

**An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna**

**Department of Education and Skills**

**Whole School Evaluation  
REPORT**

**Presentation Secondary School  
Listowel  
County Kerry  
Roll number: 61380H**

**Date of inspection: 26 January 2010**



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

## **WHOLE SCHOOL EVALUATION REPORT**

A whole-school evaluation of Presentation Secondary School, Listowel was undertaken in January 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 of the school 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**

Presentation Secondary School is an all-girls' Catholic voluntary secondary school located in the Greenville area of Listowel. It operated under the trusteeship of the Presentation congregation until 2007 when the trusteeship passed to Catholic Education, an Irish Schools Trust (CEIST). The Presentation order has had a long history of providing education for the girls of North Kerry. The Presentation Sisters arrived in Kerry in 1793 but it was in 1843, inspired by the vision of Nano Nagle, that they founded their first school in Listowel. The convent and school formed two separate buildings on the present site. In 1952 a new secondary school was opened on the original site and additions were built on over two decades, financed by the sisters themselves. In 1985 a large new extension, grant-aided by the Department of Education, was officially opened. Over the years, prefabricated classrooms have been added as needed, and currently there are eight such classrooms on site, three dating from 1985 and the more recent ones added in the 1990s. The school has a relatively small catchment area and caters for students from up to six miles' distance from the school. Enrolment has been falling in recent years and is expected to fall further over the next six years according to projected enrolment figures. Proposals regarding the provision of a single co-educational post-primary school in Listowel were made following an Area Development Plan which was carried out in relation to school accommodation in North Kerry in November 2006. Discussions regarding this have been ongoing among the various partners.

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

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

Today the school remains true to the aspirations of Nano Nagle by welcoming and providing for the needs of all students. Its vision is clearly articulated in its mission statement and is shared by the whole-school community. The school's mission reflects a commitment to implementing the philosophy and ethos of Presentation education in "assisting in the development of the full potential of each girl in a pleasant and safe environment, where the dignity of each member of the school community is recognised, affirmed and valued". Emphasis is placed on prioritising the needs of the learner rather than academic achievement alone. During the evaluation it was evident that the school's mission is shared by the school partners and that day-to-day activities in the school reflect this vision. It was also evident that the formation and implementation of school policies reflect the school's mission.

The trustees are building links with the school to promote and foster the characteristic spirit of the school. A school support co-ordinator and a faith development co-ordinator provide support for the school in its work and the trustees have provided training on spiritual renewal for the whole

staff in the recent past. The trustees receive copies of the minutes of the school's board of management meetings, the annual report to the parents' council and financial reports. Trustee members endeavour to attend school events, such as the end-of-year Mass, and maintain contact with the principal.

## **1.2 School ownership and management**

The first board of management was established in the school in the 1980s and the current, appropriately constituted, board plays an active role in the life of the school. It meets regularly, maintains minutes of meetings and issues an agreed set of minutes to members of staff and the parents' council via their respective representatives on the board. Regular contact is maintained between the principal and the chairperson of the board. The principal acts as secretary to the board and keeps members updated on school matters. An annual report is provided by the board to the parents' council, giving details of school developments. It is suggested that this annual report could be put on to the school's website so that prospective parents, as well as current parents, could access this information. Some board members have served two or more terms, thus ensuring continuity, and both new and experienced members bring a range of skills and knowledge to the board's deliberations. A sub-committee is in place for finance and reports back to the full board. Board members are involved in staff appointments and promotion, and the board has been actively involved in the school development planning process through the development, ratification and review of school policies. All legally required policies are in place and it is evident that the board has taken steps to ensure that all policies reflect positive attitudes to equality, diversity and inclusion. It is positive that all members of the board have fulfilled appropriate training and demonstrate an awareness of their roles in relation to statutory obligations and responsibilities. All of this work is highly praised.

Priorities identified by the board include falling numbers and the possibility of amalgamation, staffing needs, reduction in funding following recent budget decisions and the structural maintenance of the school buildings. Concern was also expressed about safety issues in relation to a nearby road junction, where crossing the road presents a hazard for students at the school. The board members hope that a roundabout with pedestrian crossings will be provided in the near future. It is evident that both the board and senior management are very supportive of the professional development of members of staff and have encouraged and facilitated teachers to attend professional development courses and in-service training. The support of the board of management has been particularly notable in relation to upskilling staff members in the area of special needs, where teachers were recently released to carry out training in this area.

## **1.3 In-school management**

Senior management displays clear leadership qualities, using a range of skills to support, manage and motivate other members of the school team. Both principal and deputy principal demonstrate a strong commitment to the school, an appreciation of and care for members of staff, and an interest in and concern for individual students. They communicate effectively as a team, with regular scheduled daily meeting times to plan and discuss school issues. They share a clear vision for the school and implement the strategies to foster this vision. While each person's role is clearly outlined, a shared responsibility to prioritise learning outcomes and the overall care for students is evident. Senior management fosters a collaborative approach on achieving the aims of the school.

Middle-management roles are assigned in a clear and open manner to ensure the effective operation of the school. The contribution that post-holders make to the smooth operation of the

school is very clear. A major review of post-holders' duties was carried out about seven years ago, and changes are made as posts evolve to meet the needs of the school. Forthcoming retirements and the possible non-replacement of post-holders in the school will necessitate a review of posts at the end of this school year, involving the difficult task of placing the needs of the school and students in order of priority to decide which post-holders' roles are to be retained. Regular review of their roles is carried out by post-holders and any appropriate in-service opportunities relating to their tasks have been willingly undertaken. However, while it is evident that post holders play a vital role in supporting school management, many do not see themselves as part of the middle-management structure of the school. The school is therefore encouraged to facilitate the further development of leadership roles among members of staff as it is felt that their role as part of the middle-management structure of the school could be further enhanced.

Senior management actively promotes the development of a professional learning community within the school. A programme of whole-staff professional development, which is planned in consultation with members of staff, is in place and management facilitates and encourages individual members of staff to engage in continuing professional development. There are structures in place to ensure that the outcomes of such professional development are shared with the whole staff as appropriate. It is a tribute to the professionalism and dedication of members of staff that many such opportunities are currently being availed of, and have been willingly availed of in recent years. It is clear that members of staff form a committed and dedicated group of people who have a genuine care for their students. Lines of communication are very effective among staff members and between senior management and staff, particularly in relation to the care of students, and a good level of collaboration is evident among subject-team members and between subjects and programmes. Staff members feel they have an input into policy development and decision-making within the school. Formal staff meetings are held once per term and a time slot on a Tuesday afternoon has been made available every week to enable groups of teachers to meet. All of this is very positive.

The admissions policy reflects the characteristic spirit and mission of the school and is grounded in the principles of equality, diversity and inclusion of all students, including those students with special educational needs, those from disadvantaged and minority backgrounds and those for whom English is a second language (EAL students). All students are facilitated and encouraged to participate fully in the life of the school, having access to all subjects, programmes and all school activities. Particular emphasis has been placed on providing appropriate opportunities for all students, as is seen through the range of programmes available to students.

The school's code of behaviour is given to all new students and parents and is widely disseminated throughout the school community. A whole-school approach has been taken to a review which is currently being undertaken of the school's code in the light of the recent National Educational Welfare Board (NEWB) guidelines. Staff members have been reviewing the code with a view to clarifying and simplifying the existing system and to ensure fairness and consistency. Planned inputs from the board, parents, students' council and teachers are welcomed and encouraged as good practice. The school has recognised the importance of the focus on affirming good behaviour and setting high expectations for students. Efforts are being made within the school to highlight positive behaviour through acknowledging and rewarding the efforts of students who show improvement or who make a particular contribution to the life of the school. An awards afternoon places emphasis not only on academic and sporting achievements but highlights students who have shown community awareness or who have used their talents to contribute to the school community. Awards such as 'student of the year', 'school ambassador' and the 'friendship award' give recognition to those girls who have demonstrated concern for others and whose personal qualities reflect the aims of the school's ethos. It is suggested that

regular whole-school or year assemblies could afford a further opportunity to acknowledge and commend positive behaviour.

A system of year heads and class teachers is in place and this system supports the welfare of students. The recent decision to retain the same class teachers through from first to second year and from second to third year provides good continuity for students and is encouraged. The class teacher plays a more active role in junior cycle, particularly in first year. It is suggested that a review of the role of the class teacher in senior cycle could be undertaken, to investigate how the role could be further developed for senior students. Clearly identified procedures and structures are in place to manage, monitor and record students' behaviour so that students in need of interventions, such as behaviour-modification programmes, can be identified. Regular communication is maintained with parents, who are encouraged to make an appointment to meet the principal, deputy, class teacher or year head when they so wish. Each student has a student's journal which can also be used for communications between home and school, and this also includes useful information for students, such as a study planner, a list of support services and helplines, subject-related information, school calendar and other relevant school information. It is suggested that school policies, such as the reviewed code of behaviour, should also be included in the students' journal and that consideration could be given to including a type of merit slip which would further affirm students' efforts.

The school complies with the requirements of the NEWB by supplying relevant data regarding students' attendance. Effective strategies are in place to monitor and record students' attendance and punctuality. A morning and afternoon swipe-card system and a parent-texting facility ensure that students' absences are reported at an early stage and appropriate action taken.

A students' council has been in existence in the school since 1998. Willing representatives from each class group are elected by their peers and the group meets at least once every two weeks at lunchtime. A teacher acts as support to the group and attends meetings. To date, some of the projects which the students' council has taken on have included the purchase of a water fountain for students, raising funds for the schools' book scheme and a food collection for the St Vincent de Paul organisation at Christmas. Members of the students' council are commended for their involvement in this very worthwhile work.

It is reported that the preparation of a constitution for the students' council is a work in progress and this is greatly encouraged in order to clarify the aims and role of the council in the school. In this regard, it may be useful to note that the *Second Level Student Councils' Resource Pack* (National Children's Office, January 2006) provides very good guidelines for the role and work of a students' council. In order to further develop the role of the council, it is recommended that the council adopt formalised procedures for their meetings, that formal minutes be kept of each meeting, and that the council establish clear and regular methods of communicating information to and from all students. It would be of benefit to have a dedicated notice board or some other formal means of communicating information to the general student body. A slot on the school website may also be useful. It is planned to include input from the students' council into the ongoing review of the code of behaviour and this is greatly encouraged. The involvement of the students' council in the formation of policies and school issues in general can be very positive and it is felt that this should be expanded and developed.

Effective systems of communication are in place to inform parents about their daughter's progress and to provide information and guidance to parents in relation to subject and programme choices. Regular communications in the form of individual letters, newsletters and information nights ensure clear communication with parents, and individual interviews with teachers can be arranged

on request. It was of particular note that, where students have specific learning needs, a high level of collaboration between school and parents is maintained to ensure appropriate interventions and support. Following in-house examinations in February and at the end of the summer term, reports on students' progress, achievement, attendance and punctuality are issued to parents. Annual parent-teacher meetings are held for each year group. After-school study is provided for students in the school and reports are issued to parents of students availing of this provision, regarding their attendance, punctuality and behaviour. During the evaluation process, parent representatives expressed their satisfaction with the level of communication regarding students' progress and guidance in relation to subject, programme and career choices.

A long-established parents' council is in place and meets approximately six or seven times a year. Minutes of meetings are recorded and the principal usually attends all meetings. The council was affiliated to the Congress of Catholic Schools' Parent Associations (CSPA) until recently and plans to renew this affiliation to the general parent body are encouraged, to ensure up-to-date information on developments in education matters. Membership of the council has fallen off in recent years due to the difficulty in recruiting active members for the council. Steps have been taken to try to remedy this. It is suggested that a link to the parents' council on the school's website would serve to publicise the work of the council and provide a vehicle for disseminating information to the general of body of parents.

Members of the parents' council have been involved in policy formation and are currently taking part in the review of the code of behaviour. In the past, they have been actively involved in discussions relating to the proposed school amalgamation, a healthy-eating project, fundraising and sporting events. In acknowledgement of the Presentation Sisters' contribution to Listowel over the years, the parents' council plans to erect a plaque which will be displayed in the town. Communication with the general parent body is carried out via letters, and the council expressed grateful appreciation of the work of the secretarial staff in the school for their help throughout the years. The council is encouraged in its efforts to involve a greater number of parents in its work.

The school maintains effective links with relevant outside agencies such as the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS), NEWB, National Council for Special Education (NCSE), Health Service Executive (HSE), Kerry Youth Development Service (KYDS), Kerry Mental Health, Kerry Adolescent Counselling Centre and Enable Ireland. Links with third-level colleges have also been established to assist in the guidance of students from school to further education. The students fundraise for local charities, such as the St Vincent de Paul organisation, and maintain close links with the Nano Nagle Special School which forms part of the nearby Presentation primary school. Through the Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA), Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP) and Transition Year (TY) work-experience programmes, further links have been forged with local businesses which have provided placements for students from the school.

Procedures for self-evaluation and review are well established in the school. Systematic review is carried out through the school-development-planning process, through feedback from teachers, students and parents and through the review of learning outcomes for students. Strengths and areas for development are identified and inform further planning. This is a very positive finding for which the school is to be commended.

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

The deployment of teachers is consistent with teachers' qualifications, expertise and experience and in the context of meeting the learning needs of students. Management is aware of current and

future staffing needs and proactively seeks additional resources where necessary. Both senior management and the board of management expressed concern that the wide range of subjects and programmes offered by the school may be adversely affected by current budgetary implications and forthcoming retirements. The teaching staff consists of thirty-three teachers including the principal, twenty-seven of whom have permanent whole-time contracts and six of whom have contracts of indefinite duration (CID). A member of the Presentation congregation acts in the capacity of voluntary chaplain to the school, promoting the integration of a spiritual dimension into pastoral policy and practice by contributing to the work of the religious education department and providing prayer services and reflection time for students. Four special-needs assistants are also employed by the school and contribute greatly to the support and welfare of students with special educational needs. Induction procedures are in place for members of staff who are new to the school and a staff handbook has been prepared to provide useful information for both new and long-serving members of staff.

Ancillary members of staff in the school include a full-time and two part-time secretaries, a full-time caretaker and cleaning staff, all of whom play a role in supporting the teaching staff and students and maintaining the school accommodation to a high standard. Their contribution to the life of the school is acknowledged and highly commended.

The school buildings have been maintained to a high standard. In particular, the prefabricated classrooms, many of which have been in place for over twenty years, have been very well maintained. The school building was insulated last summer and repairs were carried out to the prefabricated classrooms. The main school building is bright and airy and it is commendable that corridors and classrooms are kept clean and litter-free. Plans to introduce a *Green Schools Initiative* are greatly encouraged and it is suggested that this could prove to be a useful project for the students' council. Throughout the school, students' achievements are affirmed by the display of photos, posters and newspaper articles giving details of past school musicals and the students' many achievements and activities. The school environment is greatly enhanced by exhibiting students' photographic and art work throughout the building. This good practice not only enhances the educational environment but visibly adds to the students' ownership and pride in the school. A monitor in the large social area in the school is used to display items of news and updates for both students and teachers. It is indicative of the spirit of the school that personal birthday wishes for students and a welcome to visitors are also displayed on this monitor from time to time.

The school has twenty-three classrooms which serve as base classrooms for the different class groups. Some of these classrooms are joined by partition doors and it was noted during the evaluation that teachers are conscious of noise travelling between classrooms. As this may be having an impact on classroom practice and teaching methodologies, it is recommended that, when resources allow, the school should look at the possibility of replacing these partitions with more solid structures. Specialist rooms in the school include two science laboratories, a suite of rooms for Guidance, three learning-support rooms, a bright and airy art room with kiln, two very well-equipped home economics rooms, a dress design room, a music room, a religion room, a prayer room, a fully equipped computer room, an LCA room complete with computers, a hair-care room which serves as a second LCA base classroom, a social-studies classroom, an Irish room, a business classroom, a language laboratory and administrative offices for senior management and secretarial staff. An annex to the main building contains a fully refurbished design and communication graphics (DCG) room together with a typing classroom. The school also has a large library with separate annexes serving as a careers library and LCA and LCVP offices, an assembly/dining area and a physical education/concert hall complete with stage. As the hall is about two-thirds the size of a full-sized PE hall, indoor basketball matches have to be

played in another venue. The school does, however, have two full-sized outdoor basketball courts. It is suggested that the school investigate the possibility of introducing specialist classrooms for subject areas such as SPHE and English, as this would facilitate different seating arrangements where necessary, and the creation of a print-rich learning environment where posters, visual stimuli and students' work could be displayed and teaching resources such as audiovisual equipment would be readily available.

The school has prioritised the development of information and communication technology (ICT) in the school and further development is ongoing. An up-to-date ICT system has been developed which includes a computerised swipe system to record students' attendance. Members of staff have been provided with appropriate training at various stages over the past few years and students are timetabled for computer lessons, encouraged to take annual computer examinations and, where appropriate, are facilitated to use the school's computers outside of class time. It is very positive that evening classes have been provided for parents by members of staff and an information session on safety on the internet was recently held for parents. The school has an intranet system with individual password-protected user names for all staff and students and is planning a web-based file for staff to upload files accessible by students at home. This is greatly encouraged as it will facilitate the sharing of teaching tools such as lesson plans, teaching resources, expected learning outcomes and marking schemes with students, thereby encouraging students' independent learning.

During the evaluation there was evidence of ICT being used to good effect during several lessons. Teachers have access to two computers in the staffroom and, while some school laptops are available for teachers' use, many members of staff use their own laptops in school. Teachers have access to data projectors in several classrooms and most classrooms are connected to the internet, facilitating the use of ICT for teaching and learning. A well-equipped computer room houses a suite of computers and a data projector, and subject areas can access this equipment during lessons. The sixth-year LCA room contains a suite of computers for students' use and the newly refurbished technical graphics laboratory, which has its own server, contains seventeen computers and a data projector. The home economics, religious education and science departments have access to computers and data projectors in their specialist rooms. The guidance, learning-support, LCA and LCVP rooms are all equipped with computers with internet access. The school is commended for the work already completed in relation to ICT and is encouraged, over time and when resources become available, to aim to integrate ICT into all subject areas.

Subject departments complete an annual budget form for teaching resources and this system seems to be working well. A book scheme is in place which most students avail of, and the amount due to cover this cost is included on a school expenses form which is issued to all students. Also included on this form are the expected contributions from parents to cover overheads such as photocopying, the students' journal, postage, swipe card, contribution towards the maintenance and upgrade of computers, art materials, locker, a voluntary contribution towards the library, insurance and other subject-related expenses. While it is not clearly stated that this contribution is a voluntary one, it is reported that in cases where parents may have difficulty paying these expenses, the school comes to an arrangement whereby they can be waived or reduced according to the family circumstances. As the school may only specify a voluntary contribution from parents, it is recommended that payment for the book scheme be kept separate from the other contributions and that it be clearly specified on the form that the remaining contributions are voluntary.

A comprehensive and appropriate health and safety statement has been prepared by the school and communicated to all members of the school community. It is currently being reviewed. A

safety officer and a safety representative have been appointed and regular safety inspections are carried out. The roles of all members of the school community in relation to safety issues are clearly set out in the statement. Teachers of practical subjects were involved in the drafting of this statement. Recent whole-staff in-service training was provided on fire safety. All of this is good practice.

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

A well-established and collaborative whole-school development planning (SDP) process, which reflects the mission statement of the school, is in place. It is evident that, over the years, this process has had a positive impact on many aspects of life in the school and has resulted in a greater sense of partnership within the school. School development planning is both supported and encouraged by senior management and the board of management, and a shared ownership of the process is in evidence among members of staff. The board, members of staff, the parents' council and students' council are enabled, as appropriate, to contribute to the development and review of policies, such as the current review of the code of behaviour. Clear developmental priorities for the school, such as the ongoing development of ICT and continued focus on provision for students with special educational needs, have been identified by the board and management. Action plans contain specific targets and timeframes for their achievement and evaluation and review form part of the process. As an SDP co-ordinator has not been appointed, the principal effectively takes on this role and manages the process. Convenors for subject areas have been assigned and regular meetings of planning teams are facilitated. Classes are timetabled to end earlier on a Tuesday afternoon so that members of staff can have the opportunity to have scheduled meetings. A schedule for team planning meetings to be held during this meeting time is drawn up at the beginning of the year and other informal meetings are facilitated as required. Support services such as the School Development Planning Initiative (SDPI) have been availed of to provide in-service for the whole staff. All of this is good practice.

The comprehensive policy statements which form part of the permanent section of the school plan are in line with statutory requirements and show evidence of an impressive amount of work and thought. The date of ratification by the board of management and, in many cases, a review date are specified in individual policies and this is encouraged as good practice. Policies which are in place include those relating to admissions and participation, internet access, substance use, safety, special educational needs, assessment, homework, dignity in the workplace, extracurricular activities and the code of behaviour. As well as the review of the code of behaviour which is currently being undertaken, work on the preparation of policy statements in the areas of literacy and numeracy and EAL is being carried out. Work has also been carried out on policy documents relating to attendance, the management and storage of data, and critical incidents.

Very good work has been carried out by the relevant departments on draft policy documents relating to a whole-school guidance plan, Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) and Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE), and it is planned that these will shortly be brought to the whole staff and other partners for consultation and ratification. A draft pastoral care policy, which was prepared in 2006 but not as yet ratified by the board, contains comprehensive guidelines for the support of students. It is evident from the documentation already in existence in relation to the care of students that good procedures are in place to support the pastoral care of students. However, it is felt that there may be a need to clarify the different elements of student support in an overall whole-school plan. It is recommended that the work which has been undertaken in relation to the preparation of a whole-school guidance plan be further developed to incorporate all elements of student support, including SPHE, RSE, Religious Education and

special educational needs. The involvement of all members of staff, with input from both parents and students, would be a vital element of this work. In the past, a core team was in place for pastoral care, with representation from the guidance, SPHE, religion and special educational needs departments, and it is suggested that it would be advantageous to reinstate such a team to move forward work on the whole-school plan in order to bring together all the strands which support the pastoral care of students.

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 members (including all new staff); and that management has ensured that all staff are familiar with the procedures to be followed. All members of staff and parents are annually reminded of the school's approach and policy regarding child protection. A designated liaison person (DLP) and a deputy DLP have been appointed in line with the requirements of the guidelines.

Much work has been carried out in the preparation of subject department plans and it was clear that, in general, there is a high level of collaboration among subject teams. Besides meeting informally, subject departments meet formally at least once per term and report back to senior management on progress. Minutes of departmental meetings are maintained and evaluation and review inform action planning. SDPI tools, such as the diagnostic window and curriculum-content planning templates, are being utilised to plan, record and evaluate progress. The role of subject convenor is rotated in most subject areas and this is encouraged. A review of subject and programme planning documentation during the evaluation showed some excellent examples of long-term planning and it was evident that individual subject plans are at different stages of development. Good practice was noted where plans include syllabus-based curriculum content, details of effective teaching methodologies and comprehensive schemes of work which focus on skills-based, time-linked learning goals. A planning template, used in some subject areas, where specific topics are linked to appropriate teaching methodologies, resources, learning goals and assessment, was noted as very useful and further expansion of this format is encouraged. The inclusion in subject plans of strategies to support students with special educational needs was also noted as good practice. In some subject areas there is a need to further develop the curriculum content for each year group, based on the relevant syllabus, and to link topics with effective teaching methodologies.

There is evidence that, in general, the subject planning process has had a positive impact on classroom practice. Teachers share resources and prepare common in-house examinations for students where appropriate. Recent whole-staff in-service has been provided on assessment for learning and teachers undertook to implement some of the strategies in their lessons. Members of the mathematics department have, commendably, been involved in the Project Maths pilot programme and their planning has highlighted discussion on different approaches to classroom practice. The special educational needs team has provided advice to members of staff on differentiated teaching strategies and suggested approaches for students with additional needs. This focus on teaching and learning is very positive. In some of the subject inspections which form part of this whole-school evaluation, suggestions have been given for the further development of teaching strategies to increase students' active participation in lessons and to encourage independent learning. It is therefore recommended that the subject planning process focus on specific teaching methodologies, with these aims in mind. The whole-staff approach which was taken recently in relation to assessment for learning, followed by subject-department areas working together to share ideas and methodologies, could be further developed to include

cross-curricular discussion of strategies to encourage active student participation. Some examples of very good teaching were observed during the evaluation and it is felt that it would be of great benefit for the whole staff to share ideas and practice across curricular areas. The Second Level Support Service (SLSS), who have been availed of in the past, can provide further practical whole-staff and subject-department support in this area.

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

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

Presentation Secondary School offers a broad and balanced curriculum, both at junior cycle and at senior cycle, with a very good range of subjects, including a choice of practical subjects and two modern European languages. A full range of programmes is available to students, including an optional TY programme, the LCA programme and LCVP. It is evident that, in planning for the curriculum, management endeavours to provide the widest possible range of subjects and programmes to cater for the needs, interests and abilities of its student cohort. Management is to be commended for, and strongly encouraged in, its efforts to maintain such a wide range of subjects. Curriculum provision ensures equality of access for all students. Commendably, students are taught in mixed-ability groupings, with some setting in the core subjects in third year and in senior cycle. It is very positive that all students are encouraged to take higher-level courses for the certificate examinations and follow this level for as long as possible. Teachers have appropriately high expectations of students, leading to good learning outcomes. Both management and subject-department teachers compare certificate examination outcomes with national norms and this informs future planning, which is good practice.

Subject teachers are timetabled to take their class groups through from second year to third year and from fifth year to sixth year, thus providing continuity for students. Meeting the needs of students within the resources available to the school is the primary concern in framing the timetable. The principal consults subject departments every year in relation to timetabling, and the expertise, skills and interests of members of staff are taken into account when preparing the timetable for the following year. The school complies fully with Department of Education and Science regulations in relation to the organisation of the school calendar and the number of instruction hours per week.

While in general the timetable allocates time for each subject in line with syllabus guidelines, there are some issues which need to be addressed in relation to timetabling. Students in first year study all junior cycle subjects and choose four out of eight optional Junior Certificate subjects at the end of first year. While the advantages to be gained from having a year-long 'taster' period for first-year students to sample subjects before making their choices for the Junior Certificate programme are acknowledged, timetabling for some subject areas falls short of the recommended allocation. Students are timetabled for SPHE and Reflection on alternate weeks with the result that they are only allocated half the recommended class-contact time for SPHE. In order to comply with the Department of Education and Science Circular M11/03 and to ensure completion of syllabus content for the year, it is recommended that all students be timetabled for one period of SPHE per week. Some other subjects, for example, PE, History and Geography, have less than the recommended allocation of class-contact time. It is therefore also recommended that a review of the length of the 'taster' period be carried out, with input from all members of staff.

The provision for PE across all year groups is significantly less than that recommended in the Department of Education and Science *Rules and Programme for Secondary Schools 2004/05*.

While recognising current difficulties regarding the availability of sufficient qualified members of staff, it is recommended that, in the long term, the school should work towards providing additional, timetabled lessons in Physical Education for all students.

Recommendations contained in a recent LCA programme inspection regarding an increase of time allocation for the arts education modules and the elective modules in LCA have resulted in an increase in the allocation for Arts Education in Year One of the programme. In line with the recommendations, the school plans to increase the class contact-time time for the two elective modules, Religion and Science, in the forthcoming year and this is strongly encouraged.

The TY, LCVP and LCA programmes are delivered in line with programme requirements and best practice and are well supported by the whole staff and management. Each programme has been assigned a co-ordinator and all three co-ordinators work in collaboration with each other and with the school's overall programme co-ordinator to ensure optimal provision for students. Regular meetings of the team ensure that aspects of the programmes, such as work experience, out-of-school visits and invited guest speakers, are carefully co-ordinated. It is planned that the guidance counsellor will also form part of these team meetings and this is encouraged. The programme co-ordinator has input into the planning and implementation of all three programmes and works closely with the other co-ordinators. Common links between the different programmes are identified so that groups of students can attend activities together. To ensure that students choose the option that would best suit their interests and needs, information sessions for both parents and students are provided and entry into each of the programmes is through a carefully managed selection process where students make a formal application and are interviewed. Well laid-out information leaflets on each of the programmes have been prepared and all programmes feature in the school prospectus and in a senior cycle information booklet issued by the school. Work experience is an integral part of each programme and is, in each case, well managed, with appropriate preparatory work and follow-up procedures. Links are fostered and maintained with outside agencies, support groups and employers. Cross-curricular links are well established and other members of staff liaise with the team as required. Evaluation and review, including input from students, via questionnaires, and feedback from members of staff, are an inherent part of the programmes and inform future planning. All of this is very positive. All programme co-ordinators have timetabled provision for the co-ordination of the programmes and this is good practice. It is suggested that, when practicable, the one period allocated to the TY co-ordinator should be increased.

The LCVP programme is well established in the school, having been introduced over ten years ago. Timetabling provision for the programme is very good, with consecutive periods allocated in fifth year to facilitate visiting speakers and out-of-school visits, and timetabled guidance input. Students have access to computers during class-contact time, which is good practice, and teachers have availed of this to introduce team teaching in both year groups. This is a positive development. Specific criteria for selecting students who apply to take the programme are in line with LCVP objectives, and uptake for the programme has been growing in the past few years. Students generally study seven Leaving Certificate subjects in addition to the LCVP modules, and all students are studying a modern European language. An effective student induction programme is included in the programme and appropriate supports are in place for students with additional needs. The written plan and recording procedures for the programme are very comprehensive and in accordance with best practice. Relevant information relating to the programme is disseminated to other staff members. It is suggested that an LCVP-specific notice board would further highlight LCVP activities and events. Contact is maintained with the LCVP Support Service and all teachers involved in the programme have availed of relevant in-service. All of this is very positive.

The LCA programme is also well established within the school, having been introduced in the late 1990s, and it is evident that the needs, interests and abilities of students are prioritised in its design and implementation. An LCA programme inspection was carried out in the school in 2008 and the resulting report can be accessed on the Department of Education and Science website. The very positive findings of the LCA report reflect the findings of this whole-school evaluation in relation to the programme. There is very strong whole-school support for the programme and co-ordination of the programme is very effective. The programme has a high profile within the school, and photographs of LCA students' achievements and successes are to be seen on display around the school and in the school yearbook. Information from in-service courses is passed on to the whole team. A mentoring programme by LCA teachers has recently been introduced into sixth year to support students in their work and this is a positive development. Students' work experience is currently carried out on one day per week and members of the LCA team of teachers volunteer to visit the students in their workplaces. Students have good access to ICT as one of the dedicated LCA rooms is equipped with computers. As recommended in the previously mentioned LCA report, the addition of a data projector in this room would be of benefit. Thought has been given to the future progression of students as the vocational specialisms, Hair and Beauty, and Hotel, Catering and Tourism, provide for the development of a range of skills that are relevant to the local community. The second LCA room which has been equipped with a hair and beauty salon provides the opportunity for students to give practical demonstrations, for example, on open nights. Commendably, the guidance counsellor tracks the progression of students when they leave to take up employment or to continue with their studies.

The optional TY programme in the school provides a varied and interesting educational experience for students. At present, approximately one-third of the total cohort of third-year students chooses to avail of this option. Surveys carried out among students and parents inform programme review at the end of each year, so that modules change to provide a rich and varied experience for students and to suit their interests and needs. Co-ordination of the programme is good. Planning documentation includes comprehensive details of all that is involved in organising the programme, and is in line with the aims of the programme. A wide range of modules and activities has been organised for students, including cultural, aesthetic, community, social and sporting activities. Students take part in the Kerry Young Entrepreneur project, for which the school won the overall school award last year. Activities have included hill walking, fundraising activities, school tours and participation in an outdoor-pursuits course and Gaisce, the President's award. This year, some students are participating in online correspondence courses facilitated by the Irish Centre for Talented Youth (ICTY) in Dublin City University. Students undertake three weeks of work experience, two weeks during first term and one week during the summer term. The co-ordinator's plans to introduce monitoring visits to students on work experience are strongly encouraged, and it is suggested that some of the co-ordinator's workload could be shared by other teachers who may be interested in visiting students during their work placements. Each student completes the European Computer Driving Licence (ECDL) by the end of the year. A mentoring course is organised for those students who want to take part in a mentoring programme for incoming first-year students. TY students produce a very impressive yearbook each year, with sponsorship from local businesses. It takes the form of a colourful and interesting magazine which contains many samples of students' art work, poetry and creative writing, interviews with present and past students and teachers, and details of school events and achievements. This work is highly commended. At the end of the year a graduation ceremony for TY students is held, where all students give short oral presentations on some aspect of the year. A range of assessment procedures is in place to monitor TY students' progress, including formal in-house examinations in the academic subjects, class tests and assessment of portfolio and project work. Members of staff are kept informed about TY activities via a TY-specific notice board in the staffroom. The

co-ordinator communicates informally with individual teachers and meetings of the whole team are held when required.

The timetable for TY is organised so that one day per week is kept aside for an activities day when the different TY modules and activities take place. This facilitates out-of-school activities. In order to help students choose their subject options for the Leaving Certificate programme in the third term of Transition Year, students have eight timetabled 'taster' periods per week where they sit in on fifth-year lessons for a six-week period. Recent subject inspections have made recommendations that this system be reviewed for several reasons. The content of fifth-year lessons is geared towards the Leaving Certificate examination and therefore not suited to the aims and spirit of the TY programme. It is recommended that the school aim to replace this system with structured TY-based 'taster' modules which would reflect the TY programme's emphasis on developing independent learning skills through activity-based learning.

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

Very good arrangements are in place for supporting students in their choice of subjects and programmes. Parents are given appropriate, timely and comprehensive information on the options available and are included in the choice process. Guidance is provided to students and parents on the implications of these choices which is good practice. Students are given an open choice at both junior cycle and at senior cycle. First-year students study all subjects prior to making their subject choices on entering second year. All students in the current second-year group study Irish; English; Mathematics; History; Geography; Civic, Social and Political Education; SPHE; PE; Religious Education (RE) and Computer Studies. The range of optional subjects includes French; German; Music; Art, Craft and Design; Home Economics; Science; Business Studies and Technical Graphics. Students are strongly encouraged to choose a European language and Science, and are made aware of future career implications which may arise by not taking these options. While at present French is timetabled against German, it is reported that where there is a demand, students who wish to study the two languages can be accommodated. This is encouraged. Choices of level are not made until well into third year and this is very good practice, ensuring that students have the opportunity to aim for the highest level for as long as possible.

Senior cycle options are made at the end of third year or, for those students opting for TY, at the end of the second term of the programme. Each third-year student is interviewed regarding their senior cycle choices and information evenings are held for parents so that they are fully informed regarding the options. Senior cycle students take the core subjects of Irish, English and Mathematics and choose their optional subjects from a choice of: French; German; Accounting; Business; Economics; Music; Art; History; Geography; RE; Physics; Chemistry; Biology; Applied Maths; Home Economics; and Design and Communication Graphics. They are also timetabled for guidance and one period of PE.

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

Members of staff and management are commended for providing a wide range of co-curricular and extracurricular activities and opportunities to support and enhance learning. An extracurricular policy has been drawn up and ratified by the board of management, and each subject area has included opportunities for co-curricular and extracurricular activities in department planning documentation. Among the many co-curricular activities provided are school tours, retreats, participation in science quizzes, visits to a recording studio, art and photography exhibitions, museums, the theatre, local enterprises, third-level exhibitions and lectures. Students have successfully participated in many competitions and quizzes relating to different subject

areas, such as public speaking and debating, the Kerry Young Entrepreneur Business project, Science Olympiads, the President's Gaisce award, photography competitions, art competitions, essay competitions, and maths quizzes. Geography and Biology fieldtrips form part of the curriculum in those subjects. TY students present short plays from time to time and students take part in musical events such as carol services, variety concerts, traditional music sessions with set dancing for Seachtain na Gaeilge, percussion and dance workshops, and talent shows. A novel event which has proved to be a great success is the 'Pet Day' which is held every five years or so, where students bring their pets into school.

The school is well known for its many successes in basketball over the years and it is evident that many students enjoy and take a great pride in the sport. Students also have the opportunity to participate in football, badminton, athletics, soccer, horse-riding and swimming. Efforts to build up the range of sports provision within the school are encouraged. Training takes place at lunchtime and at weekends and great praise is due to the teachers who give of their time to support these activities. In tune with the school's characteristic spirit, participation in community work is encouraged and facilitated where possible. Special fundraising activities, including musical events, fancy-dress days and bag-packing, are often organised to support both local and international organisations. The school has a strong social outreach programme, and students and teachers are to be commended for their generous contribution of time and energy to raise funds for many worthy causes. The school maintains very good communication with the neighbouring Nano Nagle Special Primary School and supports it in many ways, including through fundraising activities. In the recent past, the school's close links with the Presentation congregation have resulted in the school linking up with a school in Pakistan, bringing to students an increased awareness of the needs of others.

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

##### **4.1 Planning and preparation**

A very good standard of subject-department planning is in evidence and structures are in place to support planning. There is a subject co-ordinator for all departments and the position is generally rotated among the teachers. This is good practice. Ongoing subject-department planning is facilitated by management through the provision of a formal meeting each term while teachers also meet informally on a regular basis. It is commendable that minutes are kept of formal meetings and feedback is provided to senior management on progress achieved.

The commitment of teachers to the planning process has led to the development of comprehensive plans for the subjects. These plans are reviewed collaboratively by the teachers at the start of each school year. This represents good practice. Work is also ongoing on the preparation of a policy for EAL.

In addition to a curricular plan and common schemes of work, subject plans include strategies for the support of students with additional needs, an analysis of results in certificate examinations and information on effective teaching methodologies. A contract for students engaged in fieldwork outside the school has also been prepared. The identification of priorities for development outlined in the action plan for each subject is also particularly noteworthy as this provides a blueprint for further planning. It is evident that the experience and reflection of the teaching teams has informed the work on curricular planning. In one subject area, the non-linear approach to the plan for each year group is praised, and in language subject areas the adoption of a thematic

approach to incorporate all four language skills is highlighted as good practice. The teachers' efforts and work to date in the subject planning process are commended.

Some recommendations and ideas for the further development of these plans are contained in the individual subject inspection reports. The recommendations include a focus on teaching and learning methodologies in future planning with a particular emphasis on the development of assessment-for-learning strategies and active-learning methodologies; the sharing of good practice across subject areas; and the incorporation of skills-based, syllabus-based and time-linked learning goals. A common recommendation in the area of languages is that there should be an agreed approach to the use of the target language during lessons and that reference to this should be included in the subject plan. Furthermore, the teaching of literature and the importance of the oral aspect of language whether as part of a lesson or for assessment purposes are also highlighted.

There is evidence of very good individual planning for lessons by teachers. During the evaluation, this planning took account of the students' abilities and interests and impacted positively on teaching and learning in the classroom. Resources to support learning such as handouts, maps and visual material had been prepared and were used effectively in the lessons.

#### **4.2 Learning and teaching**

The overall quality of teaching and learning in the lessons observed ranged from good to very good, with some excellent examples of good practice. In general, lessons were well structured and in most instances there was good pacing of activities. Frequent encouragement and affirmation of students' contributions created a positive, warm, classroom atmosphere. Good rapport between teachers and students, and a high level of student engagement were in evidence.

A variety of methodologies were used to introduce lesson content and to stimulate students' participation in lesson activities. While questioning was used to good effect throughout many lessons, in some subject areas teachers are encouraged to vary their questioning techniques. In some lessons the learning intention was shared at the outset with the students. This served to focus students on lesson content as well as enabling teachers and students, towards the end of the lesson, to assess the extent of the learning which had taken place. It is recommended that this practice be extended to all subject areas. Other methodologies that were commonly used included teacher-led class discussions, role-play and interactive tasks such as pair work and group work. Some very good examples of imaginative teaching methodologies were noted and it is suggested that similar strategies could be explored across all subjects.

Teachers made good use of a wide range of resources. Of particular note was the use of ICT and other visual stimuli such as photographs and costumes. The use of authentic documents stimulated students' interest and ensured their genuine engagement. Audio extracts had a positive impact in a number of lessons and modern language teachers are reminded of their benefit when seeking to enhance pronunciation. A number of reports also call for an expansion of the print-rich environment of the classrooms through the display of students' work as well as items such as key words, key quotes, frequently used expressions and grammatical points.

Students were engaged in a range of activities throughout the lessons and it was clear that they enjoyed the opportunities for interaction created by pair work and group work. They contributed ideas and exchanged views in a purposeful and respectful manner. Activities were often linked thematically, thus enabling students to practise a variety of subject-specific skills. Teachers are encouraged to maintain a focus on skills development. Teachers had high expectations of students

and students generally displayed a solid understanding of lesson content as well as good overall subject knowledge. Some reports point to the need for an increased level of student engagement during lessons, and in these instances, teachers are encouraged to investigate strategies which facilitate more individual student activity and place a greater responsibility upon students for directing their own learning.

### **4.3 Assessment**

A comprehensive range of modes of assessment is used across subject departments and details of these are specified in the school's assessment policy. This range includes in-class questioning, class tests, continuous assessment and formal examinations. Formal house examinations are organised twice yearly. House examinations are held for all year groups in February, while all year groups, apart from third year and sixth year participate in end-of-year examinations. TY students have formal examinations in February and summer in Irish, English and Mathematics. In all other subjects, TY students are assessed on the basis of class tests and project work which they complete during the year. In a number of subjects, the setting of common examinations for different class groups was noted as good practice.

Homework is assigned regularly and in appropriate amounts, in line with the school's homework policy. Inspectors commented positively on the extent to which homework was monitored and especially highlighted the good practice of providing comment-based feedback to students regarding their work, where this occurred. In one subject the effective use of self-assessment on the part of students was praised, while peer assessment, which serves to enhance students' self-esteem and sense of self-efficacy, was commended in another subject area. With this in mind, it is recommended that subject departments investigate further opportunities to expand their use of assessment-for-learning strategies in general as a means of fostering independent learning.

In the language subjects, the inclusion of an aural component as part of all students' annual assessment is seen as good practice, and the commitment of teachers to supporting students in preparing for the oral element of their Leaving Certificate examination is praiseworthy. In some languages, formal house examinations incorporate an oral element for students in senior cycle. This is positive and it is recommended that, in these subjects, this practice be extended so that formal examinations incorporate an oral component for all year groups. It is suggested that, if individual oral testing proves impracticable, this could take the form of giving students a global mark for their oral contribution throughout the year. The possibility of including an oral assessment element as part of the TY programme has also been suggested in one of the appended inspection reports.

Reports regarding students' progress are communicated to parents on a twice-yearly basis. One parent-teacher meeting is organised per year group each year. Where parents are unable to attend these meetings, class teachers may communicate information regarding a student's progress where this is requested. The students' journal also provides a means of communication between the school and students' homes. Inspectors frequently commented on the maintenance of detailed records of students' achievement on the part of teachers. This is good practice.

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

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

The school's policies on the admission, enrolment and participation of students with additional needs are consistent with statutory requirements and reflect the mission statement and ethos of the school. Overall provision of support for students with special educational needs in the school is very good and they are encouraged and facilitated to participate fully in the life of the school. Links with local primary schools, parents and appropriate agencies regarding students with special needs are timely and effective. Among members of staff there was evidence of an awareness of, and a commitment to provide for, the learning needs of students with additional needs. A special-needs co-ordinator was appointed in September 2006 and a special educational needs policy has been in place since 2007. As previously mentioned, work is currently ongoing on a whole-school literacy and numeracy policy and an EAL policy. All of this is very positive.

Management's commitment to providing for students with additional educational needs is evident in the efforts which have been made to facilitate whole-staff professional development on special educational needs over the years. Good communication between the learning-support team and mainstream teachers ensures that all teachers have the necessary information regarding students' needs, and the co-ordinator, who very effectively plans and co-ordinates the appropriate supports for students, provides practical advice for subject teachers. Relevant expert advice and information on appropriate teaching methodologies is disseminated to the whole staff. Regular contact is maintained with relevant external agencies. The school applies for the resources to support the full inclusion of these students in the school and these resources are allocated in line with best practice. The school applies for appropriate reasonable accommodations in certificate examinations (RACE) for those students who need them and provision is made for these in house examinations. This is good practice.

Professional expertise among the learning-support team is high. A small core team of teachers is in place to support students' learning needs and two staff members have specific training in this area. The special-needs team, consisting of the principal, the co-ordinator and one of the learning-support teachers, meets frequently, with input from the deputy principal and the guidance counsellor when required. Communication among teachers who are engaged in learning support and in resource teaching is good as teachers meet both formally and informally. Parents are kept very well informed as the co-ordinator meets the parents of each individual student on a monthly basis. Parents are welcome to visit the school at any time, by appointment, to discuss their daughter's progress.

Students with additional needs include those with low-incidence and high-incidence disabilities, those in receipt of learning support, students with hearing difficulties, students for whom English is an additional language, students from the Traveller community and exceptionally gifted students. Support strategies include one-to-one provision, small-group curriculum support, small-group intensive literacy and numeracy support, short-term behavioural intervention schemes and in-class support. First-year classes are timetabled simultaneously for the core subjects of English and Mathematics so that small groups can be formed when necessary to support students' learning. As part of the literacy and numeracy policy, teachers are encouraged to use a range of strategies to differentiate teaching. It is suggested that, in the long term, the benefits of team teaching could be explored. Four special-needs assistants are employed in the school and their contribution to the care of students is acknowledged and commended.

The school has three dedicated rooms for learning support, with appropriate access to ICT and secure storage facilities. An annual budget is provided and a good bank of resources has been built up and is shared among the team. While some posters were on display in the learning-support rooms, it is suggested that this could be further developed to include more visual stimuli such as keyword charts and colourful posters, together with some examples of students' work.

Testing of all students is carried out prior to enrolment and subsequent testing and continuous assessment of students who require support is carried out. A register of all students with special needs is maintained and their progress is recorded. It is very positive that the special-needs policy includes a statement regarding the educational and sensitive use of data. Individual education plans (IEP) are in place for those students who need them, with input from all the relevant partners. It is suggested that the use of ICT to prepare and develop IEPs could be of benefit to facilitate communication among the team. An electronic register could be updated on a regular basis by the individual members of the team, to give an overall picture of how students are progressing.

Two teachers are involved in the provision of English language classes for EAL students. Appropriate resources have been accessed and subject-related support is provided for students. All subject teachers have been given a language-rating scale and useful resources, such as word banks, for teaching newcomer students. It was positive to note that the school yearbook has included interviews with some of the school's newcomer students, helping to celebrate cultural diversity within the school. It was also encouraging to see the use of Polish on some signage in the school and in the Christmas newsletter to parents and it is suggested that similar ways of highlighting the different cultures within the school could be further developed. At present the special-needs co-ordinator takes on the role of EAL co-ordinator. It is suggested that, when resources and personnel allow, consideration should be given to the appointment of a separate EAL co-ordinator. It is also suggested that the planned EAL policy statement should include a statement regarding the school's policy on the acknowledgement and support of students' home languages and culture.

The care given to disadvantaged students is very much in tune with the ethos of the school. Both the principal and deputy principal play a major role in identifying and discreetly supporting these students. Students in need of lunch, uniform, books or supervised study are dealt with sensitively and the school maintains strong links with the St. Vincent de Paul Association. The guidance counsellor ensures that students are made aware of the Disability Access Route to Education (DARE) and Higher Education Access Route (HEAR) programmes and are encouraged to apply. The school's policy on special educational needs includes a commitment to provide for gifted students and plans to research and further develop this support are encouraged. Management fully supports the needs of students who are members of the Traveller community through liaison with the Visiting Teacher for Travellers and home visits when necessary. The students are very well integrated into the life of the school. It is suggested that the school should, over the long term, consider giving a member of staff responsibility for supporting students from the Traveller community with the aim of fostering and encouraging attendance and participation levels.

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

Resources for guidance within the school are very good and include a guidance suite consisting of an office equipped with ICT broadband access and phone and waiting area, an up-to-date careers library section in the main library and a careers notice board. Students have access to online career-guidance information either in the library or in the school's computer room. The school has an allocation of 16 hours 45 minutes for Guidance and this is appropriately used. Guidance provision in the school incorporates vocational, social and personal and educational elements. The guidance counsellor maintains very good communication with other support staff in the school, including senior management, the programme co-ordinators, class tutors and the special educational needs team. Strong links have been established between the school and community, business, third-level institutions and training bodies. Timetabling is organised to allow the

guidance counsellor avail of counselling supervision which is an important aspect of professional development and support.

Provision for Guidance is excellent. The guidance department programme is very comprehensive and includes appropriate input into all junior and senior cycle year groups. It is of particular note that cross-curricular links with subject areas and programmes are very clearly laid out in the plan and this is encouraged as good practice. Guidance lessons are timetabled with all senior cycle classes, including TY, and access to junior cycle classes is arranged as the need arises. Personal student counselling is carried out according to best practice and includes very good record-keeping and secure filing systems. External referrals are made as appropriate and very good links exist between the school and relevant outside support agencies. An effective system of evaluation and review, including surveys of students, parents and members of staff, informs planning. Very good collaboration with the senior cycle programme co-ordinators ensures that guidance provision forms an integral part of each programme. Information sessions are held for both parents and students at all the transition stages, regarding subject, programme or career choices. Students are individually interviewed in third year and in senior cycle so that they are fully informed of all career implications of subject and programme choices. Guest speakers are invited into the school on a regular basis and students are facilitated to attend third-level open days. Commendably, the guidance counsellor formally tracks the progression of all students and makes this information available to staff members.

A comprehensive induction programme is in place for students making the transition from primary school. This process includes visits to the primary schools, an open day, information sessions for parents, pre-entry assessment of students and an induction programme early in first year. Incoming students spend a day in the school in April or May as part of this induction process and the guidance counsellor meets the first-year students during their first week in the school to explain her role. TY students carry out mentoring of first-year classes during the first term to help them settle into the school. It is clear that much thought has been given to supporting students in their transition into first year. Attention to detail, such as the Christmas card sent to each incoming sixth-class pupil and the booklets provided with photographs of all members of staff and of all first-year students, helps to make this transition easier for students and reflects the school's mission.

Together with the comprehensive guidance department programme which has been developed, as previously mentioned in Section 2, good work has been carried out on a draft whole-school guidance plan. To date, this work has involved mainly the guidance counsellor. It is now planned to bring this to the consultation stage, with input from all of the partners, including all members of staff, before ratification by the board. This is strongly encouraged. It is suggested that, in the first instance, a task group consisting of representatives of core student-support teams should advance this process. The good work which has already been carried out on other school policies relating to student support, such as the SPHE, pastoral care, critical incidents, RSE and anti-bullying policies will feed into and support the work on whole-school guidance. As the draft whole-school guidance plan states: "Guidance [is] a whole school responsibility involving all members of staff, permeating all subjects and school activities."

The care of students is a central element of life in the school and it is clear that teachers feel that the care of students is the responsibility of all members of staff. The pastoral-care structure includes class teachers and year heads, who are assigned to each class and year group respectively, to monitor the progress and welfare of students. Senior management also plays a major role in the ongoing care of students. Year heads meet their group of class teachers regularly, and communications with the deputy principal, guidance counsellor and special

educational needs team in relation to students' welfare are very effective. Contact with parents is good and the school tries to ensure that any problems or issues which arise are dealt with immediately. It is very positive that year heads are provided with professional development in relation to their role. The SPHE team links in closely with the care system as class teachers usually take their class group for SPHE lessons and the co-ordinator of SPHE has taken on the role of co-ordinating pastoral care. Work is planned to bring the draft pastoral care policy to ratification stage, in consultation with all partners. As previously mentioned, this work could be undertaken by a core care team consisting of the main student-support elements in the school and in conjunction with the work being carried out on the school guidance plan. It is suggested that the role of class teachers in relation to students in senior cycle could be clarified as part of this work. The focus on affirming positive behaviour in the review of the code of behaviour could be strengthened by regular assemblies, which are advocated in the draft pastoral care policy.

Relevant information regarding students' welfare is appropriately shared with members of staff, and procedures are in place to support those students who are undergoing personal, social or educational difficulties. The guidance counsellor and special educational needs team provide one-to-one support and counselling when needed and close links with external, local and national, agencies provide further support for students. Good provision is made through the curriculum for personal and social education, and visiting speakers and agencies contribute to this.

All students have access to SPHE and RSE and well developed cross-curricular links ensure good communication among the different subject areas. All members of the SPHE team have accessed training and the department plan is well developed, with clear aims for the subject in each year group together with a range of methodologies and resources for each topic. The team works in collaboration with senior management and other members of staff when devising curriculum content so that programmes can be adjusted to suit students' needs. Regular evaluation and review of the programme is carried out and this is frequently informed by feedback from students and parents. All of this is good practice. The introduction of SPHE into school reports to parents is a positive step and plans to produce an SPHE guide for parents are encouraged.

Reflecting the characteristic spirit of the school, the provision of spiritual support for students in the school is very good. The voluntary chaplain, together with the religious education department, promotes the integration of a spiritual dimension through a faith formation programme, including reflection time, relaxation and meditation exercises. Liturgical events are celebrated throughout the school year, and school Masses are held both at the beginning of the year for each year group and at the end of the year. While the school is Catholic in ethos, it is fully inclusive and welcoming of students from other faiths.

The school has prepared a critical incidents policy and a crisis response team is in place. Plans to re-introduce the Rainbows programme for students are encouraged to give further support to students. The good work carried out by TY students in providing mentoring for first-year students is commended and it is suggested that this could informally be extended beyond first term to include some contact during break times during the rest of the year. It is clear that individual teachers feel they receive ongoing support from management and other members of staff, and that relationships among members of staff reflect the positive, caring atmosphere within the school.

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

The following are the main strengths identified in the evaluation:

- The school's ethos is reflected in the dedication of staff and management, the care for students, the formation and implementation of school policies and in the day-to-day life of the school.
- The board of management shows a strong commitment to the school and plays an active role in the life of the school.
- Senior management displays clear leadership qualities and a strong commitment to the school, and actively encourages and facilitates the continuing professional development of members of staff.
- It is clear that members of staff are a committed and dedicated group of people, who have a genuine care for their students.
- Effective systems are in place to ensure good ongoing communication with parents, with the community and with relevant outside agencies.
- Procedures for self evaluation and review are well established in the school.
- A collaborative school development planning process, based on self-evaluation, review, prioritisation and action planning, is in place.
- The school offers a broad and balanced curriculum, aimed at serving the needs, interests and abilities of all students. Very good arrangements are in place for supporting students and parents regarding subject and programme choice.
- Teachers and management are commended for providing a wide range of co-curricular and extracurricular activities and opportunities to support and enhance learning.
- A very good standard of long-term subject planning and very good individual lesson planning were noted in the appended subject inspection reports.
- The overall quality of teaching and learning in the lessons observed ranged from good to very good, with some excellent examples of good practice.
- Students generally displayed a solid understanding of lesson content as well as good overall subject knowledge.
- Provision of support for students with additional needs in the school is very effective.
- Provision for Guidance is excellent.
- The care of students is a central element of life in the school and student-support structures are in place to provide for this care.

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

- It is felt that the role of the students' council could be expanded and developed.
- For the reasons given in this report, it is recommended that, when resources allow, the school look at the possibility of replacing partition doors between classrooms with more solid structures.
- The voluntary nature of parental contributions to the school should be made clear in school documentation.
- It is recommended that subject planning focus on the sharing of good classroom practice across subject areas, with a view to increasing students' active participation in lessons and encouraging independent learning.

- It is recommended that a core task group be formed to co-ordinate and formalise the policies and strands relating to student support into an overall whole-school student-support plan, with input from all of the partners.
- It is recommended that all students be timetabled for one period of SPHE per week. In conjunction with this, it is suggested that the length of the ‘taster’ period in first year be reviewed.
- The school should, over time, work towards providing additional timetabled PE for all students.
- It is recommended that the school aim to replace the TY fifth-year ‘taster’ lessons with structured TY-based ‘taster’ modules which would reflect the TY programme’s emphasis on developing independent learning skills through activity-based learning.

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

## **7. RELATED SUBJECT INSPECTION REPORTS**

The following related Subject Inspection reports are available:

- Subject Inspection of Geography – 10 December 2009
- Subject Inspection of English – 21 January 2010
- Subject Inspection of Gaeilge – 25 January 2010
- Subject Inspection of French – 26 January 2010

# **Appendix**

**SCHOOL RESPONSE TO THE REPORT**

**Submitted by the Board of Management**

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

We welcome the positive report and its findings.

We are particularly pleased that the Inspectorate recognised the central role of our Presentation ethos in the life of the school.

We have noted the recommendations and suggestions. These will be implemented as soon as is practicable, reasonable and financially possible.

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

The following recommendations have been implemented

A Care Team has been established and meets regularly.

The school has fully utilised grants made available by the Department of Education & Skills for ICT and our provision in this area is now of a very high standard.

Some of the recommendations made regarding subjects examined during the inspection have been implemented and others are currently under review as we prepare in detail provision for next year's timetable.