Whole-School Evaluation
REPORT

East Glendalough School
Station Road, Wicklow
Roll number: 81016V

Date of inspection: 22 January 2010
WHOLE-SCHOOL EVALUATION

A whole-school evaluation of East Glendalough School 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 three subjects and one programme were evaluated in detail, and separate reports are available. Teaching staff chose not to participate in formal meetings with the inspectorate during the course of the evaluation. The board of management was given an opportunity to comment in writing on the findings and recommendations of the report, and the response of the board will be found in the appendix of this report.

INTRODUCTION

East Glendalough School, founded in 1987, is a co-educational comprehensive school under the patronage of the Church of Ireland Archbishop of Dublin. The school was founded to meet the needs of the Protestant community and has both an urban and rural enrolment base. Students come from as far afield as Bray to Gorey. Students are enrolled from many primary schools in the local area and from further afield. Enrolment has remained quite consistent over recent years, varying from 360 to the current enrolment of 368 students. More recently, the school has experienced a substantial increase in demand for places. In response to this development, the board of management has decided that the school will accept an additional cohort of thirty students in first year of 2010.

With increasing enrolment, an extension block of classrooms was initially added in 1992 and recent infrastructural improvements to the school building include the re-roofing of the main school building, and the installation of a new gas-fired heating system funded by the Summer Works Scheme of the Department of Education and Skills (DES). Parental funding enabled the establishment of a new school library and resource room. Further development of the school campus is ongoing and the school is in the process of completing an Astroturf pitch. Proposed plans are in place for the development of a new sports hall. The board and parents’ association are commended for their commitment to funding ongoing development projects. In light of the increasing enrolment demands, the board has made renewed submissions to the planning unit of the Department for additional accommodation.

1. QUALITY OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT

1.1 Characteristic spirit of the school

Through its stated ethos, East Glendalough School seeks to provide ‘a broad Christian education and to develop spiritual and moral values, personal and social skills and the highest standards of excellence in all areas of school activity’. As outlined in its mission statement, the school aims to encourage each student to develop to his/her full potential, while maturing as an individual and becoming a constructive and caring member of society. All school activities strive to promote the school’s mission. There was clear evidence in the course of the evaluation that East Glendalough School is true to its mission statement and that its mission is being lived out in the many aspects of school life observed. The mission statement also underpins school policies. In the implementation of policies, the school strives to be fair, and codes are equitably implemented in line with the school’s mission. Throughout the evaluation, respect, courtesy, politeness and friendliness were evident in the interaction between students themselves and between students and staff.
It is clear that the school is inclusive and has a very proud tradition of providing for students of all abilities. The diversity of the student body, and its needs, talents and abilities, reflects society as a whole. Students are well cared for, and school policies and practices reflect this caring ethos which is lived out in many ways. In the course of the evaluation, parents articulated their appreciation of the school ethos and the great effect it has on their children. Parents value the school as it is “small, friendly, with good pastoral care, a good sense of discipline and high academic standards”. Students also expressed the view that they had high regard for the school’s small size and friendly atmosphere. There is a clear sense of community and partnership in the school. The small student population ensures that staff know each student and staff demonstrated dedication and commitment to creating a positive learning environment. A sense of belonging and of being valued permeated the school environment. A good sense of orderliness and discipline, friendliness and calm was clearly evident throughout the school.

### 1.2 School ownership and management

The interest and dedication of the board of management to the development and continued success of the school is highly commended. The board brings a complementary range of skills and experiences to its work and members’ diverse experiences contribute to the board’s effectiveness. Board roles and responsibilities are understood by board members and these roles are carried out competently. The provision of regular in-service to its members regarding board roles and responsibilities should further contribute to the effective fulfilment by the board of its managerial duties. The board is consultative and adaptable in its outlook and has developed a leading profile in the school community. Board members regularly attend school events, awards ceremonies and school concerts.

The board of management of East Glendalough School is properly constituted and fulfils its managerial role and obligations in accordance with the Education Act (1998). The board consists of six patron nominees, two parent nominees, two nominees of teaching staff and the Education Officer of County Wicklow Vocational Education Committee (VEC). The board is elected for a five-year term and meets each month during school term in order to carry out its duties. Meetings are well attended and decisions are made by consensus. Minutes of board meetings examined at the time of the evaluation showed the board’s commitment to areas such as management, planning, policy development and support of students, and provided evidence of its proactivity in dealing with issues as they arise. The principal acts as secretary to the board and provides the board with a comprehensive update on school matters at each meeting. The deputy principal is invited to attend all board meetings as an observer. This is good practice. A verbal report is relayed to school staff and to the parents’ association following board meetings. To strengthen communication and in the interests of best practice, it is recommended that an agreed written report from the board is given to staff and parents.

The board has been proactive in identifying key priorities of an educational and infrastructural focus for the school. Strategies are in place to achieve their priorities which include meeting the increased enrolment needs in the next academic year, further improvement of the fabric of the existing school building, and the possibility of the broadening of the school curriculum. The patron and the board of management are concerned that the school cannot continue to meet the extra demand for places in the longer term and representations have been made to the DES in this regard over recent years. Views were expressed by the board that the school has particular limitations due to its current size and that in light of current circumstances, the school cannot commit to further expansion in 2011. Nevertheless, there was an open minded approach to the possible expansion of enrolment into the future.
The board has been proactive in policy formation and many key policies are in place. An examination of policies developed by the board shows that the board seeks to reflect openness, inclusiveness and respect for the individual in the school’s policies. The admissions policy is grounded in the principles of inclusion and diversity and this policy is administered in a fair and equitable way. The board should ensure that the policy clearly states that the school offers a six-year cycle with TY being offered as a compulsory programme. Policy review, development and ratification have been prioritised and widespread consultation with staff, parents and students on all relevant policies is regularly conducted. This is very praiseworthy.

Further policy development has been prioritised. The draft special education needs (SEN) policy should now be finalised and ratified by the board after consultation with relevant parties. The Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) policy should be completed and implemented as a matter of urgency. In this regard, the school should ensure that account is taken of the contents of circular M 27/08. Board of management minutes indicate that the Department’s Child Protection Guidelines for Post-primary Schools have been adopted. This is appropriate. In this context, the child protection policy which preceded the current school policy is no longer necessary. It is very praiseworthy that an audit of health and safety was carried out in the current school year. It is now recommended that the school’s health and safety policy be reviewed and updated and that this policy be subject to review on a bi-annual basis.

The board of management acknowledged the contribution of the current principal in successfully leading the school forward through a crucial stage of development. The board also expressed confidence in the commitment of the teaching staff to the school. In the context of subject inspection reports associated with this whole school evaluation, the board should ensure that specific recommendations regarding teaching and learning outlined are addressed. The board is aware of its role in discipline procedures and has admirably met its obligations in this regard.

An active and long-established parents’ association has enjoyed very good relationships with the board and the links established between both bodies have always been effective. At the time of the evaluation, the board expressed confidence in the parents’ association and expressed the sentiment that they regarded its members as true ambassadors for the school.

1.3 In-school management

The principal leads the school effectively and is aware of the challenges facing the school into the future. As the senior management team, the principal and deputy principal have commendable leadership qualities, display complementary skills and present as an effective senior management team. The principal and deputy principal share a clear vision and understanding of the developmental priorities for the school and are supported by the whole school community in this regard. Both members of senior management have an active on-the-ground presence in the school and collaboratively manage the school very effectively on a daily basis. Communication is open and transparent and senior management is consistently approachable. A collaborative and flexible approach with staff is fostered. For example, minutes of staff meetings indicate the consultative and democratic nature of the proceedings. Staff are kept well informed of decisions and actions taken on school developments. A culture of self-evaluation is being fostered by the leadership of school management especially through the school development planning process. This is central to the shared vision for the school.

The administration of the school’s care and discipline system, the management of change in consultation with the whole school community, liaison with board members on matters of
school business, the management of the school finances, communication with parents, as well as the constant management of students, are but some of the responsibilities carried out very effectively by senior management on an ongoing basis. The principal and deputy principal also take on some individual responsibilities. For example, the principal prioritises staff relations and task management and takes responsibility for the construction of the school timetable. The deputy principal plays a key role in the care and support of staff and students, the school discipline system, school transport, state examinations, supervision and substitution, and health and safety. The range of responsibilities undertaken by the senior management team is carried out effectively and contributes to the efficient operation of the school on an ongoing basis.

Assistant principals (APs) and special duties teachers (SDTs) also contribute to the effective operation of the school by taking on a variety of responsibilities. These include; head of first year; head of junior school; head of senior school; head of information technology (IT); coordinator of learning support; coordinator of TY; coordinator of LCVP; head of examinations; head of girls’ sport; development of a school archive; responsibility for the school website and yearbook; recycling and environmental awareness; applications officer and responsibility for the school library and the TY show. It was not possible to engage with post holders at the time of the evaluation in relation to the implementation of these duties. Nevertheless, it is clear that some posts are more onerous in terms of time and level of responsibility than others. All duties undertaken should be the subject of review and evaluation on an annual basis, so that school needs can continue to be best met whilst ensuring an equitable distribution of responsibilities. In addition, it is recommended that all duties and responsibilities of post holders be clearly documented and agreed between the post holder and the board of management, as required under circular C23/98. Some responsibilities currently undertaken by senior management should be delegated to post holders, particularly in the areas of school development planning, state examinations and health and safety.

The role of the year heads is central to the effective management of students. The duties of year heads are both disciplinary and pastoral in nature. Year heads meet with senior management on an ongoing basis and, in this way, form an effective middle management structure in the school. Junior, senior and whole school assemblies are conducted once per week and make a significant contribution to the care of students: evidence to this effect was observed in the course of the evaluation. Year heads work closely with form teachers in the administration of the care and discipline system of the school. Senior management should ensure that supervision of students during the morning and lunchtime breaks and before and after school is in accordance with circular letter PPT01/03.

Partnership with parents is central to the school’s ethos and it was evident at the time of the evaluation that parents play a proactive role in the life of the school and support school development in many ways. One example is the organisation of the ‘Meitheal’ day whereby parents give one day of their time to enhance the school environment. This is commendable. Through the parents’ association, parents are consulted on relevant policies, such as the anti-bullying policy and uniforms, before they are ratified by the board. The school has a good system of communication with the diversity of parents in relation to student progress and achievement. Means of communication with parents and the wider community include individual letters, newsletters and the school website, all of which provide opportunities for the celebration of student achievement. The school also communicates with parents in other ways, including phone, reports, parent teacher meetings, information evenings and a text messaging service is in place. Further use of the student journal as a tool for communicating with parents is recommended as a means of enhancing the range of strategies already in place.
The parents’ association has been proactive in supporting part-time teaching hours and funding capital school development projects. In addition, the parents’ association takes responsibility for collecting the voluntary parental contribution and parents volunteer to assist in supervising students during breaks and lunchtime. The school Bursary Fund, which is sponsored by parents, has provided much needed funding for books, uniforms, trips and extra classes for students in need of additional support. The principal attends parents’ association meetings. At the time of the evaluation, the parents’ association praised the school for being inclusive and expressed confidence in its leadership team. Well established links have been forged between the school and the community. These links have been particularly well developed due to the wide range of co-curricular and extra-curricular activities on offer. Excellent links have been established between the school and local charitable and sporting organisations.

The Student Council is elected in September each year with one representative elected from each class group in third year, TY, fifth year and sixth year, together with the positions of head boy and head girl. To further the democratic representation of the student council, it is recommended that first and second year representatives be elected in future years. The council plays an important role in representing the views and concerns of students to school management. The principal occasionally attends student council meetings. This is good practice. Good links have been established between the board of management, the parents’ association committee and the student council, with the head boy and head girl afforded the opportunity to meet the board and the parents’ association. As a further support, the board should ensure that a student council constitution is put in place. The council meets every fortnight and minutes of meetings are maintained. Teacher coordination of the work of the council is in place. Training of the student council regarding their role and responsibilities would help to further ensure that students’ needs are best met. Further information on student councils is available on the website of the Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST), www.pdst.ie.

1.4 Management of resources

East Glendalough School has a teaching allocation of 17.32 whole-time equivalent (WTE) teachers which includes the ex-quota positions of principal and chaplain. The school also receives allocations for guidance (0.59 WTEs), learning support (0.5 WTEs) special educational needs (3.41 WTEs), curricular concessions (0.29 WTEs), and the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP) (1.82 WTEs).

Teaching staff are deployed according to their competencies and experiences. The school timetable is drawn up by the principal after consultation with staff. The primary concern in determining staff deployment and timetabling is to meet students’ needs and to optimise the quality of student learning. Class formation for the majority of subjects is on the basis of mixed ability. Management facilitates concurrency in core subjects on the timetable, within bands, to allow for students to move class group if it is found that they are not appropriately placed. This is very good practice.

The school timetable is well constructed with sufficient allocation of time to subjects and good distribution of lesson time across the week. Students at junior cycle receive the required twenty-eight hours tuition time as well as a number of timetabled activities. However, at senior cycle, students have timetabled study periods each week which results in senior students not receiving the required minimum tuition time. This should be addressed to enable each student to receive their entitlement to twenty-eight hours of class contact time: circular M29/95 refers. In this context, the number of class periods allocated to teachers should also be reviewed. It is essential that no teacher is timetabled for less than
eighteen hours class contact time and teaching resources should be utilised up to a maximum of twenty two hours per week where possible.

Specialist rooms are consistently used for their designated purpose. Classrooms are predominantly teacher based and promote the development of the room itself as a resource, and there were exemplary instances of this observed across subject departments. Many classrooms contained lively displays of visual and print materials and examples of students’ recent work. The newly developed library, which has very good ICT facilities, is a worthwhile addition to the school. It occupies a central location and is well utilised by students. Computer facilities in the school have been enhanced progressively. A thorough refit of the computer room and graphics room has been completed and the majority of classrooms now have computer and data projector facilities. The computer room is well utilised and broadband internet access is in place throughout the school. It is commendable that this provision has begun to impact very positively in some lessons and subjects.

The widespread use of ICT as a tool for teaching and learning in general classrooms has yet to be fully developed. The ICT coordinator should play a role in facilitating the dissemination of best practice in ICT to staff, and in the development of the ICT policy. This policy should be finalised and ratified by the board. It is recommended that an ICT development plan be drawn up with its main aim to thoroughly integrate ICT into teaching and learning practices. Staff training should form an essential component of this plan. Audiovisual equipment is available in classrooms and improvements are being made on an ongoing basis. CD and cassette recorders, televisions and DVD players are also available in language-based classrooms.

Senior management actively promotes the development of a professional learning community in the school and continuing professional development (CPD) is encouraged and facilitated in order to maintain high standards. This is praiseworthy. Future ideas for professional development include areas such as subject department and programme planning. Three full staff meetings take place during the year and staff may propose items for inclusion on the agenda. Many staff meetings are also used for planning and for the provision of CPD. This is commended. In addition, time is provided each week for a short staff meeting. This provision is used on occasion for subject department meetings.

New teachers are well supported by senior management through a good induction programme. A staff handbook, in which the school discipline system and policies are outlined, is given to new teachers. In addition to this, it is reported that subject departments play an important role in the induction process for new teachers. The handbook, which is now in need of updating, should be revised and made available to all staff.

The school grounds are maintained to a high standard. The Astroturf pitch now nears completion and this illustrates the commitment of the school community to ongoing development to meet the needs of students. The school community recognises its responsibility with regard to environmental issues with the appointment of a special duties post for recycling and environmental awareness. A green schools’ committee ensures that best practice is promoted and that students take ownership of this process. For example, at the outset of this evaluation, a new litter initiative had been launched, whereby students were required to take their litter home rather than placing it in school bins. Students were reminded during assemblies of the importance of a clean and litter-free school environment. The school is praised for the implementation of such important initiatives. The school strives to promote new initiatives in a concerted effort to constantly improve the appearance and sustainability of its environment. The visual appearance of the school is enhanced in many ways, including the display of trophies achieved in competitions and the proud display of posters of the annual Transition Year (TY) show.
The commitment of the school support staff, including the office staff, the caretaker, the school shop staff and the cleaners, is commended. They all make an appropriate and effective contribution to the life of the school and carry out their duties efficiently and effectively.

2. QUALITY OF SCHOOL PLANNING

2.1 The school plan

The staff has embraced the whole school planning process which is led by the shared vision and leadership of senior management. Through a series of well-thought-out staff planning days in recent years, the school has addressed and moved forward many key school development issues including formative assessment, raising academic standards, improving disciplinary procedures, curriculum review and meeting the needs of gifted students. In addition, consultation on policy development with staff has been ongoing. Whole school planning is collaborative and consultative with all members of the school community enabled to contribute appropriately to the process. The planning process as it has evolved to date is very good.

The school has demonstrated exemplary practice regarding self-review and future planning. In 1992, the school published a forward-looking report entitled ‘Possible Developments in East Glendalough School in the Next Five Years’. This report addressed staff, curriculum, community and administration areas. ‘East Glendalough School, A Report’ was presented to the board of management by the present deputy principal in 1998. This comprehensive and wide-ranging report laid the groundwork for school development planning in the past decade. The deputy-principal is commended for the quality of the work completed. The school development planning process commenced in 2001. In 2007, a twenty year review of East Glendalough School was undertaken as part of the duties of a post of responsibility. This is highly commended.

The co-ordination of school planning is currently led by senior management. The commitment of senior management in this regard is highly commended. Senior management has prioritised many important areas including the promotion of high standards in teaching and learning, assigning leadership roles to post holders, positive communications with the whole school community and the holistic development of the individual in line with the school ethos. It is now timely that renewed staff development in whole school planning and in subject department planning takes place. In this regard, many valuable resources are available on the website of the school development planning initiative (SDPI), www.sdpi.ie.

Evidence from staff meeting minutes indicates that priorities for school development planning frequently come from the staff following school self-evaluation initiatives. Staff has shown a willingness to contribute effectively to this process by taking an active part in the formulation of action plans in areas identified for development. Planning is prioritised at staff meetings, with working groups considering important areas, which have included items such as the school uniform, school disciplinary procedures and raising academic standards. It is praiseworthy that the board of management is kept well informed on all these developments. The frequency of the meetings facilitates this positive progress.

The school plan has now been drawn together and has identified new priorities for action planning including the progression of the building programme, the expansion of the curriculum and the ongoing formulation and review of policies. This comprehensive plan includes both permanent and developmental sections and policy statements reflect the school’s mission statement. This is very good practice. The school has clearly outlined
development needs into the future. There is awareness among senior management of the need to revise certain policies and to prepare other policies for ratification by the board. Improvements at whole school community level are now evident as a result of focused and prioritised planning. The school plan should now be ratified by the board of management and prepared for dissemination to the school community.

The current code of behaviour was initially ratified in 2003 and reviewed in 2008. Disciplinary procedures were drawn up in 2008 following consultation with teaching staff, parents’ association and the student council. Pupil exclusion procedures were approved by the board in 2008. The anti-bullying policy was approved by the board in 2008. Policies and plans drawn up by the school and ratified by the board in the past two years include a data protection policy and a dignity in the workplace charter. The proactive approach to policy review and development is highly commended.

Co-ordinated subject departments are now well established throughout the school. Staff are facilitated in holding subject department meetings and each department is required to keep up-to-date records of subject planning. While a culture of self-review is being embedded in practice, further development within many subject departments is required. The curriculum section of the school plan should be further developed, with each subject department developing a comprehensive subject plan. Templates for subject department planning may be downloaded from the website of the SDPI, www.sdpi.ie.

Confirmation was provided that, in compliance with Post-primary Circulars M45/05 and 0062/2006, the board of management has formally adopted the *Child Protection Guidelines for Post-primary Schools* (Department of Education and Science, September 2004). Confirmation was also provided that these child protection procedures have been brought to the attention of management, school staff and parents; that a copy of the procedures has been provided to all staff (including all new staff); and that management has ensured that all staff are familiar with the procedures to be followed. A designated liaison person (DLP) and a deputy DLP have been appointed in line with the requirements of the guidelines.

3. **QUALITY OF CURRICULUM PROVISION**

3.1 **Curriculum planning and organisation**

East Glendalough School offers access to a wide range of subjects in a broad and balanced curriculum. The range of programmes offered by the school includes the Junior Certificate, the TY programme, the Leaving Certificate Vocational programme (LCVP) and the established Leaving Certificate. The school has also offered Further Education and Training Awards Council (FETAC) courses to students in the past in an effort to meet particular student needs. Programmes and subject levels offered endeavour to serve the needs of students to fulfil the school’s stated mission of each student reaching his/her full potential. The school offers a range of academic and technical subjects at junior and senior cycle.

Curriculum provision is reviewed on an annual basis by staff and senior management. A curriculum committee has been established to produce proposals on adapting the junior cycle curriculum in light of increased intake in September 2010. Senior management ensures that curriculum provision is prioritised in whole-school planning and is commended for its great efforts to broaden the curriculum and to introduce new subjects and programmes that will further meet the needs of different students. For example, senior students have the option of taking an additional subject for Leaving Certificate, in which tuition is provided for two lesson periods per week. Students are expected to make a commitment to give substantial extra time to this subject outside of school time.
The academic standards committee has identified strategies to promote further academic success in the school. It is very commendable that this committee led a whole-staff planning day on the theme of meeting the needs of gifted students.

3.2 Arrangements for students’ choice of subjects and programmes

Students are well supported regarding subject choice and the vast majority of students obtain their desired subject choices. Subject bands are developed following a review of student preferences. First year students are provided with the opportunity to sample a range of subjects in advance of choosing particular subjects for the Junior Certificate. Each optional subject is sampled for seven weeks after which an informed choice is made. Each student chooses two subjects in addition to the core subjects. TY students and parents are invited to an information evening regarding programme and subject choices in senior cycle. Subject choices are addressed at this meeting by senior management, the guidance department and relevant subject teachers.

The school offers a six-year cycle in which all students partake in the TY programme. The TY curriculum is well balanced between core subjects, optional subjects and modules, activities and calendar events. Core subjects and optional modules allow students the valuable opportunity to keep contact with the subject and sample some elements of each discipline in senior cycle before making informed choices for Leaving Certificate. The vast range of modules and activities available to students is highly commendable. Students receive timetabled guidance lessons during TY. This practice is commended. One of the highlights of TY for parents and students is the TY open evening. Students receive graded certificates on successful completion of the year. This is commended and shows very good support for students. At the outset of TY, students commit themselves to a major project which forms part of overall TY assessment. This is very good practice. Work experience is well organised and forms an integral part of the programme. It is recommended that students partake in community service for one week in lieu of one week of work experience as this initiative would strengthen the social and personal dimension of TY in line with Department guidelines.

A written plan for TY, incorporating all subject plans, should be developed in accordance with Department Guidelines, as outlined in circular M1/00. Further assistance in this regard is available on the website of the PDST, www.pdst.ie. In addition, the school should consider developing some transition units as part of its TY programme. More information on transition units and samples of these units can be downloaded from the website of the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, www.ncca.ie/transitionunits.

The focus on independent student learning is a key principle of the LCVP programme. There is open access to the programme for those students fulfilling the requirements of the programme and student selection is on the basis of choice which is commendable. The time allocation to the Link Modules is appropriate with two single periods allocated in both fifth and sixth year. All LCVP students pursue a modern European language, and so fulfil the language requirement of the programme. Destination tracking of former LCVP students conducted by senior management illustrates the extent to which students have drawn upon the additional points achieved through the LCVP assessment to access their desired course of study at third level.

The enterprise activity engaged in by LCVP students from year to year requires the employment and development of a range of skills including team-work, organisational, leadership, judgement and communication skills. The whole-school aspect of the activity also helps to promote student confidence. Effective strategies were deployed in lessons to
encourage independent student learning and students were observed working independently and in pairs on the computers. It was good to see the peer support evident in student-student interactions and evidence of cooperative learning. It is recommended that LCVP coordination explores means of broadening the range of student experiences, through expanding the number of visits out to local enterprises which provide students with opportunities to examine enterprise and business in the locality. The provision of work shadowing or work placement opportunities for LCVP students in the course of their completion of the programme should also be explored.

3.3 Co-curricular and extra-curricular provision

East Glendalough School offers a wide range of co-curricular and extra-curricular activities. It was evident that positive relationships between students and teachers are developed in this context. The majority of students partake in some form of activity from a wide range on offer in the school. Many co-curricular activities relate to subjects or programmes and impact positively on students’ experiences of the subject. Parents are very supportive of these activities and the valuable links established with the school community. First year students are allocated a class period each week where they are offered a wide range of activities on a modular basis including crafts, archery, cooking, film club and computers. This innovation is praised.

The school provides many opportunities for students incorporating a myriad of activities including sport, music and drama events. Sport plays a very important role in the lives of students in the school. The major sports include basketball, hockey, athletics, rugby and ladies football. Good links with local sports clubs have been established. The advent of new and enhanced facilities on site will benefit the whole school community. The achievement of the school in many of these activities is noteworthy. A multitude of other activities enhance student experiences. A highlight on the school calendar every year is the school concert. This event involves teachers, parents and students and promotes links with the local community.

Co-curricular activities include ecology trips, visits to museums and galleries and speakers who are invited to talk on various topics of interest. The provision of co-curricular activities is commended, as it provides students with enjoyable learning experiences and ensures that each subject maintains a high profile in the school.

4. QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN SUBJECTS

4.1 Planning and preparation

Structures that facilitate collaborative planning have been put in place in the school. In some instances, this has resulted in the sharing of resources, the identification of common programmes of work and the development of common assessments. This collaboration has, in the case of one subject department, resulted in considerable versatility and innovation in relation to the subject department’s approach to teaching the various aspects of the curriculum. Collaborative approaches of this kind are commended and should be extended to all subject areas, as appropriate.

The quality of subject planning varied considerably. Some subject plans merely identified curricular content and the associated chapters of the relevant textbooks. Best practice was observed where subject plans identified the desired key skills required of students at various intervals. Good practice was also evident in subject plans where analysis of the previous year’s outcomes was carried out and where strategies were identified to rectify any
perceived deficiencies. This reflective practice is commended. It is therefore essential that a cohesive approach to developing and improving subject planning to a consistently high standard across all subject departments is implemented.

The level of individual planning for lessons was very good. This planning included the preparation of resources and teaching aids and in some cases strategies specifically geared towards mixed ability teaching. All subject departments should ensure that differentiated teaching strategies are developed and incorporated into the written plans for each subject.

4.2 Learning and teaching

Lessons observed were structured and paced appropriately. In almost all instances, the desired learning outcomes were identified and communicated to students at the beginning of each lesson. This facilitated students in the self-evaluation of their learning. In some cases, students would have benefited from a brief recapitulation of the key aspects of the lesson and its educational link with prescribed homework.

A wide variety of appropriate teaching and learning methodologies was employed in the lessons observed. These methodologies, in most instances, promoted active learning and student engagement and facilitated the further development of important concepts. Specific strategies observed, such as group work, discussion, independent learning, research and analysis, were highly successful, as they not only facilitated student learning, but also equipped students with useful transferable skills that may be utilised in a variety of subject areas.

In some instances, student activities were prolonged resulting in students becoming distracted. To avoid this, lesson activities should be carefully planned and designed to assess students’ comprehension or to develop their skills within short focused timeframes.

Where supplementary materials, worksheets and ICT resources were used, lessons benefited considerably. Every effort should be made by all subject departments to continue to develop teaching and learning strategies that promote student participation and engagement in the topic. It is strongly recommended that teachers carefully plan group work and independent learning activities in order to maximise student learning and engagement.

The quality of questioning was generally very good. Students were encouraged to problem solve and were appropriately challenged. An example of this good practice was observed following a group work activity where the group’s feedback to the class was facilitated during a plenary session that allowed students to contribute, clarify and respond in a structured manner. This good practice is commended. A number of questioning techniques observed during the inspection should be further developed and honed in order to maximise the potential benefits that may accrue to students. These areas include individualised questioning of students and the increased use of questioning during the summation of lessons to accurately gauge students’ knowledge and understanding.

In almost all lessons observed, student behaviour was very good and a positive participative environment where students and teachers worked harmoniously was evident. The few instances of student misbehaviour occurred as a result of time management or lesson transition issues. These minor classroom management issues should be addressed in order to maintain the overwhelming positive atmosphere observed during lessons.

Classrooms were very well organised and were most appropriate to the teaching and learning of the various subjects. Good quality photographs, pictures, drawings and student
Students’ understanding, competency and skills in the subjects inspected were observed to be very good. This was evident from students’ portfolio work, their knowledge of texts, their parametric modelling skills, and their interactions using the appropriate target language. In addition, uptake and attainment at higher level in certificate examinations is generally good in the subjects inspected and this demonstrates high expectations on the part of teachers and their encouragement of students to take higher level papers.

4.3  Assessment

Students are regularly assessed in a variety of ways throughout their time in school. Third and sixth years sit monthly tests, while all other year groups sit formal assessments biannually. This practice is commended. Students are assessed and monitored in class through the incorporation of question and answer sessions, homework assignments and class tests. The regular testing, monitoring and evaluation of students’ knowledge and skills are commended.

The suitability of the methods employed to organise records of students’ work varied considerably. Best practice was observed where student portfolios were used to record and compile completed work. This method allows students to use their own work as a useful study aid while also ensuring that an up-to-date record of completed work is available to both teachers and parents. It is imperative that all students retain a detailed catalogue of completed work. The format of such a catalogue should be decided in a collaborative manner at subject department level.

A number of assessment for learning (AfL) techniques were employed during lessons observed. These included providing students with both oral and written formative feedback on completed tasks and encouraging students to draft and redraft their work. While the monitoring and correction of students’ work was generally very good, in some subjects it remains an area for development.

Contact with parents is maintained through the annual parent-teacher meetings held for each year group. The school also issues reports biannually for first, second and TY groups and on a more regular basis for third, fifth and sixth-year students. However, there is scope to further develop the use of the students’ journal in this regard. The ongoing commitment to informing parents of students’ progress is commended.

5.  QUALITY OF SUPPORT FOR STUDENTS

5.1  Inclusion of students with additional educational needs

The school has developed a draft policy on the admission, enrolment and participation of students with special educational needs (SEN). This draft policy draws on Department guidelines to put forward a whole-school approach to learning support and to resource provision. In the documentation examined, many key aspects of learning support and resource provision are emphasised, including the importance of monitoring progress and liaising with parents on an ongoing basis. It was articulated in the course of discussions, that a partnership approach is promoted between senior management, mainstream teachers, learning support teachers and parents in planning and implementing teaching programmes. Communication with parents is very good with a wide level of consultation on an ongoing
basis. The draft SEN policy should be finalised and ratified by the board as soon as possible.

The learning support and resource department consists of a small dedicated team of teachers. Two staff members who have appropriate qualifications in learning support are responsible for the delivery of resource teaching and of learning support. Coordination of learning support is carried out as part of the duties associated with a current SDT post. While senior management expressed confidence in the quality of coordination, it is suggested that teachers with experience and qualifications in learning support be afforded the opportunity to coordinate this area in the future. An inclusive approach to student support is promoted. Students who are exempt from Irish attend small group classes or receive individual tuition in literacy and numeracy. A student may be placed in a small group for additional support in English or Mathematics. Team teaching is also a feature of learning support provision.

Planning takes place in a focused way to meet ongoing student needs. Record keeping is good and minutes of learning support meetings are maintained. Examination of resource teacher timetables and the register of students with special educational needs provides evidence that each student receives their assigned allocation of hours. Relevant psychological reports are received from feeder primary schools and visits to primary schools by the learning support teachers are made, as necessary. Resource teachers monitor students’ performance in examinations and discuss student outcomes with relevant teachers. Progress is monitored so that decisions can be made on the future learning support needs of particular students. Reasonable accommodation is provided in many school examinations.

The learning support planning folder indicates a good learning support programme for first year, second year, TY and fifth year classes with individualised support in third year and sixth year. Individual education plans (IEPs) with clear learning targets are in place, with parental involvement as necessary. This is very good practice. The school library is used as a base room for provision of support to students with additional needs. There is good ICT provision and appropriate educational software and teaching resources. Flexibility is built into this arrangement in that students receive support in the boardroom on occasions when the school library is required for mainstream classes.

Good links have been established with outside agencies. Whole staff inservice is planned with the Special Education Support Service (SESS) and it is reported that positive relations have been developed with the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) and the Special Education Needs Organiser (SENO).

Guidance and student support in the whole-school context

Guidance and care are provided to students by senior management, the guidance service, the chaplain, year heads, class tutors, teachers, student prefects and parents. The school chaplain offers spiritual advice and guidance to students and is available to students by referral or by appointment. Structures and focused programmes are in place to ensure that student care and support are prioritised. These include SPHE, Religious Education (RE) and the sixth year committee. There is very good integration between these teams. In addition, good links have been established with parents, the wider community, work experience employers, NEPS and external counsellors. Counselling is a key part of school guidance provision.

The guidance plan is comprehensive and well structured. It is reflective and self-evaluative in its approach to providing support to each year group. The school makes full use of the ex-quota hours to provide personal, educational and vocational guidance. In addition, the parents’ association provides additional financial support for enhanced guidance provision.
Guidance facilities and resources including ICT facilities and a guidance library are available to students.

The guidance service plays an active part in the first-year induction programme together with the resource teachers, form teachers and year head. The ‘Be Real Game’ is provided as a ten-week module in TY. Differential Aptitude Tests are administered to TY students and guidance is provided regarding subject choice for Leaving Certificate. Weekly timetabled classes in fifth and sixth year support senior students in many ways including goal setting, study skills, career exploration and third level applications.

SPHE is timetabled in first year and second year. It is recommended that SPHE be also timetabled for a class period in third year in accordance with the requirements outlined in circular M11/93. The school is currently planning to introduce the teaching of RSE in senior cycle. This provision should be put in place immediately in line with circular M27/08. The school does not have a pastoral care and RSE policy in place at the moment. Therefore, it is recommended that policies be developed in these areas in the near future and that a strategy for the provision of RSE at senior cycle be prioritised.

A pastoral care committee for students monitors the progress and welfare of students in sixth year. This has proven to be an effective initiative. A meeting of the committee was observed in the course of the evaluation. The committee consists of senior management, the guidance counsellor, the chaplain, the senior year head and form teachers and meets on two to three occasions throughout the year. The school prefect system in place helps to administer an effective mentoring programme to first years and genuinely contributes to the care of first years and to their induction into the school. The prefects are very good role models, have a high profile and play an important role in promoting leadership among students. Their work is highly commended.

The parents’ association expressed their satisfaction with the school discipline system. Form teachers, year heads and senior management administer the code of discipline with consistency and fairness and the graduated discipline system is seen by the whole school community as fair and balanced. The code of discipline is updated as necessary to support the ongoing needs of students and to meet external changes in society. A student logbook is maintained by teachers in the staffroom to build up a profile on student behaviour. It is regularly checked by the form teachers and year heads. The school has put a successful detention system in place. In addition, the school has a very good awards system which supports student achievement in key areas including academic achievement, attendance and sport.

Form teachers and year heads have developed an administrative, discipline and caring role and work with students to maintain a positive school environment. They oversee the welfare of students on behalf of the whole school community. The school has developed a caring atmosphere in line with its ethos and mission. Student attendance is very good. Retention of students from junior cycle to senior cycle and throughout senior cycle is also very good.

6. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT

The following are the main strengths identified in the evaluation:

- All school activities strive to promote the school’s mission and vision.
- Students are well cared for, and school policies and practices reflect this caring ethos. There is a clear sense of community in the school.
- The board brings a complementary range of skills and experiences to its work and members’ diverse experiences contribute to the board’s effectiveness.
Parents play a proactive role in the life of the school and support school development in many ways.

The principal and deputy principal have commendable leadership qualities, display complementary skills and operate as an effective senior management team.

High standards are set by senior management for students and staff and high expectations for student attainment are set and achieved.

School staff has embraced the whole-school planning process which is led by the shared vision and leadership of senior management.

The school plan has identified new priorities for action planning including the progression of the building programme, the expansion of the curriculum and the ongoing formulation and review of policies.

The proactive approach to policy review and development is highly commended.

The school offers access to a wide range of subjects in a broad and balanced curriculum. Programmes and subject levels offered endeavour to serve the diversity of student needs.

Planning for learning support takes place in a focused way to meet ongoing student needs. An inclusive approach to student support is promoted.

Structures and focused programmes are in place to ensure that student care and support are prioritised.

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

- Senior management should ensure that student entitlement to twenty-eight hours of tuition time is met at senior cycle in line with the requirements outlined in circular M29/95.
- It is recommended that teaching resources should be utilised up to a maximum of twenty two hours per week where possible.
- Duties assigned as posts of responsibility should be the subject of review and evaluation on an annual basis, so that school needs can continue to be best met whilst ensuring an equitable distribution of responsibilities.
- It is recommended that staff development in whole school planning and in subject department planning takes place.
- A written plan for TY, incorporating all subject plans, should be developed in accordance with Department Guidelines, as outlined in circular M1/00.
- It is recommended that teachers with experience and qualification in learning support be afforded the opportunity to coordinate this area in the future.

Post-evaluation meetings were held with the principal and deputy principal and with 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 English – 20 March 2009
- Subject Inspection of French – 19 January 2010
- Subject Inspection of Design and Communications Graphics and Technical Graphics – 22 January 2010
- Programme Evaluation of Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP) – 22 January 2009

Published April 2011
Appendix

School response to the report

Submitted by the Board of Management

Area 1: Observations on the content of the inspection report

The East Glendalough School Board of Management are delighted with this extremely positive report. In general we found the whole process to be very helpful and affirming, and we are grateful to the inspectors for their insights and support.

It should be noted that the WSE took place in the context of a nationwide trade union directive that prevented teachers from engaging with the process. Therefore, some aspects of the Teaching & Learning section may not give an accurate picture of what takes place in this area. Nonetheless, we appreciate that the inspectors did everything in their power to present a fair report into what they saw in the classroom.

The recommendations in this report have shaped and directed much of the school development, planning and policy development already undertaken this year, and will continue to be addressed in the coming months.