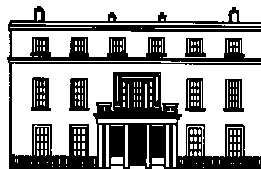


An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Whole-School Evaluation
REPORT

Mount Seskin Community College
Tallaght, Dublin 24
Roll number: 70141N

Date of inspection: 24 September 2010



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

WHOLE-SCHOOL EVALUATION

A whole-school evaluation of Mount Seskin Community College was undertaken in September 2010. This report presents the findings of the evaluation and makes recommendations for improvement. During the evaluation, the quality of teaching and learning in three subjects and in the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP) were evaluated in detail, and separate reports are available on these subjects/programmes. The board of management of the school was given an opportunity to comment on the findings and recommendations of the report; the board chose to accept the report without response.

INTRODUCTION

Mount Seskin Community College, formerly Jobstown Community College, was established by County Dublin Vocational Education Committee (CoDubVEC) in 1986. The college numbers expanded quickly in its initial years of existence as Jobstown was a rapidly growing area characterised by local authority development. Its main feeder school is the nearby St. Thomas's Senior National School. During the recent past there has been much development in the lands around the college and its hinterland now includes some private housing, a business park and other facilities. Enrolment figures have been dropping over a number of years but this trend has been reversed in the current school year. The decision to rename the college was taken to reflect more accurately its position between the established community of Jobstown and the newer Citywest community.

Mount Seskin Community College is included in the DEIS (Delivering Equality in Education) initiative. A significant number of students come from a disadvantaged background. The college is under the trusteeship of CoDubVEC which offers a comprehensive range of supports to the school community.

1. QUALITY OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT

1.1 Characteristic spirit of the school

The spirit of the school is articulated in the school mission statement that was revised in the last school year. *“Our mission is to provide an inclusive learning environment which promotes academic excellence, built on the personal, social and spiritual development of all. We endeavour to develop life-long learners in an atmosphere of equality, justice and respect”*. The mission statement is very much lived out in the life of the school. The school was described by members of the parents' association as having a calm, inclusive caring atmosphere. This atmosphere was evident during the evaluation. All students are welcomed, and the genuine care for individual students on the part of staff was evident to the evaluation team. The relationships within the school, between staff, management and students, and among staff members, are characterised by mutual respect. The mission statement was revised through a democratic process that involved staff, students and the board of management and thus is owned and articulated by stakeholders. Members of the school community interviewed welcomed the addition of a focus on academic excellence to the mission statement. The statement is available in the staff handbook and student journal.

The revision of the school mission statement was conducted in tandem with a consultative process in regard to the renaming of the school. During the evaluation, various members of the school community welcomed the renaming of the school and regarded this move as an opportunity to grow and develop as a learning community serving a wider catchment area, while building on the strengths that the school already had. It is encouraging that enrolment this year has increased. This is a welcome sign of revitalisation.

1.2 School ownership and management

The board of management is newly constituted and representative of a range of partners including CoDubVEC, the arch-diocese of Dublin, staff and parents. The board meets regularly during the school year to ensure the effective provision of education in the school. Decision making is open and transparent and the commitment of members of the board to the school community was evident to the evaluation team. Some members of the board have received training in relation to their responsibilities. It is recommended that board members take up the offer of training as it becomes available. At the time of the evaluation the school was seeking a second parent representative for the board.

Good communication structures between the board and CoDubVEC were in evidence. Members of the board acknowledge the support of the CoDubVEC in relation to financial, personnel and information and communication technology (ICT) issues. They also acknowledge that a range of very important training opportunities has been made available to the school by CoDubVEC, for example the training provided to some of the assistant principals in the school. Very good support from the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of the CoDubVEC was evident.

The board acknowledged the leadership role and vision of the principal. The principal keeps the board informed of the day to day running of the school and brings appropriate policies to the board as required by legislation. A number of sub-committees in the school are responsible for drafting policies. Draft policies are then presented through the principal to the board for approval. It is recommended that when policies are being presented to the board a member of the relevant policy sub-committee is involved in presenting the detail of the policy to the board.

The board of management is led by a proactive, supportive, chairperson who has met with staff on occasion and attends many school events. It is commendable that the board reviews inspection reports and ensures that the recommendations made are acted upon. The board has also been proactive in seeking improvements to the infrastructure of the school. The board embraces the concept of continuous school review. Minutes of board meetings show good engagement with and contributions to recent changes in the school. It is recommended that each year a synopsis of students' attainment in examinations and information on attendance and suspensions be presented to the board.

Good communication practices are in evidence. The principal draws up the agenda of board meetings and minutes of these meetings are circulated to the CoDubVEC. It is commendable that the student council is invited to present a report to the board on its activities once a year. To cultivate a spirit of partnership in the school community, it is recommended that agreed reports on board meetings are drawn up for staff and parents.

1.3 In-school management

The principal has been appointed to the post within the last two years. The deputy principal has been a number of years in the post. There is good energy in the new management team, giving purpose and direction to the school. Both share a clear vision for the school including improving student attainment, and they are effective in communicating that vision to other staff members. Very good partnership and collaboration exists between the principal and deputy principal and both are very supportive of one another. The principal is interested and proactive in every area of the school. The open-door policy of the principal was commented on by a number of staff members interviewed during the evaluation. The deputy principal supports the principal in managing the school as well as in organising supervision and substitution, and making the arrangements for extracurricular activities in the school. He

brings a wealth of local and school experience to his role. This high functioning management team enjoys a high level of goodwill from all sectors of the school community, including parents. They have been effective in skilfully managing a number of changes in the school within the last school year. As this management team has worked together for over a year it is recommended that members review their responsibilities and discuss and formalise their own duties.

Clear management structures exist in the school. The assistant principal (AP) post holders meet once a week with the senior management team and take a clear role in establishing policies and procedures. Their commitment to the school and to the students in their care was evident to the evaluation team. It was reported that the weekly meeting allows consultancy at all levels and facilitates a consistency of approach across the school. Minutes of meetings show active collaboration on a range of school-related issues. It is recommended that the time allocation for these meetings be met from within the four hours coordination time allocated to AP post holders rather than from their contractual teaching hours.

There are also a number of special duties teachers (SDT) post holders who carry out a range of tasks, many of which involve co-ordination duties of an administrative or a pastoral nature. Good leadership was shown by the principal in carrying out a restructuring of all posts in the last school year. The aim of this was to link the posts firmly with the priority needs of the school. Good progress was made at this restructuring and post holders proved flexible and willing to change their functions to meet the needs of the school. It is commendable that school development planning was prioritised as a post of responsibility in the restructuring of posts as the coordination of planning in the school is an important and necessary task. It was evident that an imbalance exists in the area of special duties posts, such that some SDT posts carry more responsibility than others and the duties associated with some posts are no longer relevant. A further review of SDT posts is needed to ensure that the responsibility attached to those posts is relevant to the needs of the school and equitably distributed among the existing post holders. This is recommended

There was evidence too of collaborative distributed leadership across the school. Non-post-holders are encouraged to take an active role in the life of the school through a range of activities including voluntary membership of committees, the class tutor system and extracurricular activities. This is good practice as it affords teachers opportunities for professional development and promotes a greater sense of belonging within the school community.

The support provided for new and existing staff members includes a staff handbook that details the school's mission and ethos, and information about school procedures, curricular programmes and personnel. Staff members are facilitated in their attendance at in-service and the board of management provides a bursary, where resources allow, to staff members undertaking further study in relevant areas. The school, in collaboration with CoDubVEC, has also developed a mentoring programme to support new teachers. Centralised training is offered and a designated mentor who has attended training in this area meets with new teachers periodically to discuss any pertinent issues. The school also has in place a system of subject mentors where teachers new to the subject department are supported in their first year in the school. These measures are highly commended.

Management has prioritised both the admissions policy and the code of behaviour for review in the next school year. The admissions policy reflects the inclusive and caring atmosphere of the school and sets out its operating context and admissions procedures. When the review of the policy is taking place, it is recommended that the application of enrolment criteria, in particular in the case of oversubscription, be clarified. In particular, an anomaly in the enrolment criteria in relation to students with special educational needs should be removed to reflect the good policy on the ground. The policy's statement regarding the circumstances

surrounding refusal to accept the transfer of a student should be adjusted to ensure that the criteria informing such decisions are clear and transparent.

A well organised student support system is in place. The important role played by year heads in managing this system was acknowledged by all staff as was the positive role played by the National Behaviour Support Service's (NBSS) classroom, also known as the "Skills Room". Student and parent satisfaction with the discipline structures in the school was noted. All acknowledged the caring and supportive role of school systems. Inspectors noted good student movement, an air of calm and good supervision during the in-school week. A staff consultative committee has been charged with looking at the code of behaviour in line with the National Education Welfare Board (NEWB) guidelines and staff members have been involved through the organisation of a staff development day on this issue. The clear ladders of referral in the revised draft policy as well as the systems to acknowledge positive student behaviour are commended.

The active involvement of parents in the education of their children and in the running of the school is sought and encouraged. The parents' association has recently been revived, following an intense effort by senior management and the parents' representative on the board of management. It is still in its early stages and exploring its role. Both the board and in-school management actively support this initiative.

An effective student council is in place. It meets once a week and is involved in a number of fundraising and other events. It is commendable that the student council has a constitution and that it has had training for its role. Good communication structures are in place. The provision of a student notice-board and a suggestions box is commended. Senior management and a student council liaison teacher liaise with the council in decision-making processes related to students' lives in school. It was noted that council members are elected in first year and thereafter represent their respective year groups for all their years in school. It is recommended that procedures are put in place to facilitate a greater degree of democratic participation. These procedures should give a wider range of students the opportunity to get involved in the student council during their time in school.

A number of effective strategies are in place to monitor attendance. An attendance officer, funded by the School Completion Programme (SCP), and supported with a dedicated phone line is employed to maximise student attendance in an organised and systematic manner. It was reported that breakfast and lunch clubs as well as extracurricular activities have proved effective in promoting good attendance. A number of initiatives are in place to reward good attendance including incentives such as postcards home. The proposed introduction of e-portal in the near future may prove to be another effective measure. With regard to areas for development it is important to ensure that accurate baseline data is collected, targets set and attendance figures monitored to help with DEIS action planning. The introduction of an afternoon register is recommended as a means to monitor afternoon attendance.

With regard to school self-evaluation and review, there has been a renewed emphasis on internal evaluation over the past year following the appointment of the current principal. However, there is good evidence to suggest that that self-evaluation was already well established in the school. It is commendable that the views of all partners in the school community are sought and valued as part of this process.

1.4 Management of resources

The school has an official allocation of 31.83 whole-time teacher equivalents (WTE) and is currently operating within this allocation. In utilising this allocation, senior management has ensured that the minimum of twenty-eight hours weekly tuition time has been achieved for all students in line with Department of Education circular letter M29/95. A review of the

school's timetable, however, indicated that not all permanent whole-time teachers are timetabled for their minimum contractual class contact time of eighteen hours. Currently, the shortfall in their hours is made up by including timetabled meeting times in the timetables. This is not satisfactory. Meeting the needs of students within the resources available to the school should be the primary concern in framing the timetable. Teaching hours are the biggest and most important resource the school has allocated to it by the Department of Education and Skills and everything should be done to ensure the use of these hours as intended. It is recommended that staff resources are used to their full capacity to support the core work of the school, that is, teaching and learning. Furthermore, it is recommended that management ensures that all teachers fulfil their contractual obligations in relation to class contact time. This may mean the rationalising and rebalancing of meeting times that take place within the school day. This matter should be addressed by the board of management with whom the ultimate responsibility rests.

Ancillary staff spoke positively about the school and felt part of the school community. It is clear that they make an important and valued contribution to the school. In most instances they expressed satisfaction that they had the resources available to them to enable them to carry out their jobs satisfactorily.

The school buildings are laid out in two blocks, an older and a newer block. Problems with the roofs of both buildings have taken up a significant amount of caretaking time. These problems are due to be addressed on a phased basis in the near future. Notwithstanding this, the fabric of the school is not as well maintained as it should be. This was evident to the inspection team and commented on by parents, students and staff interviewed. Despite the fact that the science rooms and toilet blocks have been recently refurbished and that new windows have been installed, many other areas of the school are in need of basic refurbishment and redecoration. The outside environment also needs attention. This work should be effected through the caretaking allocation to the school or, where appropriate, through application for funding under the Department's summer works programme. It is recommended that an audit of the school environment be undertaken as soon as possible to identify areas in need of improvement and that management agree a programme of work with relevant parties to address identified priorities.

Facilities to support the curriculum are very good. Subject departments are well resourced. The school has developed a formal system of keeping stock and for identifying resource needs. Well-equipped specialist rooms are available as required. The Junior Certificate School Programme (JCSP) school library with a dedicated librarian is a significant support to the delivery of the curriculum in the school.

Very good ICT facilities are available in the school. The ICT co-ordinator has been proactive in developing an up-to-date ICT system in line with the National Council for Technology in Education (NCTE) guidelines. ICT support from CoDubVEC was acknowledged in the school as very good. The school has two computer rooms and a number of computers and data projectors in locations across the school. The use of ICT as an effective teaching and learning tool is promoted. Management, staff and students have access to ICT facilities. It is commendable that an ICT Acceptable Users Policy has been developed. However this should be reviewed to include all users of ICT in the school. The college website is regularly maintained and it provides parents and students with good access to relevant information.

A health and safety statement has been prepared and a number of staff members have responsibility for the management of health and safety issues. In general good attention has been paid to the management of these issues. However it was reported by members of the school community that the flagstones outside the main school building constitute a tripping hazard. This should be addressed.

It is commendable that the school community is implementing the Green School programme towards the achievement of a Green Flag.

2. QUALITY OF SCHOOL PLANNING

2.1 The school plan

The school has been engaged in collaborative whole-school planning for a number of years. Significant whole-school planning has taken place in the last school year. Documents reviewed indicated that the board of management has clear planning priorities in mind for each school year. A number of policies, in line with legislation, have been drafted by sub-committees of staff members and brought before the board. Other policies have been identified for review by senior management and the board of management. It is recommended that all policies ratified by the board should include the date of ratification or review to enable the board to track policies. A post to coordinate school planning has been reinstated. This is commended. The post holder should meet regularly with management and liaise with staff to prioritise what policies are necessary and coordinate the various teams involved in planning in the school. A report should be prepared for management and the board each year by the planning co-ordinator.

Mount Seskin Community College is included in Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) the national action plan for educational inclusion, and in the School Completion Programme. Schools that accepted the invitation of the Department of Education and Skills to participate in DEIS, are required to implement a range of planning, target-setting and ongoing review processes. This school engaged with DEIS planning in 2007/8, some baseline data was gathered, and some actions proposed. Unfortunately the plan was then set aside. Much of the data collected is now out of date and very little tracking has taken place. While the college implements effectively a wide range of interventions and strategies that are compatible with the themes of DEIS and has had much success in many areas, it has not engaged sufficiently with the planning process. The college should revitalise planning for DEIS by immediately establishing a DEIS planning team who would be engaged in gathering baseline data for each of the required themes. A co-ordinator should be selected to have overall responsibility for the DEIS plan. It is suggested that the team should be divided into sub-groups which take responsibility for action planning for the different themes. The baseline data should be analysed and used to inform targets that the college will seek to achieve over a three-year period, and actions should be devised to help reach those targets. The plan should be reviewed yearly. To ensure whole-school buy-in to the measures and strategies to be employed, a number of whole-staff planning meetings should be organised. It is recommended that all subject departments incorporate proposed strategies and interventions to advance the DEIS themes of literacy, numeracy and examination attainment. The board of management should ensure that DEIS planning is reactivated at the earliest possible opportunity and keep itself informed about the planning process.

School development planning is the focus of weekly staff meetings. Time is allocated for subject and programme planning at these meetings as well as meetings of year heads and tutors. It was evident from a review of subject-department planning documentation that departmental structures with appointed co-ordinators are in place for all subjects. In some instances the subject co-ordinators were not currently teaching the subject, for example, in Civics, Social and Political Education (CSPE). This is not in line with best practice and should be reviewed. Subject-specific plans and common programmes of work have been developed across a range of subject areas. However, there is significant variation in the level of engagement with subject planning. Best practice was observed where programmes of work detailed the content to be delivered within specified timeframes, the corresponding learning outcomes to be achieved, the particular resources to be used, the suggested methodologies and assessment modes. It is advised that all departments ensure that programmes of work are

developed in line with the planning practices commended above. Management are encouraged to take an active role in ensuring that good planning takes place in all departments.

Very good programme planning is in place in the school across a range of programmes including Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA), Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP) and the Junior Certificate School Programme (JCSP). This resulted in very good practice on the ground in these programmes. High quality planning for the NBSS classroom and associated programme was also in evidence. There is considerable expertise in the school in the area of planning.

It was reported that, in compliance with Post-primary Circulars M44/05 and 0062/2006, the board of management has formally adopted the Department's *Child Protection Guidelines for Post-primary Schools* (published September 2004). Confirmation was also provided that these child protection procedures have been brought to the attention of management, teaching staff and special needs assistants and that management has ensured that these staff members are familiar with the procedures to be followed and that a copy of the guidelines is supplied. A designated liaison person (DLP) and a deputy DLP have been appointed in line with the requirements of the guidelines. However it came to the attention of the inspection team that many of the ancillary staff are unaware of the *Child Protection Guidelines*. It is recommended that ancillary staff and parents are apprised of the details of the guidelines.

3. QUALITY OF CURRICULUM PROVISION

3.1 Curriculum planning and organisation

The school offers a wide range of second-level curricular programmes. The Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme, the Leaving Certificate Applied programme, the Junior Certificate programme and the Junior Certificate School Programme are all available in the school. These provisions are commended. The school has targeted the area of adult and community education and Post-Leaving Certificate courses (PLCs) for further development. This is to be welcomed as it will offer young people in the community an additional point of access to continuing education.

The school regularly reviews the curriculum offered to students. There was evidence of good collaboration between management and staff when these review processes were undertaken. This good practice is commended. In any future review of the curriculum students and parents should be included in the review process. A recent such review has led to the introduction of the LCVP programme to replace the established Leaving Certificate as one of the options available at senior cycle. Currently one LCVP class group and one LCA class group have been formed in each of the two senior-cycle years. This was found to be a very effective change leading to positive outcomes in certificate examinations. However, the range and choice of subjects offered to students in LCVP need careful attention on an ongoing basis to ensure that students' needs are met and that no subject is lost to the curriculum.

Positive moves at junior cycle are also commended such as the recent introduction of a banding arrangement in first year. This facilitates mixed ability groupings and the provision of a stand alone support class. The junior-cycle curriculum has been reviewed to ensure that all first-year students now have access to a broader range of subjects than was previously the case. This is further evidence of the school's commitment to the inclusion of all students as outlined in its mission statement. It is recommended that these recent changes be maintained and that mixed-ability settings be rolled out across junior cycle in the years to come. Recently, study of a modern language has been added to the core subjects in junior cycle and this year's first-year students are the first group to benefit. Whilst improving students' access to the study of a modern language is a positive development, it is recommended that the requirement to study French or German in junior cycle is kept under review.

The school has in place a number of different strategies designed to provide a wider range of opportunities for student to study subjects at higher level. After-school study is available in the school. Concurrent timetabling of core subjects in second year and third year allows students to move between levels. The provision of an extra teacher in core subject bands facilitates this process. It is commendable that there is a whole-school focus in the revised mission statement on increasing school-wide attainment. The introduction of mixed-ability class groupings in junior cycle should prove a good step in progressing attainment across the curriculum. It is welcome that continuing professional development (CPD) has already been provided for teachers in relation to teaching in a mixed ability setting and it is suggested that further CPD in this area could prove useful.

Practical subjects are provided with double class periods in most instances. The constraints these arrangements have placed on the timetable means that at times the spread of classes in core subjects across the week is less than optimal. It is suggested that reducing the number of double classes provided across the week in practical subjects could give greater flexibility to the timetable. The provision of time for the core subjects of Irish, English and Mathematics at junior cycle is low, and this is commented on in the accompanying Mathematics and English inspection reports. It is recommended that the timetable be reconfigured to increase the time available to students in these subjects. This should prove a very good step to increase attainment in core subjects and enhance literacy and numeracy in the school. This would contribute to the achievement of the relevant DEIS planning objectives.

A good range of subjects is offered to students both at junior cycle and senior cycle. The recent return of Technical Graphics to the junior-cycle curriculum is a welcome development. However, it is important to ensure that the needs of students rather than the availability of teachers take first priority when the timetable is being planned. In subject areas where there is greater teacher availability than student demand, it is recommended that consideration be given to timetabling teachers into other subject areas where expertise allows.

3.2 Arrangements for students' choice of subjects and programmes

An excellent transfer programme from the local primary school is in place. Students get the opportunity to come on a number of visits to the school and sample some subjects while still in sixth class in primary school. The fifth-year mentors, *Amigos*, visit prospective pupils in the main feeder primary school and a *Fun Day* is organised by the *Amigos* in the college before transfer. The mentors continue to support the new students during their first year in the school. Parents are given a good level of support and information.

The school provides a good range of optional subjects to incoming first-year students. A six-week taster programme allows students to sample optional subjects before settling on their final choice. This is commended. Students select their two options subjects under the guidance of subject teachers, the tutor and year head. The guidance team should also be involved at this stage as their expertise would be useful to students.

Students in third year are well supported when making choices for senior cycle. They are provided with ad-hoc periods of Guidance to help them to choose their programme and optional subjects. Communication with parents is good. They are given timely and comprehensive information on the options available. Parents of third-year students are invited to a presentation where the main differences between the LCA and LCVP programmes are outlined and where they are given the opportunity to register for a programme. Students on the LCVP programme are provided with good option choices, within the constraints required by the LCVP.

3.3 Co-curricular and extracurricular provision

A commendably wide range of extracurricular activities, most of which are supported by the SCP, is available in the school. Many take place at lunchtime and a lunch club supported by SCP provides lunch for students who participate. A youth worker is employed to run this club. Attendance at the club was very good across the week of the evaluation. Indeed some overcrowding was observed. It is recommended, if numbers remain high, that management seek to extend the space available for the lunch club. Sporting activities include Gaelic football, soccer and cross-country running. Musical activities on offer include guitar, percussion, dance, choir and the school show. Students also have the opportunity to take part in other activities including the Connections programme, gardening club, art club, computer club, Junior Achievement and the chess club. It was reported that all staff members are involved in extracurricular activities. This shows a very good level of volunteerism and social commitment on the part of staff members and contributes to very good relations in the school community. While co-curricular activities including educational outings are organised in some subject areas it is recommended that these are extended across the subject range to enhance learning and understanding. Students have the opportunity to attend a homework club three days a week.

4. QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN SUBJECTS

4.1 Planning and preparation

It was evident during the evaluation that a culture of collaborative planning exists amongst teachers in Mount Seskin Community College. The subjects and the programme evaluated are very effectively co-ordinated. Management provides formal planning time on a regular basis and records are maintained of these meetings. It is recommended that some of the formal planning time be devoted to discussing teaching and learning. The role of co-ordinator is rotated within the subject departments.

A plan was in place for each of the subjects and the programme evaluated. The level of detail varied between subject plans examined in the school and some were more comprehensive than others. It is noteworthy that in a number of instances teachers have identified specific goals for further development. Agreed schemes of work should be extended, where necessary, to include learning outcomes, linked to syllabus content, timeframes, resources and teaching methods. It is also recommended that a policy on assessment or additional detail on assessment be provided.

Planning and preparation by individual teachers for the lessons observed was of a very high quality. It is recommended, in the context of subject department planning, that attention be paid to the integration of ICT into teaching and learning across all subjects.

4.2 Learning and teaching

Fourteen teachers and twenty-two lessons were observed over the course of the evaluation and the quality of teaching and learning was described by inspectors as very good or of a high quality in the majority of classrooms visited.

The structure of almost all lessons was good and this was often because in these lessons clear learning objectives were communicated from the outset. This good practice should be extended across all subject departments. It is recommended that learning objectives should be reviewed at the conclusion of lessons to establish how much had been learned.

The content and pace of each lesson were appropriate with, in almost all cases, a good balance between teacher-led and student-led inputs. This balance was achieved when there was a focus on student participation in the lessons and when content and meaning were not simply presented to students.

A noteworthy feature of teaching and learning commented on in all reports was the good use made of active learning methodologies. These included students working individually and co-operatively – in pairs and groups, discussion and student presentations. This in turn led to engaged students and good learning. When observed, co-operative learning was well organised. The enthusiasm of teachers for their subject was commented on by inspectors in a number of reports and this led to enthusiastic learners. The most effective lessons were the ones where there was little reliance on the text book and where students' interest was stimulated. Commendably, this was the case in almost all lessons. The very good practice of teachers paying particular attention to the development of students' literacy and numeracy skills was also noted.

Very good student questioning was in evidence in all subjects and programmes evaluated and students' responses were evidence of confidence and good knowledge of their courses. Questions ranged from lower-order, recall-type questions to more difficult higher-order questions which challenged students and encouraged them to think at a deeper level. Best practice in questioning was seen when teacher questions engaged the students in analysis and reflection and this was almost always the case. Overall, high expectations from teachers led to good quality and challenging work in the lessons.

Inspectors commented on the differentiated approach to teaching and learning used by almost all teachers to cater for the range of students' abilities, needs and interests. For example, much individual attention was given to students when work was assigned, thus assisting and supporting them. Worksheets were appropriately designed, questions were often directed at individual students and the practice of mixing abilities during group work allowed for students to assist each other. The adoption of such strategies was recommended to some teachers as they enable the teacher to develop lesson objectives more closely related to the needs of the students and to differentiate lesson delivery effectively. It was noted that most teachers are aware of students with additional educational needs and effectively support these students in the lessons.

All inspectors commented on the positive atmosphere and good student-teacher rapport that was evident in all lessons observed. Students were managed in a positive, affirming and sensitive manner and student behaviour was very good in the lessons observed. Established classroom routines led to a secure and orderly learning environment. Students were focused, on task and engaged very well in the learning process. This led to them making good progress in all lessons. The fact that teachers made their lessons interesting and enjoyable also contributed to good learning and an orderly environment. Overall, the efforts made to enhance the quality of student learning were noted in inspection reports. Students displayed a good level of knowledge and understanding during interaction with the inspectors. Inspectors also commented favourably on the quality of students' written work.

4.3 Assessment

Practices in relation to ongoing assessment of students' progress are very good. Homework is regularly assigned and the quality of verbal and written feedback provided to students as part of the correction and monitoring process reflect the importance placed by the different subject departments on homework as a key assessment vehicle. The students' homework copies were, for the most part, well maintained. Features of good practice in this regard included the use of separate hardback copybooks for homework and folders to store supplementary materials

provided by teachers. While this very good practice is widespread it should be uniformly adopted across the subject departments.

An analysis of student attainment in the certificate examinations across the different subject areas is carried out annually. The use to which the outcomes of this analysis are put varies from department to department. In some instances the outcomes are used to inform ongoing department planning, to identify the learning needs of students and in setting targets in relation to the uptake of the different levels in the certificate examinations. It would be preferable if a uniform approach was adopted across the school and incorporated into the DEIS planning process. This approach should mean that the analysis is carried out collaboratively within each department and that a report is then submitted to management. Furthermore, the outcomes should serve to establish baseline data against which student progress can be measured and should inform target-setting in relation to the level the students will take in the certificate examinations.

The student diary is used very effectively to facilitate ongoing communication with parents. In addition, formal reports issue to parents of students in non-examination classes at Christmas and summer. Parents of students in certificate examination classes receive written reports following the Christmas and mock examinations

5. QUALITY OF SUPPORT FOR STUDENTS

5.1 Inclusion of students with additional educational needs

The school's provision for students with special educational needs (SEN) is exemplary. A substantial number of students in the school are in receipt of additional support hours and the actions of management and teachers in providing for the needs of these students shows great commitment and understanding. A draft special needs policy has been formulated which outlines special needs provision in the school. It was clear from observations, interviews undertaken and documentation reviewed that provision of support for special education in the college is supported by a whole-school student-centred approach, where all staff have responsibility for the education and inclusion of students with special educational needs. The SEN team, the guidance team, the SCP personnel and the NBSS team work with management and teachers to provide an integrated approach to support for students.

There are very good links between the college and its feeder local primary school. Students transferring who will need additional educational support are identified in a coordinated process by the enrolment team which includes the SEN co-ordinator. Good systems are in place in regard to the transfer of information from the primary school and parental awareness and involvement is actively sought. Special-needs assistants (SNAs) are matched with students and visit the primary school to meet with the students and facilitate transfer. Individualised transfer programmes are arranged for students where needed. This is highly commended. The SEN co-ordinator and team work together to profile the SEN students and develop individual education plans. The co-ordinator keeps clear records on the allocation of additional support to students.

Effective use is made of the Department's additional teacher allocation for resource hours and learning support. There are three core members in the educational support team. Team members avail of the SEN support network in the CoDubVEC. Good links have been forged with external agencies to support the work of the team. A well-organised, flexible student-centred approach among the team was in evidence. A very good range of resources including ICT is available to support the work of the team. Each team member is matched to individual students with a high level of support needs and they operate in a mentoring role to these

students. Additional support in the form of individual or small group withdrawal is made available.

Team teaching is the main form of support for students. This inclusive support is commended. Most teachers in the school are involved in team teaching either as the lead teacher or the support teacher. As far as possible the skills of the support teacher are matched to the subject. One teacher generally takes the lead in planning. Where best practice concerning team teaching takes place, teachers collaborate on both the planning and the teaching, making optimum use of two trained professionals in the classroom. This allows for a wider range of methodologies including group work and cooperative learning. It was noted that the support teacher is not always actively engaged in managing teaching and learning and often takes on the role of classroom assistant. To maximise the potential of team teaching in the school, it is recommended that a whole-school approach to team teaching is agreed. This should result in agreed procedures in relation to planning, instruction and assessment. These procedures should be incorporated into the staff handbook and into individual subject planning documentation. It is recommended that additional CPD on team teaching is made available.

There are seven special-needs assistants (SNAs) on the staff. Very good coordination of the SNA team in the school was in evidence with a very good induction plan in place. SNAs have comprehensive care plans for each student in their care. This is laudable. Members of the SNA team interviewed showed an obvious commitment to students and are to be commended for undertaking additional training in their own time.

The JCSP programme is an important additional form of support for students at junior cycle. An integrated approach to the organisation of JCSP in the school was noted with good communication between key personnel. There is one timetabled JCSP meeting per week where the SEN co-ordinator, Home School Community Liaison Coordinator (HSCCL) co-ordinator, JCSP co-ordinator, members of the management team and representatives from different subject areas meet to coordinate planning in this area. A number of JCSP initiatives take place throughout the school year such as the *Make a Book* project and the first year Maths initiative. It was reported that there was a greater need for planning time at some stages in the school year than at others. It is recommended that JCSP meeting times be rationalised across the year. The school should consider using its JCSP allocation to reinstate the profiling meetings three times a year as recommended by JCSP support team documentation.

http://jcsp.slss.ie/resources/JCSP_Information_Note_for_schools%20Mar07.doc

A significant number of students in the school come from disadvantaged backgrounds. The SCP plays a pivotal role in supporting these students with some very good practices in place. Two youth workers are employed in the school through the SCP and they have a particular focus on attendance and the retention of students. There are a number of traveller students in the school. The level of support granted to these students is good as evidenced by the fact that a special duties post-holder has responsibility for supporting and mentoring these students.

Students presenting with challenging behaviour are supported by the year head system as well as the National Behaviour Support Service (NBSS) supports in the school. Two staff members are employed full time with the NBSS and they provide integrated and reflective support to students. The NBSS works with teachers on a whole-school basis but individual students are at times withdrawn to undertake a six-week behaviour programme before being gradually reintegrated into their class group while still being supported by the “Skills Room” team. Stakeholders across the school community commented on the important role played by NBSS support in the school. The school’s engagement with the NBSS has brought a considerable benefit to teachers’ continuing professional development in teaching challenging students and in devising whole-school approaches to improvement.

The school makes good provision for the more able student. Students who wish to study subjects at higher level are facilitated. Senior-cycle students have the opportunity to participate in the ACE (Accessing College Education) programme which offers intensive after school activities including revision classes and familiarisation events in higher education institutions. The programme is well coordinated and offers significant support to those students who wish to progress to higher-level education.

5.2 Guidance and student support in the whole-school context

The school's guidance allocation is used to provide a range of educational, personal and career supports for students. The school is allocated 22 ex-quota hours for guidance, including eleven hours under the Guidance Enhancement Initiative (GEI). The department comprises two qualified guidance counsellors who play a significant role in many aspects of school life including student care and curriculum support. A guidance policy is in place and planning documentation for guidance was made available to the inspection team. The guidance team is to be applauded for its level of commitment to the students in its care and for its commitment to CPD.

Guidance is well-organised in the school and facilities for guidance are very good. The guidance suite of two offices is well equipped and centrally located. Students can avail of guidance and counselling support throughout their time in the school and seek referral through year heads, class tutors and teachers as well as self-referring. Good procedures in relation to this referral were in place. It was clear to the evaluation team that the students view the guidance team as a significant support in the school. Care should be taken, however, to have an appropriate balance between counselling and guidance to ensure that all students have access to appropriate guidance support while in school.

Guidance provision at senior cycle is good. Guidance is integrated into the LCVP and the LCA programmes. A guidance period is provided for fifth-year LCVP students in addition to the *Preparation for the World of Work* link module. It is suggested that a similar arrangement for sixth year students could prove beneficial. The Guidance support in LCVP is provided by one guidance counsellor and in LCA by the other counsellor. Very good links between the LCA and LCVP teams and the guidance department were noted.

Intermittent guidance support for junior cycle students is offered including guidance around subject choice for senior cycle. It is recommended that suitable programmes for intermittent guidance classes at junior cycle be drawn up and included in the guidance plan and documented in the guidance timetable for the year. This may be achieved through appropriate links where there are common themes with the Social Personal Health Education (SPHE) programme. Key learning outcomes for each group accessing Guidance should be outlined in the guidance plan. The following document should guide the development of the plan: *Planning a School Guidance Programme*, (National Centre for Guidance in Education 2004).

The guidance team has considerable expertise and insights to bring to bear on all points of transfer in the school, including transfer into first year and transfer into senior cycle. It is recommended that the guidance team take a more active role in the generation of option bands at point of entry and in assigning students to first-year classes.

The guidance counsellors are, commendably, an integral part of communication channels between the school and parents and they participate in gatherings such as open nights, subject-choice meetings and parent-teacher meetings to provide clear information and to discuss matters with parents. It was evident during the evaluation that guidance within the school was viewed as a whole-school activity and was integrated into all the school's planning and care systems.

A very well organised student-support structure is in place in the school. Each year group has a year head who holds an assistant principal post and has overall responsibility for the year group. Each year head retains the group through to sixth year. It was reported that this contributed greatly to the care of students. Each class group has a tutor who takes on a pastoral role. Frequent meetings between year heads and tutors take place which ensures good communication around student needs and supports. Very good communication channels ensuring parents were aware of the support structures in the school were noted. For example, the parents of first-year students are invited into the school in the first term where the student support structures available are outlined.

A well organised care team is in place. The team meets weekly to discuss issues affecting individual students and groups of students and to identify appropriate responses and actions to be taken, which are then suitably assigned to team members for implementation. A student support network team also exists and meetings take place once a month. This allows the sharing of information between all support services within the college. When appropriate, representatives from the National Education Welfare Board (NEWB) and other outside agencies attend meetings of this team.

All members of the school community acknowledge the very good levels of pastoral care provided in the school. With regard to areas for development, the SPHE programme, which is a significant element of student support, should be expanded to outline the learning outcomes to be achieved in each year of the programme. Details of provision of Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) within the programme at both senior and junior cycle should be described in planning documentation. This should make clear the contribution of the SPHE and guidance teams to the RSE programme.

The home-school community liaison (HSCL) co-ordinator provides very important support for students and parents. Resources, including a parents' room, are well utilised. The work of the HSCL co-ordinator includes home visits to parents whose children may be experiencing difficulty in school. The co-ordinator encourages links with students' homes by organising classes for parents. The HSCL co-ordinator is on the JCSP team and the care team and liaises with many members of staff, the staff of the SCP and outside agencies in order to ensure a high level of support for students. This is highly commended.

The school has the services of a full time chaplain. It is clear to the evaluation team that the chaplaincy is integral to the life of the school. The chaplain is a member of the board of management, is on the care team, organises liturgical celebrations in the school and works closely with students and parents on the spiritual dimension to school life, for example creating a quiet space, the college prayer garden, which is used by all members of the school community. The work and contribution of the chaplain to school life is highly valued by students, staff and parents.

6. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT

The following are the main strengths identified in the evaluation:

- The board of management meets regularly during the school year to ensure the effective provision of education in the school. Decision making is open and transparent and the commitment of members of the board to the school community was evident to the evaluation team.
- A high functioning senior management team is in place in the school. Very good partnership and collaboration exists between the principal and deputy principal.
- The relationships within the school, between staff, management and students, and among staff members, are characterised by mutual respect reflecting the very good level of pastoral care provided in the school.

- A well organised student support system is in place, including an excellent transfer programme from the local primary school.
- Facilities to support the curriculum are very good. The Junior Certificate School Programme (JCSP) school library and ICT facilities are significant supports to the delivery of the curriculum in the school.
- The school offers a good range of second-level curricular programmes to meet the needs of students and regularly reviews this curriculum. The curriculum is strengthened by a commendably wide range of extracurricular activities, most of which are supported by SCP.
- A culture of collaborative planning exists amongst teachers in Mount Seskin Community College demonstrated by the significant whole-school planning that has taken place in the last school year.
- The quality of teaching and learning was described by inspectors as very good or of a high quality in the majority of classrooms visited. Practices in relation to ongoing assessment of students' progress are very good.
- The school's provision for students with special educational needs is exemplary.
- Guidance is well-organised in the school and facilities for guidance are very good.

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

- A review of the schedule of SDT posts should be conducted to ensure that the responsibility attached to those posts is relevant to the needs of the school and equitably distributed among the existing post holders.
- All teachers should fulfil their contractual obligations in relation to class contact time.
- An audit of the school environment should be undertaken as soon as possible to identify areas in need of improvement and a programme of work to address identified priorities should be put in place.
- The school should develop a DEIS plan as a matter of priority.
- A whole-school approach to team teaching which specifies procedures in relation to planning, instruction and assessment should be agreed.

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

7. RELATED SUBJECT INSPECTION REPORTS

The following related Subject Inspection reports are available:

- Subject Inspection of English – 21 September 2010
- Subject Inspection of Maths – 21 September 2010
- Subject Inspection of Geography – 23 September 2010
- LCVP Programme Evaluation– 23 September 2010