

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

**Whole School Evaluation
REPORT**

**Hartstown Community School
Clonsilla, Dublin 15
Roll number: 91339F**

Date of inspection: 23 September 2010



**A N R O I N N | D E P A R T M E N T O F
O I D E A C H A I S | E D U C A T I O N
A G U S S C I L E A N N A | A N D S K I L L S**

WHOLE SCHOOL EVALUATION REPORT

A whole-school evaluation of Hartstown Community School 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 four subjects was evaluated in detail. One subject was evaluated in advance. Separate reports are available on these subjects (see Section 7 for details). The board of management was given an opportunity to comment in writing on the findings and recommendations of the report, and the response of the board will be found in the appendix of this report.

INTRODUCTION

Hartstown Community School is a co-educational, multi-denominational school. It was established in 1992 to provide for the post-primary education of students in Hartstown and Huntstown parishes. The primary schools in those two parishes are its main feeder schools. School management, the parents' association and the teaching staff are proud that almost 94% of the local children continue their education in Hartstown Community School.

Programmes currently on offer in the school are the Junior Certificate, Transition Year (TY), the Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) and the established Leaving Certificate. Enrolment currently stands at 1046 students.

1. THE QUALITY OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT

1.1 Characteristic spirit of the school

The characteristic spirit of this school is best described by two words – community and respect. All members of the school community who met with the inspection team described the school as an integral part of the local community. This was also evident to the inspection team in a number of ways including the school's open, non-selective admissions practices, the close links established with its feeder primary schools and its extensive community education programme. It was clear that members of the board have a strong sense of community ownership of, and responsibility for, the school. At interview with the inspectors, members of the parents' association described the school as 'the heart of the community.' The commitment to openness and transparency evident in the way both the board of management and the senior management team engage with the school community is entirely in keeping with the understanding of the school's characteristic spirit articulated by the parents.

A second key element in the school's characteristic spirit is the importance placed on mutual respect, evident in the interactions between school management, teachers, parents and students. This value underpins a number of policies developed in the school, most notably the code of behaviour, and it was clear during this evaluation that it contributes to an orderly and pleasant learning environment for all students.

1.2 School ownership and management

The first board of management was established in 1992. The current board had been appointed just prior to the whole-school evaluation. It is properly constituted and operates in accordance with the requirements of the Education Act 1998 and sound operational practice. Re-

appointments of some representatives ensure, however, that the breadth of school management experience gained by previous boards continues to be available to the school. All members have received training for their role from their respective organisations. To build on this good practice it is suggested that the board access collective training to support its role in strategic planning for the future development of the school.

From its inception, all the boards of management have been very actively involved in the management of the school. Meetings are held regularly. Agendas are prepared and circulated and minutes of each are maintained. Decision-making is based on consensus by the full board, sometimes after issues are discussed and debated at length. Decisions are made with the best interests of the students as a central consideration. Teachers' representatives bring an agreed report back to their members following each meeting. The parents' representatives are members of the schools' parents' association (PA) and they make a similar report at PA meetings. It is open to them to include some notes on matters discussed at board meetings in the school newsletters. The board publishes an annual report to parents on the work of the school. This document provides very good quality information on school development planning, curriculum developments, and student outcomes. It also draws parents' attention to other sources of information about the school, for example, the school's website, newsletters home and an excellent handbook for parents which is updated annually. The board is highly commended for the open and consultative manner in which it conducts its business.

The board is a key driver for development in the school, identifying priorities and delegating responsibility for achieving these to senior management and staff. One such priority, for example, is raising students' expectations and overall levels of attainment in certificate examinations. A thorough review of examination results is carried out annually and the board reported that the emerging issues have informed some practices in the school, for example, a shift away from foundation-level courses and greater uptake of higher-level courses. It was also evident to the inspection team that it has become standard practice in some subject departments, for example in Home Economics and Science, to use the results of the analysis of student attainment in certificate examinations to inform planning for teaching and learning. It is recommended that this approach should be adopted by all subject areas with a view to achieving the board's aims in this regard.

Another priority for the board is securing additional accommodation and facilities for the school and planning in this regard is at a very early stage. Considerable investment in upgrading the existing facilities has taken place and the board is keen to manage the energy requirements of the school in as efficient a manner as possible. To that end, insulation on the outside walls has been improved, some motion-sensitive lighting has been installed and the main door to the school operates automatically. The board is very supportive of the Green-School committee and is proud that Hartstown Community School has been awarded two green flags.

The board recognises the efforts and achievements of both staff and students annually. It sponsors the awards ceremonies for students, for example, and members of the board attend school functions throughout the year. The board also hosts a dinner for the staff at the end of each year to recognise their efforts and to build positive morale in the school. Senior management expressed appreciation for the high level of support received from the board and for its active engagement with school life.

Partnership with parents is central to the school's ethos. Following a period of inactivity, a PA has recently been re-established, with significant support from school management. Annual general meetings are held and it was reported that these are usually well attended. The

association's committee is composed of those parents who wish to attend meetings which are generally held every half-term. Currently, there are no elected officers and the school principal serves as acting chairperson for PA meetings. It is recommended that the current PA and the board work to establish the association on a proper footing, perhaps drawing on supports available from the Parents' Association of Community & Comprehensive Schools (PACCS), of which the PA is a member. The training already accessed by members of the PA on setting up appropriate committee structures will be a very useful foundation for this work.

Despite the informality of their structure, the PA has made valuable contributions to the school. For example, the introduction of an open day to familiarise fifth and sixth-class pupils with the school was built on a suggestion made by the association. Helpful research, carried out by the association, identified an issue in relation to the weight of schoolbags carried by first-year students and a number of changes have been made to alleviate this problem. The parents' association is also committed to providing support to parents and has established a very good practice of meeting parents at the open day and being available during parent-teacher meetings. It is suggested that the association should consider how the SMS texting service available in the school, the newsletters and the school website could be used to promote and heighten awareness of their work among the general parent body.

The parents interviewed during the evaluation were very pleased with the level of communication between school and home and reported that the principal and deputy principals were supportive, and approachable.

1.3 In-school management

The senior management team in the school consists of the principal and two deputy principals. All three were established members of the teaching staff prior to their appointments and they share a common understanding of the school's mission. They expressed appreciation of the fact that they had inherited very good management and leadership structures which they are committed to maintaining and developing. The principal, who was appointed in 2009, provides leadership of a very high quality to this team and to the whole school. With the deputy principals, he has set out a clear agenda for the development of the school. The principal's address to staff, which is made at the first staff meeting of the school year, is reproduced in the staff handbook. This address identifies a number of key teaching and learning priorities for the year. Teachers are supported in their efforts to achieve those priorities in a number of ways, including the allocation of time for subject planning and the support offered by each deputy principal to specific year-group teams within the school. The visibility of the senior management team on the corridors of the school is seen by staff as a good support for their work.

The principal and deputy principals reported that they have clearly specified individual areas of responsibility. They meet for a short time at the beginning of the day and meet regularly though informally during the day. They demonstrate a shared vision and passion for the school which is very student-focused. Together, they continue to foster the culture of teamwork established by former principals. This is most evident in the clear management structure which is based on year groups. The partnership approach adopted assigns responsibility for the management and support of students to a year team, comprising the year head, assistant year head, tutors, a guidance counsellor, a learning support teacher and one of the deputy principals. Currently, year heads meet the senior management team on a weekly basis to ensure that issues are identified and addressed promptly and in a consistent manner across the school. It is recommended that the school consider the advantages of establishing regular meetings, perhaps on a termly basis, to include all members of the year team.

The school's middle management team is made up of the assistant principals and special duties teachers. Four of the school's twelve assistant principal posts are currently vacant and these will remain unfilled due to the moratorium on promotional posts in the public service. Senior management reported that this has presented particular challenges for the management of the school. There is a significant investment of posts in the year head system, as five assistant principals and five of the eighteen special duties teachers are assigned to year head and assistant year head roles. However, the senior management believes that this is worthwhile and is a necessary consequence of the management structure which the inspectors found to be working very well in this school.

The current schedule of post responsibilities has evolved over many years. As each post becomes vacant, the full teaching staff is invited to suggest what duties should be attached to it so that, in effect, there has been no formal whole-school audit of the schedule of posts. It is acknowledged that some of the post duties have been adjusted over the years, indicating a commendable level of willingness among post-holders to take on revised duties or to further develop their roles to meet changing needs. However, it is recommended that a whole-school audit of school management needs and a re-identification of post duties should be carried out in order to ensure that the post structures meet the current and emerging needs of the school. This should be led by the board, involve all staff, and be carried out with reference to the key development priorities identified in the school plan. The schedule should then be reviewed regularly.

All post-holders undertake and complete their individual responsibilities as assigned. The year heads address the teaching staff at every staff meeting, ensuring that everyone is kept informed of issues relating to each year group. All post-holders present end-of-year reports to the whole staff, reflecting on what went well in their work during the year and outlining proposals to develop their posts.

There are excellent, thorough procedures in place to assist the induction of new staff and mentors in the subject areas of the new teachers are appointed. The comprehensive staff handbook contains a wealth of relevant, useful material to assist any teachers who are new to the school, including a copy of the school policies. This handbook is updated annually. Post-graduate Diploma in Education (PGDE) students working in the school are supported by regular meetings focussing on aspects of teaching facilitated by one of the deputy principals.

In keeping with the open management approach adopted in the school, communication is very good. Strategies used to communicate with parents include the parents' handbook, which is renewed annually; the school web page, newsletters home and an SMS text messaging service. Communication with the general student body is maintained through year group daily assemblies and through the school intercom system, which is used only minimally. Staff meetings are held six times per year to an agreed agenda and minutes were made available for inspection. On a daily basis, communication between senior management and teachers is maintained in a number of ways, including announcements during break and the use of notice boards in the staff room. Teachers with whom the inspection team engaged indicated that senior management in the school is helpful and approachable.

The relationship between students and staff reflects the school's commitment, as expressed in its mission statement, to 'provide for its pupils an atmosphere of security and belonging'. The school has a very effective code of behaviour which has the respect of both students and parents. A positive approach, rooted in respect for self, others, property and openness, is taken to behaviour management. Members of the inspection team noted the very good behaviour of students and the

courteous manner with which they addressed themselves and their teachers. Those students who met the inspectors spoke freely of feeling respected by teachers and they believe that they are treated fairly. A 'Charter of Behaviour' and 'Pupil Guidelines' are published in the parents' handbook, the staff handbook and the students' journal, with some variations. These reflect ongoing reviews of the charter and the school's behaviour management approach. It is recommended that the school community should agree a single version which should be reproduced faithfully in all relevant publications.

The enrolment practices in the school are open, inclusive and welcoming of all applicants, in keeping with the ethos of the school. The school's admissions policy was recently reviewed to ensure that the commitment to provide a place for all children in the parishes of Hartstown and Huntstown would be maintained into the future. Very good relations with the primary schools in those parishes have been established and an open-day is held annually to encourage pupils and their parents to visit the school. Despite this genuinely open enrolment approach, the school's admissions policy does require some minor amendments. In particular, it is suggested that the wording of section 10 in the admissions procedures is ambiguous and does not make it clear that admission is not dependent on the payment of a voluntary contribution to the school's Sports and Recreation fund. Similarly, reference to a re-registration fee, made in the parents' booklet, should be clarified so that it is appropriately described as a voluntary contribution.

1.4 Management of resources

The school is in compliance with Department regulations with regard to the number of class contact hours per week and the number of days of instruction per year.

The school's staffing allocation for the 2010-2011 school year, when all available entitlements and additional concessions have been included, is 71.52 whole-time teacher equivalents (WTE). In general, teachers are appropriately deployed according to their qualifications, skills and interests and their access to teaching subjects at different levels is facilitated by collaboration within subject departments. This is commended.

Facilities to support the implementation of the curriculum are well organised and maintained and senior management makes every effort to ensure the availability of specialist rooms for the relevant class times. The board has also prioritised the further development of the school infrastructure as part of its strategic plan. Actions already taken include the installation of paths around the perimeter of the school and a programme of replanting boundary hedges with native varieties. Improvements to the sporting facilities available include the draining of a pitch and planning for an all-weather pitch and new sports hall have begun.

The work of the team of ancillary staff responsible for the maintenance of the school is highly commended. Though the building is eighteen years old, it is very well maintained and presents like a new school thanks to their efforts. Inspectors noted the very good displays of students' work and the celebration of students' sporting, academic and cultural achievements which are recorded in photographs exhibited on the school corridors.

The school has excellent information and communications technology (ICT) facilities. Participation in the high-speed broadband project co-ordinated by the National Centre for Technology in Education (NCTE) has enabled the installation of data projectors in all classrooms. There are ten interactive whiteboards in the school and two computer rooms. First and second-year students are timetabled for lessons in ICT and senior students can achieve the European Computer Driving Licence (ECDL). A good internet usage policy has been developed and parents

are required to sign an acceptable use agreement on behalf of their children. The integration of ICT into learning and teaching as a tool to extend, enhance and enrich learning has been prioritised as part of the school's strategic plan.

A health and safety policy is in place and fire drills are carried out twice annually. The health and safety policy does not include records of audits of safety issues, though a full fire safety audit was conducted in 2009-2010. It is recommended that an annual all-risks audit should be conducted at the end of each academic year. This will identify risks which may have arisen during the year and allow these to be addressed during the summer break. Subject departments which have been assigned specialist rooms should be involved in carrying out the audit in those rooms. In some specialist rooms, it is necessary that the boundaries of safe operating areas be re-marked and first aid boxes should be prominently displayed.

2. QUALITY OF SCHOOL PLANNING

Records of the school's involvement in formal school development planning since 2000 were made available to the inspection team. These indicate a very strong focus on curriculum and on the development of structures to support student achievement in the school. Planning priorities have in the past been identified by various sectors of the school community, including the board, the senior management team, teachers and parents. Good processes are in place to address those priorities and develop relevant school policies and practices. Typically, task groups are established comprising teachers who have an interest in the area for development. In this way, almost all teachers are involved in planning at whole-school level. Proposals from task groups are put to the full staff, including senior management. Consultation with parents and, in the case of a small number of policies, with students, follows. It is suggested that the school will have much to gain from a more formal involvement of representative students in the planning process. All policies are referred to the board where they are discussed thoroughly before ratification. A particular feature of planning in Hartstown Community School is the excellent quality of the data gathering process which has underpinned the development of school policy. There is considerable evidence of very thorough self-review and evaluation as the basis for planning. This includes surveys issued to parents and students, analysis of uptake of higher-level courses and the use of pre-entry tests as base-line data against which to measure students' progress in the school. This is excellent practice.

A school plan, as envisaged by the Education Act (1998) Section 21, has been compiled by the school. A significant number of relevant policies, readily accessible to all members of the school community, has been developed. However, the development of a Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) policy, in accordance with guidelines issued by the Department in Circular Letter 37/10, is recommended as a priority. Copies of some policies are included in the handbook for parents and in the student journal. The handbook and the board's annual report to parents also make it clear that all policies are available on request to parents. This level of accessibility is highly commended and is indicative of the commitment of school management to openness and transparency. There is evidence of systematic review of policies, for example, the admissions policy and the charter of behaviour have been considered recently. In reviewing policies, it is suggested that care should be taken to ensure that the language used in policies is accessible to all. Versions of policies which are no longer active should be archived to avoid confusion regarding which policy is being implemented. For the same reason, it is recommended that the board also sign and date all ratified policies. All policies developed in the school should be included in the school policy folder.

Subject department structures are well established in the school and teacher meetings are facilitated at least twice each year to support planning for teaching and learning. The good work completed by subject departments in relation to subject planning is acknowledged.

Evidence was provided to confirm that the board and staff have taken appropriate steps to develop policies in line with the provisions in *Children First: National Guidelines for the Protection and Welfare of Children* (Department of Health and Children, 1999, updated issue May 2004) and *Child Protection Guidelines for Post-primary Schools* (Department of Education and Science, September 2004). Evidence was also provided to confirm that the board has adopted and implemented the policies. A designated liaison person has been appointed in line with the requirements of the Departmental guidelines. It is recommended that the school's policy in this regard should be revisited annually with all members of staff, including the administrative and ancillary staff.

3. QUALITY OF CURRICULUM PROVISION

3.1 Curriculum planning and organisation

Hartstown Community School offers the Junior Certificate, the established Leaving Certificate and the Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) programmes. An optional Transition Year (TY) programme is also available. A very good range of subjects is on offer to students in both junior and senior cycles and all subjects are accessible to all students. Given the multicultural nature of the student population, the arrangements made by the school to provide mother-tongue lessons in Russian, Polish, Lithuanian and Romanian are highly commended. These language lessons take place once a week after school and focus on preparing students for the Leaving Certificate examinations in these subjects. A course in Applied Mathematics, which is offered before school begins, is also available to students.

First-year students are placed in mixed-ability class groups within three bands. Their achievement in pre-entry assessments and reports from primary schools inform their placement in specific class groups within each band. From second year, the strategy of 'setting' on the timetable is used variously to allow students to make decisions about the levels at which they study English, Irish and Mathematics. Additional teachers are allocated to the second and third bands to facilitate the formation of small class groups for English, Irish and Mathematics and to support a small learning support class for English and Mathematics from first year. Class groups for all other subjects are of mixed-ability, including students from class groups across each of the three bands. The flexibility which this timetabling arrangement allows is commended, particularly as student placement is carefully monitored and changes are made in the best interest of the students involved in the early part of each academic year.

The TY in the school is well documented. The elements of an effective TY are visible in the balance achieved between core and modular subjects, between traditional academic and innovative TY courses. This is a popular option in the school and each year two class groups are formed. Graduates of this programme who met with the inspectors were enthusiastic about the work they had done and were appreciative of the opportunities TY had provided for them. It is noted that, following a successful experience of Japanese in TY, students have opted to continue the study of this language to Leaving Certificate level. The support of school management in facilitating this is commended.

The advantages of participation in the TY programme have been carefully researched in the school. In addition, students' and parents' evaluations of the programme offered have been conducted from time to time. The data gathered identified a high level of satisfaction with the programme and indicates significant benefit in terms of success in the Leaving Certificate. The school's own research confirms research at the national level and senior management has identified greater uptake of this option as a strategic goal for the school. In that context, the need to appoint of a TY co-ordinator might be considered during the audit of schools needs recommended above in 1.2.

Arrangements for work experience in both TY and LCA are co-ordinated by a post-holder. The process of identifying work placements and monitoring students' experiences is well managed.

A new co-ordinator had been appointed to the LCA just prior to this evaluation. No planning documentation was available and it was reported that the outlines provided by the relevant LCA subject syllabuses are being used to guide teaching and learning. It was evident in the subject department planning folders examined that planning for this programme has been undertaken, though the quality of the plans does vary. In order to support the work of the new co-ordinator, the following recommendations are made. A programme plan for LCA, similar to the plan available in the school for TY, should be developed. In the initial stages of planning, a core group of teachers interested in LCA and the co-ordinator should meet to identify the school's goals for LCA and to progress the development of the programme plan. Subject departments should adopt a creative approach to developing a rich and appropriately challenging programme for their students, building on the syllabus documentation as a starting point.

It is suggested that all programme plans should include a more regular review process which allows for the formal evaluation of their implementation and effectiveness in supporting students' learning. This review should involve teachers, students and parents.

The school timetable allocates time for almost all subjects as appropriate, and distributes the allocated time suitably. However, Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) is not available to students in the two top-band class groups in third year. Whilst the attached subject inspection report discusses provision for SPHE in greater detail, the board is reminded here of the requirement specified in Circular Letter M11/03 that SPHE must be timetabled for the equivalent of one class period of SPHE in each year of the junior cycle.

3.2 Arrangements for students' choice of subjects and programmes

Very good arrangements are in place to support students' subject choices. Prior to entry, sixth-class pupils from the feeder primary schools are invited to an open-day in the school aimed at improving transition from primary and also at introducing students to some of the range of subjects available in the school. An information booklet is provided which gives details of the optional subjects available and in-coming students make their choices prior to entry in September. There is good monitoring of their experiences of those subjects as they settle into first year and changes are facilitated as necessary.

The school organises information evenings for students and their parents on subject options and programme selection at the end of third year and following the TY. The facility for students in TY to sample a new subject, such as Art or the senior-cycle science subjects, for the year is commendable also. The facility to continue the study of some of these subjects to Leaving Certificate is positively noted. Comprehensive advice on the implications of subject choices is provided by the guidance department and a detailed booklet provides information in relation to

course content and the level of challenge in each. Students then choose freely from among the list of available optional subjects and option bands are created. This caters for the preferences of the majority of students and is good practice.

3.3 Co-curricular and extracurricular provision

There is an enthusiastic and energetic teaching staff in the school and their shared focus on doing what is best for students is particularly evident in the wide range of extracurricular and co-curricular activities which they facilitate. A variety of sporting, cultural and social activities is available and accessible to all students. All students are encouraged to become involved in extracurricular and co-curricular activities and their achievements are recognised through the information displayed in the school foyer, the awards night and through the annual school magazine.

The school benefits from the commitment of time, energy, enthusiasm and care which the many teachers who provide these experiences bring to these activities. This was acknowledged by the parents, students and the board who are appreciative of their work. It was reported that the extracurricular programme makes a significant contribution to the very good relationships which exist between staff and students. The fact that past students continue to volunteer their time to help with coaching, for example, is indicative of the strength of the loyalty to the school which the extracurricular programme develops.

4. QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN SUBJECTS

4.1 Planning and preparation

Subject department structures are well established in the school. In almost all subjects planning time is made available for discrete subject teams to meet and minutes are recorded of these formal meetings. More informal meetings take place on a regular basis. In many of the subjects evaluated these practices have proved very effective in agreeing practice in areas such as class planning, assessment procedures, resource development and programme review. To standardise practice senior management should facilitate formal meetings for all of the taught programmes and subjects as part of the calendar of subject department meetings. As a means of sharing best practice, the agenda of these meetings should routinely provide opportunities for teachers to share their professional expertise by discussing effective teaching strategies and resources. All subject teams should keep records of meetings to facilitate continuity between meetings and foster a culture of reflective practice.

At the time of the evaluation no subject co-ordinator was in place for one of the subjects evaluated due to the retirement and non-replacement of the post holder. The absence of a co-ordinator impacts negatively on the subject department planning process. The practice of aligning the role of subject co-ordinator to a post of responsibility should be reviewed. It can be more beneficial to rotate the position among the teaching team in order to build capacity and to enable each teacher to assume a leadership role in the continued development of the subject in the school.

A review of all subject department planning folders indicated that the quality of the plans produced is not consistent across all departments. The best planning exemplars were based on identified learning outcomes for students and they clearly linked teaching and assessment strategies to those outcomes. It is recommended that the sharing of good planning practice across

the subject departments should take place. The teamwork and collegiality which were noted by the inspectors as key strengths of the staff in this school will support this work.

Subjects departments are equipped with a very good range of resources to support student learning. It was evident during the evaluation that many teachers have developed an extensive range of additional resources to support teaching and learning.

Good quality short-term planning was evident for the lessons observed. In many instances lesson planning provided for the integration of a variety of teaching strategies and the use of a range of resources. This proved very effective in enriching the learning experiences of students.

4.2 Teaching and learning

Most classrooms are teacher-based or subject-based, have digital projectors and computers, are print-rich or have subject-relevant displays on their walls. This provided a very good environment for teaching and learning. Many teachers availed of the opportunities provided by the ICT equipment in classrooms to utilise various computer-based applications in teaching their classes. Judicious use of ICT was noted in several cases, where teachers used not only text but graphics, diagrams, video-clips, cartoons and other pictorial representations to advance the lesson. In many of the lessons observed, teaching and learning were enhanced by the use of this methodology. Students' responses to ICT-based material were positive and their reactions to questions and work following use of these methods showed understanding and comprehension.

In a majority of classes visited, the topic or theme for the lesson was displayed on the board or screen, and was accompanied by the relevant learning objectives. This was good practice which kept students focused on the task for the day and acted as a constant reminder as to what the lesson aimed to achieve. Where this was not the case, the inspectors have recommended to teachers that they avail of this useful and constructive practice.

Teachers employed various ways of engaging their students in the processes of the lesson, and a wide variety of methodologies was in evidence. Questioning techniques, which featured in most lessons, were positive and focused. Individual and general questions were posed by teachers, and differentiation was in evidence in most lessons, with higher-order questioning being used in many instances. In some lessons pair or group work was used to good effect, and it is recommended that all teachers use this practice in their classes. Where students worked in small groups, they focused better on the task in hand and clearly benefited from the experience. Well-devised worksheets were in evidence in some lessons and these assisted in the learning process, especially where the activity was designed to include the skills and abilities of all the students.

In most lessons inspected, text-books were used sparingly or in a focused manner. It was clear that students benefited from this practice, especially if the work included using material, visuals or questions from the chapter. In some lessons where there was over-reliance on the text book, it was recommended that a greater variety of teaching and learning methods be used. Students in most of the lessons observed engaged well with the work and activities of the class, and clearly derived benefit from the lessons. This was especially so where contemporary parallels or real-life examples were used in the work. It was clear that students were prepared to involve themselves in lessons where this was the case.

In many instances, the learning outcomes of the class were discussed or emphasised towards the conclusion of the lesson. This made contact with the message or objective placed before the students at the commencement of the lesson, and reinforced their learning as a result. Homework

was generally set during or towards the end of lessons and was relevant to the lesson taught. In a few instances it was pointed out that the monitoring or correction of such work need not take up class time which could be used to better effect.

Overall teaching and learning were of a high quality in the classrooms visited, with emphasis on learning objectives, relevant teaching methodologies, inclusive approaches to questioning, and positive engagement with their work by the students.

4.3 Assessment

The school's homework policy, in some cases tailored to specific subjects, was observed to be in practice in a number of the subjects inspected. Students, however, need to be reminded of and given time to make note of all allocated homework in their journals. Policies on the assessment of students' work were not generally developed and it is recommended that subject departments put such policies in place. As a first step in this process, existing practices should be reviewed and a range of suitable targeted assessment strategies agreed among subject teams.

There were examples of the appropriate use of formative assessment strategies, with comments provided on students' written work and affirmation and feedback given on other assigned tasks. It was at its most effective where students' strengths were highlighted and advice for improvement was clear.

In line with good practice, a wide variety of assessment modes was observed, including class tests, formal examinations, in-class questioning, paragraph writing, group and individual project work, debating, peer assessment and student self-assessment.

Teachers maintain records, and in the case of one subject inspected comprehensive profiles, of students' progress. These are communicated to parents through formal written reports issued twice in the school year and at scheduled parent-teacher meetings. The students' journal is used as an additional means of communication between the school and home.

5. QUALITY OF SUPPORT FOR STUDENTS

5.1 Students with special educational needs

Hartstown Community School is proactive in seeking necessary resources to support students with a range of educational support needs. The school receives an allocation of 5.63 whole-time teacher equivalents (WTE) to enable it to meet the needs of students who have been assessed as having special educational needs (SEN). This is in addition to an ex-quota allocation of 1.2 WTE for learning support. Where an undiagnosed special educational need is suspected, parents are encouraged to access a psychological assessment for their child and, where necessary, the board will provide some funding for this purpose. The allocations provided to the school are used appropriately. The model of provision is flexible, with small group sessions where students are withdrawn from class, in-class support and the allocation of additional teachers to English, Irish and Mathematics in junior cycle. In this way, the time available is optimised in the school so that a large number of students benefit from support.

A team of three qualified support teachers, each of whom is assigned responsibility for co-ordinating the support programme for one or two year groups, operates in the school. Their interest in providing a very high quality service to teachers and students was evident both at

interview and in the quality of the planning completed to facilitate the support programme. They are assisted by a number of teachers who are directly responsible for working with individuals and groups of students. There are good systems in place to identify the support needs of students. These include close liaison with primary schools, consultation with parents and the administration of standardised tests. A register of students receiving support is maintained and this provided evidence that students are supported as appropriate.

The resource and learning support teachers play a pivotal role in supporting students to achieve to their potential. Curriculum planning for withdrawal classes is of a high quality. It includes identification of students' priority needs and setting learning targets, carried out by the individual support teachers in consultation with mainstream subject teachers. The collegial approach taken by both to managing the needs of students is highly commendable. As a result, the work done in support classes is targeted at helping students participate as fully as possible in the mainstream lesson. Support lessons are planned in six-week modules and students' progress is monitored and recorded by support teachers. Records of work done and progress made are maintained.

The student population in the school is relatively diverse, reflecting the communities which it serves. Currently, sixty-three students require English language tuition (EAL). The school has an allocation of two WTE, or forty-four hours, for this purpose and this allocation is well used. Very good implementation of recommendations made in an earlier subject inspection report on EAL was noted during this evaluation. A small, qualified, team has been identified and careful planning to identify and address language teaching needs was evident.

The work of the EAL teachers is co-ordinated by a specialist teacher and planning for EAL support mirrors the very good practice of the learning support department. There is very good monitoring of students' progress, supported by the administration of formal language proficiency tests twice annually. The following suggestions are made to both the EAL and learning support teams in order to progress the good work currently being done. It is recommended that a clear developmental focus should be evident in the planning from one six-week module to the next. Attention should also be paid to how the records of work done are filed in order to facilitate ease of access when tracking progress made by individual students in receipt of support.

There is a very commendable emphasis on teaching the language of the curriculum in EAL support classes. However, a small number of students enroll from time to time who do not have any English and confining support to cognitive, academic language is not appropriate in the initial stages of support lessons for this cohort. It is recommended that the EAL team develop a short programme to meet their social language needs for the first six-week module. This will support their integration into the school community.

5.2 Guidance and student support in the whole-school context

The ex-quota allocation for Guidance from the Department is 2.14 WTE. This is used effectively by the guidance team, which includes three guidance counsellors, a psychologist and the school chaplain. The guidance counsellors are members of the year teams which exist in the school and they share responsibility for the delivery of the guidance department programme. The school plan identifies their particular role in providing help to students with decision-making regarding their education and their careers. Together with the psychologist and the chaplain, the guidance counsellors are also available to students who are in need of personal counselling. Each of the five members of the team avails of the supports available from their professional bodies, including supervision and professional development.

The three guidance counsellors meet regularly on a weekly basis and minutes of their meetings are maintained. The professionalism with which they approach their work was evident in the subject plan which they have developed. This is a comprehensive document, with clear identification of time allocations to guidance in junior and senior cycles, guidance curriculum and resources, as well as information on the testing of students and details of internal and external links. The guidance department plan identifies a specific focus for guidance in each year of junior cycle and an outline content plan for guidance classes in senior cycle. Whilst there is no timetabled provision for guidance classes in the junior cycle, the guidance teachers work with those students by arrangement with class teachers. This works well, for example, all first-year students are met by the chaplain and the relevant guidance teacher on an individual basis to support the settling-in process.

In developing guidance planning in the school, a focus on guidance and student support in the whole-school context is recommended. Building on the current guidance department plan as a core element, a whole-school guidance plan should be developed. For example, links between guidance and the many other supports available in the school, and the contribution made by Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE), Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) in senior cycle, the chaplaincy and the student care structures to student guidance, should be more fully developed in an integrated approach to whole-school guidance. While the guidance team has a key role to play in this regard, the planning team for a whole-school guidance plan should include other relevant members of staff and representatives of parents and students. There is a template, designed to assist schools in developing their guidance plan available on the Department's web site (www.education.ie). *Planning the School Guidance Plan*, available from www.sdpi.ie and *Guidelines for Second Level Schools on the Implications of Section 9(c) of the Education Act 1998*, published by the Inspectorate will be helpful during the planning process. *Planning the School Guidance Programme*, published by the National Centre for Guidance in Education (NCGE) should also be included as a reference.

Members of the guidance team are key figures in the support system available to students. Other supports in place include a 'Rainbows' programme which is sponsored by an external agency. Relevant policies including an anti-bullying policy and a critical incident response policy have been developed. A mentoring programme which involves fifth-year students is in place to support students in junior cycle.

Each class group is assigned a class tutor who is responsible for the care of students in his or her group. Tutors were appropriately described by both parents and school management as 'pivotal' to the care system. They are generally assigned to their class group for each of the three years in junior cycle and they may also be assigned to them, where possible, right through the senior cycle. Time is provided to tutors at the beginning of each day to take roll call and to build on the messages communicated at assemblies led by the year heads. As a result, they develop a very good knowledge of the students in their care and are well-placed to pass on any issues to the relevant year head as appropriate. It was evident that there is a clear sense of purpose for the work of the year heads and the tutors which is to ensure that a student's time in Hartstown Community School is 'fruitful and enjoyable', as articulated by a member of the teaching staff.

Currently, there is good informal liaison and internal networking between the members of the year teams, which comprise the year head, assistant year head, tutors, a guidance counsellor, a learning support teacher and one of the deputy principals. The year head acts as the principal conduit through whom information is exchanged. The school is satisfied that there is a good information flow to all relevant parties. However, it is recommended that the school consider the advantages of the recommendation made earlier in this report regarding regular year team

meetings. In the context of such meetings, a register of students at risk could be developed in order to support a co-ordinated approach to providing the full range of supports available in the school.

The evaluation team welcomes the recent establishment of the student council in the school. Together with the mentoring programme, it provides an opportunity for students to develop their leadership and team-working skills. However, the student council is not properly constituted and, though there are good foundations evident, it does not function as a representative body for the students in the school. Student council members interviewed as part of the whole-school evaluation displayed a commendable enthusiasm for their role and a keen interest in representing the views of their peers. The students involved demonstrated a high level of maturity, leadership and loyalty to the school and an eagerness to continue to influence the development of the school. The board and senior management are recommended to formally recognise this goodwill by placing the council on a proper footing. As a first step, the current council should work with the board to develop a constitution for the school's student council. It is also recommended that a clear distinction should be made between the mentoring system and the student council. Support in developing a student council is available from the Student Council Support Service and through their website, www.studentcouncil.ie

6. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT

The following are the main strengths identified in the evaluation:

- The school is an integral part of the local community and almost 94% of the local children continue their education in Hartstown Community School.
- The board has been very actively involved in the management of the school. It is a key driver for development in the school, identifying priorities and delegating responsibility for achieving these to senior management and staff.
- The business of the board is conducted in an open and transparent manner. It publishes an annual report to parents on the work of the school.
- The principal provides leadership of a very high quality to the senior management team and to the whole school. The senior management team demonstrate a shared vision and passion for the school which is very student-focused.
- All post-holders undertake and complete their individual responsibilities as assigned and present a report on their work annually to the teaching staff.
- A positive approach, rooted in respect for self, others, property and openness, is taken to behaviour management.
- Data gathering of a very high quality underpins the development of school policy. There is strong evidence of very thorough self-review and evaluation as the basis for school development planning.
- A very good range of subjects is on offer to students in both junior and senior cycles and all subjects are accessible to all students. Very good arrangements are in place to support students' programme and subject choices.
- Overall teaching and learning were of a high quality in the classrooms visited.
- There is an enthusiastic and energetic teaching staff in the school and their shared focus of doing what is best for students is particularly evident in the wide range of extracurricular and co-curricular activities which they facilitate.
- Subject department structures are well established in the school. Departments are equipped with a very good range of resources to support student learning.

- A very high quality learning support and language support service to teachers and students is evident. Records of work done and progress made by students are maintained.
- A very committed and professional guidance team is in place.
- A very good student support system, built on the collaborative work of year group teams, is in place.

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

- A whole-staff audit of school management needs and re-identification of post duties should be carried out. Consideration should be given to de-coupling the co-ordination of subject departments from the schedule of posts.
- An appropriately challenging programme plan for LCA should be developed.
- Building on the current guidance department plan as a core element, a whole-school guidance plan should be developed.
- The board should work with the current student council to develop proper structures and a constitution. A clear distinction should be made between the mentoring system and the student council.

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

1. The following related Subject Inspection reports are available:
2. Subject Inspection of Art - September 21st 2010
3. Subject Inspection of History - September 20th 2010
4. Subject Inspection of Mathematics - September 29th 2010
5. Subject Inspection of Social, Personal and Health Education - September 23rd 2010
6. Subject Inspection of Geography – published

Appendix

SCHOOL RESPONSE TO THE REPORT

Submitted by the Board of Management

School Response to WSE

Area 1: Observations on the content of the inspection report

The board welcomes the very positive findings of the WSE report. The board is very proud that the WSE affirms the school's success in implementing the core principles contained in the mission statement.

The board is very pleased that the core value of respect was so evident to the team of inspectors during the evaluation process and notes the observations on the very good behaviour and courtesy of students and the good relationships that exist between students and staff.

The board notes the very positive observations regarding the quality and commitment of the teaching staff and the high level of ownership of responsibility of all members of staff.

The board will continue to support the staff in encouraging the holistic development of all students.

The school is proud to be considered an integral part of the local community.

The school will continue to develop through self-review and evaluation based on data.

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

A review of school management needs and post duties has already begun.

A comprehensive LCA programme plan is being developed and is well advanced.

A new whole-school guidance plan has been developed and has been approved by the board.

The student council has been properly structured and the current council has written a constitution.

School Response to Subject Inspection of Art

Area 1: Observations on the content of the inspection report

The board welcomes the very positive findings of the report in relation to subject planning and co-ordination including the overall vision for Art, the quality of teaching and learning and assessment.

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

An Art appreciation course for TY is being considered in line with the recommendation.

School Response to Subject Inspection of History

Area 1: Observations on the content of the inspection report

The board welcomes the positive findings of the report in relation to subject planning and co-ordination, the provision for and use of ICT, and teaching and learning.

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

The weekly timetable has been adjusted to allow for the provision of a third period for History in first year.

We will continue to advance formative assessment, assessment for learning and student-centred learning through our staff development programme.

School Response to Subject Inspection of Mathematics

Area 1: Observations on the content of the inspection report

The board welcomes the positive findings of the report in relation to subject planning and collaboration. The board acknowledges the commitment of the teaching staff to the Maths Club, which is a popular co-curricular activity.

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

The size of the teaching team has been reduced for the coming year.

The first year programme is being updated to incorporate the common introductory course for first year and the strands of the new syllabus.

The recommendation regarding the pace and challenge in higher level classes is noted. Subject development in the coming year will focus on pacing and on questioning techniques.

School Response to Subject Inspection of SPHE

Area 1: Observations on the content of the inspection report

The board welcomes the positive findings of the report in relation to the high levels of enthusiasm and commitment of the SPHE teaching team and the very good quality of planning and reflection. The board is particularly pleased at the inspector's observation that all teaching and learning took place in a secure and supportive environment and that students feel that the dedicated lesson supports their social and personal development.

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

An RSE policy has been developed and has been ratified by the board.

The weekly timetable has been modified to facilitate the timetabling of SPHE as a discreet subject for all junior cycle classes.

It is hoped to focus on SPHE in the coming year at a whole school level. This would facilitate developing programme plans and promoting experiential learning. It would also facilitate the development of an assessment policy.