differentiation and planning for individual needs. The school might also consider revising the document as a whole-school policy on inclusion. This would include the identification and support of exceptionally gifted or talented students. The *Inclusion of Students with Special Educational Needs: Post-Primary Guidelines* (DES, 2007) will be a useful reference in this process.

There are a number of newcomer students in the school. These students are assisted by a link teacher and every effort is made to fully integrate each student into all aspects of school life. English as an additional Language (EAL) support is provided by withdrawal from Irish and Religious Education when appropriate. No planning documentation for the delivery of EAL support was made available during the evaluation.

It is praiseworthy that feedback sheets are used by mainstream teachers to enable accurate tracking of students' progress by the language support teachers. It is also good that multi-lingual and pictorial communications are utilised when contacting parents. As a further support to teaching and learning the EAL teacher has developed word banks in relevant languages for specific subjects. This is good work. The school has an intercultural and inclusion policy which is approaching its review date. It is suggested that as part of the school's planning review process, the newcomer students be surveyed to establish the efficacy of the strategies put into place to aid their integration.

There are a very small number of traveller students enrolled at the school. It is reported that these students are well integrated into the school community. These students receive resource hours and financial support, as appropriate.

5.2 Guidance and student support in the whole-school context

The school has an allocation of 1.09 WTE for Guidance and Counselling. One full-time guidance counsellor is employed at the school. Student access to personal counselling is also supported by this allocation. This is good use of the resources provided. The school provides a counselling service to students. This is provided by the chaplain, who is very well integrated into school staff and attends the school three days per week, and an external counsellor with a specialist qualification who is employed for two hours per week.

Guidance provision in the school is concentrated in the senior cycle. The junior cycle programme includes management of the process of transferring from feeder primary schools to the school and the provision of information regarding subject choice to first year students and their parents. This is well managed. The guidance counsellor works with individual class groups by arrangement with their class teachers. The Guidance plan outlines the programme taught at those times. At senior-cycle, students receive timetabled guidance lessons and the guidance counsellor has had individual meetings with every student in senior cycle. Senior-cycle students were very confident and capable of discussing their chosen career path and the routes that they might take. This is positive.

The school's Guidance Plan was made available to the evaluation team. It is noteworthy that this document is consistent with the guidelines outlined by the National Centre for Guidance in Education (NCGE). However, the Guidance Plan is in the early stages of development and is best described as a summary of Guidance aims and activities in St Patrick's College. It is recommended that this document be progressed to better reflect in detail the processes by which Guidance is delivered in the school. The plan should also include more specific and measurable plans for review. The development of the Guidance Plan should be lead by the guidance counsellor and should have representation from the whole school community as well as the locality.

The school provides a range of care services to students. The provision of these services reflects the school's mission of care and commitment to the development of the whole student. The school has a well-established care team which includes the school chaplain, tutors for each class, and year heads. It is good to note that the care team has regular meetings to identify issues and problems for students and to establish methods of support. The minutes of these meetings are recorded and a copy of these is provided to the principal.

The school is a participant in the Cool School programme. In conversation with inspectors, students and parents reported that they were satisfied that bullying was dealt with appropriately in the school. However, the school's anti-bullying policy requires updating and review in line with the Departments guidelines. Further information can be found at www.education.ie under 'school policies and plans'. Other supports include the mentoring system for first years, Rainbows and access to the services of the school's psychologist. The care team also have access to support from the Cavan Child and Adolescent Psychiatry Services. In tandem with the school, a local agency has devised a programme to support students in an anti-drug campaign. Talks are provided in the school for students during the year and this agency also provides information for parents. This is good work.

The students spoken to during the evaluation were well informed about the supports available to them. They also reported that they felt supported by the school and could ask for help with a range of issues including bullying and academic help.

6. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT

The following are the main strengths identified in the evaluation:

- The college's mission informs all of its work and has led to a very well articulated vision and plan for the school which was shared by all members of the school community.
- Communication with staff is open, transparent and forthright and transparency in decision making is prioritised by the principal.

- School development planning is very well-established in the school and places the student at the core of all development.
- The school provides a broad range of subjects at junior cycle and senior cycle. The extracurricular and co-curricular activities provided are a very positive feature of students' experience at the school.
- The quality of planning for individual lessons was good with appropriate teaching resources prepared in advance and used effectively by teachers.
- The quality of learning and teaching in the lessons observed was good to very good.
- The school provides a safe and supportive environment for all its students and a distinctive sense of care pervades the activities of the school.
- Students remarked very positively on the school's friendly atmosphere and they are very proud of their school.

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

- The progress of a small number of students should be monitored in order to determine if an alternative programme, such as the LCA, should be implemented.
- The duties assigned to post holders should be reviewed and the potential for leadership amongst members of staff, post holders and non-post holders, should be explored. In addition the role of middle management in the school should be developed.
- A process for the ratification for policies should be established. Relevant dates should be included on all copies of policy available to the school community.
- The guidance plan should be progressed to better reflect in detail the processes by which Guidance is delivered in the school.

Post-evaluation meetings were held with the principal 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 Irish – 25 March 2010
- Subject Inspection of Mathematics – 23 March 2010
- Subject Inspection of Special Educational Needs – 26 March 2010
- Subject Inspection of Materials Technology (Wood) and Construction Studies – 24 March 2010

Appendix

8. SCHOOL RESPONSE TO THE REPORT

Submitted by the Board of Management

Area 1: Observations on the content of the inspection report

The Board of Management welcomes the wide ranging and very positive Whole School Evaluation Report from the Department of Education and Skills. It is very important to point out that when the Inspection took place, in March 2010, there was a very serious industrial impasse between the teachers' Union and the Department. Our teachers in St. Patrick's were precluded by their Union from showing the detailed subject policies and schemes of work etc, that were in place, as well as the details regarding all the subject meetings held for the previous years, to the Inspectors. Hence the reference to such documents not being seen by the Inspection team.

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

Fourteen months elapsed from the time of the Inspection until the College received the official report. The Board of Management regrets this delay, as it hampered a more prompt implementation of the very positive recommendations contained in the report. Notwithstanding this, the College, on the basis of the short verbal report given in March 2010, was able to implement a number of its recommendations almost immediately.

- The delivery of help in English and Maths to Special Needs students has been reorganised commencing September 2010. Very small class groups in these subjects at Ordinary Level are now provided for students experiencing difficulty, timetabled at the same time as the rest of the students pursue Higher Level in English and Maths.
- Junior Certificate students now take the optional Oral Irish component of the examination as recommended by the Irish inspector.
- Great progress has been made in teachers sharing ICT resources, as part of a staff initiative helped by participating in a pilot project under the auspices of the DES Continuing Professional Development Programme. This was undertaken in the school year, 2010 – 2011.