

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Whole School Evaluation
REPORT

Pobalscoil na Tríonoíde
Youghal, County Cork
Roll number: 91513S

Date of inspection: 23 October 2009



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

WHOLE-SCHOOL EVALUATION

A whole-school evaluation of Pobalscoil na Tríonóide was undertaken in October 2009. This report presents the findings of the evaluation and makes recommendations for improvement. The quality of teaching and learning in three subjects was evaluated during the evaluation. One subject and one programme were evaluated in advance. Separate reports are available on these evaluations (see section 7 for details). The board of management of the school was given an opportunity to comment in writing on the findings and recommendations of the report, and the response of the board will be found in the appendix of this report.

INTRODUCTION

Pobalscoil na Tríonóide opened its doors to students for the first time in September 2006. It was formed from the amalgamation of the three post-primary schools in Youghal: Loreto Secondary School, Christian Brothers' Secondary School and Coláiste Eoin, the vocational school. Pobalscoil na Tríonóide is located on the outskirts of the town of Youghal and is now the single provider of post-primary education in the town and its environs. It is an inter-denominational co-educational institution seeking to accommodate and cater for the educational needs of the wide diversity of students enrolled. The current enrolment is 907 students. The school has a large number of feeder primary schools. The immediate catchment area of the school is the town of Youghal, which has been designated a RAPID area by the government. It also serves the primary schools within approximately an eight-mile radius of the town.

A distinctive feature of the school is its ability to provide for the education of its students through the medium of Irish in its Aonad lán-Ghaeilge. One class group of students is enrolled in first year each year in this stream. The school offers a broad and balanced curriculum and the following curricular programmes are taught: Junior Certificate, Transition Year (TY), Leaving Certificate, Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP) and the Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) programme.

1. QUALITY OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT

1.1 Characteristic spirit of the school

The trustees, the Loreto Sisters, the Edmund Rice Schools Trust and Cork County Vocational Education Committee (CCVEC), actively encouraged and guided the development of the characteristic spirit of Pobalscoil na Tríonóide. Through a series of meetings prior to the amalgamation, the three different staffs found the common ground that produced the principles that underpin the characteristic spirit of the school. Significant time and energy were invested in the collaborative development of the school's mission statement. The prominent display of the mission statement throughout the school building is commended as it serves to consolidate its essence with the whole-school community. The school should consider including in appropriate literature the fact that it is inter-denominational.

Central to the vision of the school is the key concept of '*mutual respect*'. This is reflected in the high level of care afforded to the student body. Students and parents referred to this level of care. They regard the school as a happy and friendly place and commented on the supportive relationships between teachers and students.

The characteristic spirit is evident in the day-to-day operation of the school. The school's admissions policy is open and inclusive and supports the principle of equality for all students regarding access to and participation in the school. The school welcomes all students and respects the diversity of traditions, values and languages. This is clearly demonstrated by the display of the flags of all the nations of the school in the central concourse. The holistic education of students is achieved through the balance between the personal, vocational and academic elements of the curriculum and the provision of a wide range of co-curricular and extracurricular activities. The achievements of the students across a broad range of areas are appropriately recognised through the display of photographs and an annual awards ceremony that celebrates the diversity of students' talents and efforts. This practice is commended as it serves to develop students' potential and promotes growth in self-esteem and confidence.

The bilingual nature of the mission statement is testament to the school's desire to acknowledge the importance of the Aonad lán-Ghaeilge in the school. The display of *seanfhocail* and the organisation of Seachtain na Gaeilge assists in developing an Irish ethos. The school should use the exceptional opportunity provided by the presence of the Irish stream to develop further all students' understanding and appreciation of the Irish language. It is recommended that the school promotes an Irish ethos to a greater extent. Intercom notices, for example, could be bilingual. It is also suggested that the corridor, which houses the classrooms where the students from the Aonad lán-Ghaeilge receive the majority of their tuition, could radiate a greater relevant linguistic culture. It is noteworthy that the school has endeavoured to facilitate the use of Irish as a means of communication outside the classroom by allocating a specific social area for this purpose.

The coat of arms is symbolic of the history and location of the school. Three rings represent the unity of the three schools, the book a symbol of learning and the yew tree is a symbol of Youghal. The coat of arms depicts the school's desire to be an integral part of the community and is in accordance with its mission statement.

1.2 School ownership and management

The appointment of a board of management nine months before the opening of the school was a very good strategy. This enabled procedures for the appointment of the new principal to be put in place in good time and it subsequently facilitated all-important support for senior management and the staffs of the three schools in the amalgamation process.

The current board, which is in its third year of operation, is vibrant and effective with a very good knowledge of the school. The board is appropriately constituted. At the time of the evaluation, the board was waiting for the appointment of one additional trustee nominee. Following initial appointment to the board, members availed of training opportunities to become cognisant with their roles and responsibilities. In addition representatives of the board attend conferences including that of the annual Association of Community and Comprehensive Schools (ACCS) and update their colleagues at subsequent board meetings. This is good practice.

The board meets on a very regular basis and the attendance levels of members is very good. The board is facilitated in its work through these meetings with agendas and draft minutes circulated prior to each meeting. The practice of reviewing and discussing subject inspection reports with a view to implementing the recommendations in a manner that is appropriate to the school is commended. The members of the senior management team deem that they are very much supported by the board. As is appropriate, the principal informs the board of management about school-related issues at each board meeting. To

further enhance communication, it is recommended that the principal also furnishes a written annual report to the board.

The board's decision-making procedures are open and decisions are determined by consensus, taking cognisance of the best interests of the whole-school community. It is good practice that a finance subcommittee has been put in place to monitor the school's finance. The members of the board are actively involved in the discussion of school policies.

The board's stated intention to begin issuing an agreed report to the staff and parents after each board meeting is fully encouraged. As a means of further developing the very good communication that exists between the board and parents, and as suggested in Section 20 of the Education Act 1998, it is recommended that an annual report on the operations and performance of the school be published each year. This could be incorporated into an issue of the newsletter and also, made available on the school website.

Strong links are maintained with senior management and with the trustees. To facilitate the trustees in their understanding of the work of the school on an ongoing basis, a nominated link person to all the trustees has been appointed and minutes of board meetings are furnished. This is good practice.

1.3 In-school management

Senior in-school management demonstrates effective leadership. The principal and deputy principal, demonstrate a strong sense of team spirit. They work very much in a supportive partnership and promote a collaborative management style involving all the stakeholders. They work in a complementary manner and share a sense of common purpose. They communicate effectively with each other on an ongoing basis both formally and informally. They promote shared leadership, building capacity among the staff in the school and encouraging teachers to take responsibility for the organisation and management of different aspects of school life. Self-reflection and self-evaluation permeate their work in an effort to provide for the optimum educational experience of the students. Management is particularly conscious of the need to keep the school, which is a community school, at the heart of the local community. Opportunities for continuing professional development (CPD) are availed of by the senior-management team, both independently and as a team. This is good practice.

The principal is an able and enthusiastic leader whose collaborative style is based on the establishment of good relationships. This positive approach has been effective at all levels of the school. The principal was appointed a number of months before the schools amalgamated. Among his main priorities was the development of good relationships with staff through an understanding of their interests and skills. To facilitate this process the principal met with all teaching staff individually, following the opening of the school. Prior to the opening of the school the principal was actively involved in discussions and in the development of systems that would provide for a successful amalgamation. Particularly noteworthy has been the empowerment of all stake holders to be actively and consciously involved in policy development. The contribution of the deputy principal to overall school management, her visible presence around the school and the energy she brings to her role enhances the quality of senior management. She brings to her position a wealth of knowledge and an understanding of the needs of the local community from her years of experience both teaching and as acting principal in one of the schools prior to amalgamation.

Teachers play a key role in the development of the various elements of the life in the school and above all in the care of students. These include attendance, discipline, care, teaching

and learning, co-curricular and extracurricular activities and policy development. The board and senior management are very supportive of the teachers' engagement in CPD. The inspection team acknowledges and affirms the important role played by teachers in the school.

Meaningful delegation of leadership in the school has resulted in a middle-management team that takes full responsibility for assigned tasks and duties. The duties of assistant principals and of special-duties teachers generally reflect the interests of the individual teachers and they cover many, but not all, of the needs of the school. These duties are carried out in a professional manner and the post-holders show a high level of commitment to the school. Changing the duties assigned after a number of years is good practice as it broadens the managerial and skills base of the teachers. In addition to the work carried out by middle management, in order to meet the needs of the school, there is a significant amount of work undertaken on a voluntary basis by teachers who are not post-holders. Their important contribution to the effective day-to-day running of the school is highly valued by school management. There are also benefits to those who volunteer by way of the experience gained and; this should be borne in mind.

The *muinteoir i bhfeighil*, who has an ex-quota post at assistant-principal level manages the Aonad lán-Ghaeilge effectively in co-operation with the *ceann sóisearach* who has a special-duties post. They provide support for the students and teachers in this section of the school in conjunction with the class tutors who also communicate with the students in Irish.

In terms of management of students, the benefits and effectiveness of the regular meetings of all the year heads with senior management that take place are acknowledged. Nevertheless, to develop a greater leadership role among the assistant principals as a group, it is recommended that senior management also meets with these post-holders as a full group on a regular basis. The members of the group could reflect on their key role in the running of the school and could provide an important discussion forum with the principal and deputy principal for school initiatives and developments into the future.

It is good to note that the school had identified as a priority for this academic year, the need for a root-and-branch review of the duties attached to posts of responsibility. This review should include an audit of the needs of the school and prioritisation of the schedule of duties. This is particularly relevant in the context of the school's recent loss of a significant number of post-holders due to retirement. Posts should also include written job descriptions and contracts should be devised. There is some imbalance among the duties assigned to post-holders at each level and between levels. The posts should be tailored to ensure that the needs of the school continue to be met and to address any imbalance in the current post structure within available resources. Currently, the duties of posts are agreed in order to maximise teachers' expertise and interests. This approach has definite advantages but the value of individuals taking on new and different responsibility should also be recognised. It is recommended that all post-holders furnish a short written annual report to the principal, outlining the work completed, the challenges encountered and suggestions for the following year. In addition post-holders should identify any support and training needs to enable the duties to be carried out to as high a standard as possible. This report should then be incorporated into the principal's written annual report to the board of management.

Communication mechanisms are good. Communication with the staff and among the staff is achieved by announcements at break time, the use of notice boards and staff meetings. It is envisaged that the school will move towards the chairing of the staff meetings by different members of staff. This is proof of senior management's encouragement of devolved leadership. The willingness of the senior- management team to implement suggestions from staff that contribute to the enhancement of whole-staff communication is noted. The organisation of staff meetings and the development of task groups facilitate

collaborative decision-making and serve to allow staff members have a sense of ownership of decisions. The task-group structure used prior to the formation of the school and during the initial years of the school was effective in ameliorating the transition to the amalgamated school. The school is commended for identifying other innovative structures by which to further develop existing practices of whole-staff collaborative involvement in decision-making. Minutes of relevant meetings are posted following the meeting. However, the criteria for inclusion of the technical-support staff at full or appropriate elements of staff meetings are not clear. These should be clarified. The formal communication that exists is enhanced by ongoing informal communication that occurs in a friendly atmosphere. Parents are generally happy with the overall level of communication, which is facilitated by a number of means. Measures employed include phone-calls and letters home, newsletters, texts and the annual parent-teacher meetings.

The effective co-ordination of the procedures for admission of students to the school is undertaken by the enrolment committee. These procedures include an open evening, completion of forms and an entrance assessment. The school should consider identifying the incoming year head for first-year students in advance of the open night. This would facilitate more easily the development of home-school links. The school operates an open enrolment policy and this is good practice. While acknowledging that the policy refers to parents' right to appeal under Section 29 of the Education Act 1998, the enrolment policy should be revisited in light of the implications relating to refusal to enrol in certain circumstances.

The strategies in place for monitoring attendance are very good. Attendance is monitored each morning during the class-tutor period and almost all class tutors use the *e-Portal* system in addition to the more traditional roll call. Students provide absence notes as required. To augment this system, random class roll calls are made at various stages throughout the week. In addition, this year, the holder of an assistant-principal post has responsibility for monitoring attendance and new systems have been put in place to alert parents of students' absence. The school has stated that these strategies have resulted in a more streamlined system for monitoring and reducing students' absences. Completed returns are made annually to the National Educational Welfare Board (NEWB) as required.

The school's mission statement is reflected in its revised draft code of behaviour which emphasises the concept of positive behaviour. Two working groups comprising representatives of relevant stakeholders revised the administration and implementation of the code of behaviour and the discipline procedures. This approach is positive as it ensures that all key stakeholders endorse the policy. In an effort to provide a consistent approach to discipline, procedures are clearly outlined and implemented in an incremental manner. Subject teachers insert reports on individual students into the record book and the year heads subsequently determine the sanction. The practice of linking this policy to other policies such as the anti-bullying policy and the attendance policy is praiseworthy.

Consideration should be given to the development of a mentoring policy that incorporates a tracking system and mentoring process for students. The procedures outlined in such a policy could help raise academic expectations further among the whole student population. Teacher mentors or a dean of studies could provide a formal mechanism for the development of these strategies.

It is noteworthy that students are furnished with opportunities for personal development through their roles on the student council and the school's leadership programme. The establishment of the student council during the first month of the school's existence illustrates the priority which management and staff attribute to facilitating the active involvement of the students in school affairs. In conjunction with the liaison teacher, a constitution was devised and subsequently approved by senior management and staff.

Standing orders to determine how business is carried out have been devised. This is very good practice. The student council represents the general student body. Class captains and vice-captains, who are elected by their peers in a gender-balanced way, represent their classmates on the student council. The executive council which comprises twelve members are enthusiastic and dedicated in their roles and display a keen desire to serve the students they represent. As appropriate, the council members have been consulted in relation to certain school policies. It is particularly noteworthy that student representatives have been on task groups that have been devising policies in areas such as anti-bullying and discipline. The student council played a significant role from the outset in uniting the student groups from the amalgamating schools. Other achievements and activities have included discussion with the principal with regard to the establishment of a common lunch break and the installation of classroom blinds, involvement in the North/South exchange and participation in the Jack and Jill Foundation Appeal. The students' executive council demonstrates a high level of maturity, leadership and allegiance to the school.

Fifth-year students can apply to be accepted onto the school's leadership programme. Following success at interview, students are appointed. Off-site training is provided during the September or October of sixth year. The school should investigate the possibility of holding this training prior to the summer as students would be more cognisant of their roles and responsibilities as leaders at the beginning of the school year. Two leaders are assigned to each first-year class group. They play a significant role in the first-year induction day and support these students at break-times during the months that follow. The willingness of these students to give of their time to mentor the first-year students in their transition from primary school to post-primary school is admirable. Their support is a significant component of the care system in the school.

Student awards are an important positive affirmation of students' achievements and contributions to the school. An annual awards night celebrates students' attainments and excellence in a broad range of categories, for example, attendance, humanitarian awards, performing arts, '*Gradam na Gaeilge Labartha*', sport and academic achievement. In addition the parents' association has sponsored an award for creative writing. The school has experienced significant sporting and non-sporting success in various competitions.

Parents are actively engaged in the school through the parents' association and various task groups. The parents, who meet regularly, are very enthusiastic about their involvement in various initiatives and their participation is fully encouraged by management. These initiatives, which are wide and varied, are designed to support teachers, parents and students alike. The high profile of parents' involvement in the school is illustrated by, for example, the parents' association sponsorship of awards for attendance and creative writing. In accordance with best practice, work priorities have been identified for the lifetime of this committee. Outside speakers have been organised on issues pertinent to parents' needs. It is good to note that the parents' association is affiliated to the national organisation, the Parents' Association for Community and Comprehensive Schools (PACCS). Close links are maintained with Pobalscoil na Tríonóide having hosted regional meetings for PACCS in the past.

Parents have a significant role in policy development. The parents' association is consulted by management when school policies are devised or revised. In addition parents' representatives are members of the awards committee and of the task groups that are reviewing the code of conduct and discipline procedures in the school. Good communication is maintained with the principal. Communication is maintained with the general parent body through the school's newsletter, a letter at the beginning of the year and personal contact. While acknowledging the level of contact with the parents' associations of the local national schools, consideration could be given to the delivery of a short presentation on the open nights for prospective parents on the role of the parents'

association in Pobalscoil na Tríonóide. In addition the parents' association could have a stand at these nights to facilitate individual consultation by prospective parents. It was clear that the parents were very interested in teaching and learning and had accessed previous subject inspection reports in advance of the whole-school evaluation. Parents are appreciative that both principal and deputy principal are very approachable.

1.4 Management of resources

Management analyses current and future staffing needs, seeking additional resources as deemed necessary and appropriate. One constraint in staffing is the available expertise across the subject range to teach through the medium of Irish. The school continues to try to address this issue each year through the employment of new staff. This is to be encouraged.

Two post-holders have responsibility for the creation of the school timetable, under the direction of the principal and the deputy principal. In almost all instances, teachers are appropriately deployed according to their qualifications and skills and due cognisance is taken of the needs of the school and of its students. It is recommended that all teachers are timetabled at least for the minimum number of hours each week stipulated in the relevant circular letters and that all are timetabled in accordance with their qualifications. To assist in effective timetabling, students should be encouraged to commit to participation in the LCVP when making their final subject choice and before they commence the programme.

The secretarial, caretaking, cleaning staff, canteen supervisors and special-needs assistants (SNAs) make an important and valued contribution to the work of the school. Effective technical support is also provided to teachers in the areas of information and communication technology (ICT) and Science. The commitment of all the support staff to the fulfilment of their assigned duties and the support they provide to staff and students merits much praise. Consideration should be given to the organisation of regular meetings between the ancillary staff and management in order to enhance communication. Some ancillary staff expressed a need for clarity regarding their working hours in advance of each school year. To facilitate such staff in more effectively managing their work, set hours should be agreed.

Pobalscoil na Tríonóide is a modern two-storey building. The design of the school building accommodates three corridors, which are connected via the central concourse on the ground floor and a balcony on the upper floor. The design facilitates access to natural light which adds to the open atmosphere of the space. These areas provide meeting spaces for the students and house a number of notice-boards for the display of student work and information relevant to the student body. The school has sufficient facilities for its administration and has ample general classroom space. In particular, its abundant facilities for the sciences, Art, Home Economics and the technologies are of a very high standard. The attractive oratory provides a space for peace and tranquillity in the school. The pleasant appearance of the school's fine main building has been enhanced through the display of school photographs, displays of student activities and subject-related posters. A permanent piece of sculpture has been installed under the *Per Cent for Art Scheme*. The work in this regard is of very high quality and a most effective addition to the school.

The school is currently in the process of developing its school library. The school is advised to advance this project in the immediate term with a view to providing a multi-media facility that would support the development of students' literacy and encourage an interest in reading. The state-of-the-art sports hall, which includes a weights room, the multi-purpose sports courts and the grass pitch are fully utilised by the school and the community. Significant concern was expressed during the course of the evaluation about the grass pitch which has very poor drainage and therefore cannot be used at all times. The school is

discussing this issue with the Department with a view to reconditioning the pitch with an effective drainage system.

The board and school are cognisant of the need to continually monitor and enhance the facilities. An appropriate extractor system was installed in the technology area. Currently planning for the building of external changing rooms is at an advanced stage. It is planned that these rooms will be accessible on a needs basis to the local community. This is another example of the school's desire to be a central part of the local community.

The school buildings and surroundings are maintained to a very high standard and this helps to create a positive teaching and learning environment. The cleanliness of classrooms and the school environment is a notable feature. The commitment of students, teachers and support staff to the environment is evident by their ongoing and active involvement in the Green-Schools programme. To facilitate this achievement, a Green-Schools committee was put in place comprising students from each year group, teachers and support staff including a caretaker and special-needs assistant. This committee meets regularly and the work involved in attaining the green flag included the undertaking of an environmental review and the setting up of clear short-term action plans for each year. This is very good work. Significantly the school introduced a *reverse vending plastic shredder* and monitored and evaluated their progress in reducing waste to landfill at frequent intervals. The acquisition of the Green Flag in May 2009 is reflective not only of the hard work and dedication of the caretaker, cleaning staff and the Green-Schools committee, but of the school community as a whole. The dedication of all involved to this very worthwhile activity is highly commended.

The ICT provision in the school is very good. This includes the provision of a broadband-enabled school with computers, data projectors and DVD players in many classrooms, laboratories and workshops in conjunction with four well-resourced computer rooms and twenty-five computers in the design and communication graphics and technical graphics room. A password log on system has been put in place for students and teachers. It is recommended that all staff members further develop and utilise these electronic resources to support the teaching and learning process. The school has a formal system for keeping stock of existing resources and for identifying and acquiring up-to-date resources.

A comprehensive health and safety statement has been developed and ratified by the board. It is recommended that the ratification date, appropriate signature and review dates be included in the statement.

2. QUALITY OF SCHOOL PLANNING

2.1 The school plan

The school is commended on the considerable level of work, collaboration and commitment required to achieve the successful amalgamation. Effective planning procedures in advance of the amalgamation facilitated the unification of the three schools. A steering committee was set up comprising the principals and teacher, parent and trustee representatives from the three schools. This committee directed the setting up of various representative task groups who discussed issues pertinent to the amalgamation. In this manner, matters that were of concern such as the formulation of common work practices were addressed and the development of working relationships among the staffs of the three schools was also achieved. At that early stage and indeed in the years prior to the appointment of the principal and the board of management, curricular planning, in the form of subject and programme provision, subject plans and resources were also discussed in order to facilitate the smooth implementation of the curriculum on the opening of the

school. All stakeholders encountered during the evaluation stated that the amalgamation process has been successful and the transition into the new school has been seamless. In advance of the amalgamation, the *muinteoir i bhfeighil* contacted another school with an Aonad lán-Ghaeilge to discuss the effective strategies for the management and organisation of this stream. Overall, the planning for the amalgamation was proactive, thorough and well-led.

A good level of planning has taken place within the short lifetime of the school. The processes used in school planning are very good. School-development planning is led by the co-ordinator in co-operation with senior management. The work is carried out in a collaborative manner. Short-term planning priorities have been identified. To advance school planning, the school has engaged with the School Development and Planning Initiative (SDPI), the Irish Association for Pastoral Care in Education (IAPCE) and more recently with Sycol, whose input was in the area of solution-focused planning. Members of staff and senior management have been trained by Sycol and a team has been put in place to direct planning. In an effort to integrate and direct all aspects of planning and to advance the development of the whole-school guidance plan, a representative school planning staff group should be put in place. This team would support the work of the co-ordinator.

Significant work has been done in developing the school plan which is very well organised. Many elements of the permanent section are in place. These include the mission statement, the characteristic spirit, the school profile, the curriculum and provision for student support. It is noteworthy that developmental priorities have been identified in some instances, for example in the TY, LCVP and LCA plans. Task groups were set up comprising teachers and management who were interested in the specific topics. As previously mentioned, in some task groups, students' and parents' representatives also had input.

Considerable time and energy have been employed in the development of school policies. Many draft policies both of an organisational and support nature have been developed. This is commended. Building on this good practice the permanent, developmental, and action-planning sections of the school plan should be clearly identified. It is recommended that the science and ICT technicians and other ancillary staff be consulted on the development of appropriate policies. The board has organised a meeting that will concentrate on the discussion and ratification of the draft policies. This will assist in the further development of the permanent section of the school plan. Appropriate signatures should also be included in all ratified policies. In order to formalise a cyclical review process, it is recommended that a planned review date be specified on all policies. Management and staff are encouraged to proceed with policy development in the other areas that they have identified such as the development of a Relationship and Sexuality Education (RSE) policy. For ease of familiarisation among the student population, amended versions of certain policies are published in students' journals. This is good practice. Circulation of policies to all parents could be achieved by means of the school's website.

The school supports the process of formal subject-department planning. Subject co-ordinators act on a voluntary basis. In some instances the position is rotated among department members. This is a beneficial approach. Subject specific plans and common programmes of work have been developed across the programmes and subject areas. However, there is significant variation in the nature of the written plans. Best practice was observed where programmes of work detailed the content to be delivered within specified timeframes, the corresponding learning outcomes to be achieved, the particular resources to be used, the suggested methodologies and assessment modes. It is recommended that this format be used as a template to further develop subject planning across all subject areas. It is advised that all departments ensure that programmes of work are developed in line with the planning practices commended above.

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

The curriculum provided in Pobalscoil na Tríonóide, offering both practical and academic subjects and a range of programmes, takes cognisance of the identified needs and aptitudes of the students. The curriculum provided also reflects the aspirations of parents and the profile of the student intake in general. Programmes offered are the Junior Certificate, the TY programme, the established Leaving Certificate, the LCVP and the LCA programme.

The school timetable provided the basis for the evaluation of curriculum provision and of the breadth and balance of programmes and subjects within the school. Management reported that the priorities when devising the timetable include continuity, the needs as expressed by subject departments and students' preferences with regard to optional subjects. This is good practice. It is noteworthy that the total time allocated weekly for instruction, for almost all students complies with the requirements of the Department of Education and Science Circular Letter M29/95. However, for the significant numbers of senior cycle students who have time-tabled periods of study, the total time allocated weekly for instruction is less than the requirements of the Department of Education and Science. Management is cognisant of this fact and has agreed to resolve this matter.

Whole-school support for the provision of subjects at all levels is generally good and in almost all instances subjects are provided in accordance with the *Rules and Programmes for Secondary Schools*. However, a small number of issues in respect of timetabling are apparent. The time allocated to the optional subjects in first year is lower than that recommended. It is acknowledged that this shortfall is due to the subject-sampling system. The distribution of lessons across the week is satisfactory in almost all instances. The school should endeavour to avoid timetabling two single lessons on any one day for any subject as is happening in a minority of instances. It is acknowledged that the large number of option blocks and the concurrent timetabling in core subjects places constraints on devising the timetable. To alleviate this constraint and to provide increased flexibility in timetabling, the school should review its approach.

The provision of double periods for practical lessons is praiseworthy. First-year classes and all optional subjects in the remainder of junior cycle and in senior cycle are of mixed ability. There are five class groups in second year and six class groups in third year. The first three class groups are concurrently timetabled in each of the second-year and third-year Irish and mathematics classes as are the remaining groups in each year. This arrangement facilitates students' access to all levels and is therefore praiseworthy. All core subjects are concurrently timetabled in a similar manner in third year, fifth year and sixth year. In addition, in many instances, smaller class groups are facilitated by the inclusion of an extra teacher in the subject-band. These arrangements provide a good level of flexibility to meet students' needs in these subjects.

Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) is not delivered to all students in line with Department requirements. Third-year students do not have the requisite one period each week in accordance with the requirements of CL M11/03. It is essential that school management addresses this in future timetabling. Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) is provided as an integral part of the SPHE programme at junior cycle, as required.

Following the subject inspection of History in April 2007, the board reviewed the optional status of both History and Geography in junior cycle. After extensive discussion it was decided to provide for both subjects in junior cycle in such a manner that makes the study of one of these subjects mandatory by the students, while offering the choice to study both. The board of management is commended on giving due consideration to this matter and is urged to review the suitability of the current practice in the future, in line with the school's policy of self-review.

Currently, students in first year are limited to the study of one modern European language, following the short language-sampling programme. During the course of the evaluation, management stated that when the provision for languages facilitated the study of the two modern European languages available, French and German, the numbers of students opting to study both was small. Notwithstanding that, the school should re-examine its current approach to the provision of modern languages as a component of the review of curriculum provision mentioned above. This could also entail looking at the interest expressed in Spanish by parents and students. The range of science subjects offered in all the programmes is very good. Given the high uptake of Science in junior cycle, the school should consider making Science a core subject for Junior Certificate. This would ensure that all students would have a basic understanding of scientific concepts which would assist them in understanding everyday issues in our scientific and technologically-based society.

Commendably, Physical Education (PE) is timetabled for a double period each week for almost all classes in junior cycle. The school should avoid the timetabling of single lessons for PE in future years. The timetabling of too many class groups concurrently for PE has resulted in an over-demand for the facilities. This also causes a constraint on available personnel and it has potential to lead to health and safety issues. This arrangement does not represent the best use of the school's resources. These issues were raised in a previous PE inspection report. Management is strongly advised to resolve them in future timetabling. It is important that Physical Education does not become a de facto optional subject at any level. It is therefore recommended that the school seeks to proactively change the culture extant in the school whereby some students in senior cycle do not study PE.

The co-ordination of TY, LCA and LCVP is very good. The organisation of each programme is well facilitated by the allocation of co-ordination time. It is noteworthy that in line with advice offered during the TY evaluation, a core team has been put in place for TY. Core teams should also be created for LCA and LCVP whose function would be to sustain and further develop the good-quality programmes that currently exist. Notice boards are used to share information with regard to each programme with staff and students. In some instances photographs of students' activities are also displayed. This is good practice. Significantly, resources are made available to assist in the effective co-ordination of each programme. The level of planning in all of the programmes is good as is indicated by the comprehensive programme documentation furnished. The good practice of indicating timeframes for different elements and modules evident in some programmes of work for TY, LCA and LCVP should be extended to all elements. It is recommended that a formal review and evaluation of all aspects of each programme should be carried out from time-to-time involving all participants, including parents. A co-ordinated approach to work experience should also be devised in order to facilitate the development of common practices. For example, the good practice of employers completing a short-evaluative report

on the performance of a student following work experience in some instances should be extended to all programmes.

The co-ordination of TY is effective and facilitates the delivery of a broad and balanced curriculum. In line with good practice, the programme has core, sampling, modular and calendar elements. It is positive that an issue with regard to insufficient exposure to the delivery of the programme through the medium of Irish for some students in current year was successfully resolved within the constraints of the school's main timetable. The school should ensure that the sampling and modular aspects are balanced in future years taking cognisance of the need to provide subject options through the medium of Irish throughout the year. More detail on the TY programme is available in the separate evaluation report of the TY programme conducted in May 2009.

Co-ordination of LCA is very satisfactory. Although the LCA programme is offered as an option for Leaving Certificate each year, there has been no uptake by the current fifth-year cohort. In line with best practice, the LCA co-ordinator teaches a number of modules. This facilitates the necessary and very regular contact with the students, and also assists in the development of a good relationship between the co-ordinator and the students. Programme requirements such as the monitoring of attendance, the completion of key assignments and tasks are adhered to. Central storage of key assignments should be considered in order to build a profile of the students' work and progress over the duration of the programme. It is recommended that the school continues to explore strategies to increase understanding of the nature and purpose of the programme among incoming fifth-year parents and that of their sons or daughters.

The co-ordination of LCVP is very good. It is noteworthy that support is provided to parents by means of advice on the open nights and information packs which are sent home. In this way the advantages of students' uptake of LCVP and the requirements for participation in the programme are clarified. Links have been established with experienced co-ordinators in other schools in order to share best practice and obtain support. This is good practice. Teaching personnel are changed on annual basis to some extent, but this is offset by a number of core teachers who retain the delivery of the link modules. This focus on continuity is good. Sharing of successful teaching strategies should take place at meetings to support the teachers who are new to the delivery of the programme. The school is compliant with regard to students' uptake of a modern language and the timetabling of the link modules is appropriate. It is noteworthy that good links have been established with local businesses in order to enhance the delivery of the programme

The school endeavours to provide as much of the curriculum as possible through the medium of Irish for students in the Aonad lán-Ghaeilge. Currently, first-year students study all subjects through the medium of Irish. However, the school cannot offer all subjects through the medium of Irish in subsequent years. This is in part due to the desire to provide the students with access to a broad curriculum, while endeavouring to seek a balance between the availability of staff with expertise to teach through the medium of Irish and student uptake. If student uptake does not facilitate an Irish-medium class group in a specific optional subject, then the student has the choice to study the subject through the medium of English. The TY programme is provided to separate class groups using either Irish or English as the medium of instruction. All students are encouraged to use the opportunity of TY to improve their oral and written Irish by completing the programme through Irish. This strategy is a positive feature of the curriculum provision in the school. In some instances these students have continued the study of a number of their subjects through the medium of Irish to Leaving Certificate level. However, the provision of optional subjects for Leaving Certificate becomes more problematic due to smaller student numbers.

As part of its commitment to lifelong learning and to the local community, as previously mentioned, the school offers a programme of innovative evening classes catering for adults. A broad choice of courses is offered based on leisure and recreation, the acquisition of skills and personal development. Examples of these courses include ICT, photography, yoga, woodturning and beekeeping. The success of this comprehensive programme is, in part, a consequence of the team approach, which is clearly evident between the adult-education director and the special-duties teacher, whose duties include the design of the programme, advertising and employment of tutors. In conjunction with the evening programme and in an effort to expand its educational service to the community, Pobalscoil na Tríonóide has examined the feasibility of providing full-time courses which would prepare candidates for employment and provide access to higher-education programmes. To this end, plans are well advanced for a two-year post-Leaving Certificate course, leading to a FETAC award, to commence in September 2010. This is very much in line with the school's adult-education mission statement. The interest and dedication of the adult-education department is praiseworthy.

3.2 Arrangements for students' choice of subjects and programmes

The school is committed to providing the best possible arrangements for students' choice of subjects and it has been very proactive in this regard. In addition to the core subjects: Irish, English, Mathematics, Civil, Social and Political Education (CSPE), Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE), Religion and Physical Education, first-year students also study Science, History, Geography and Music for the full year. Art, Materials Technology (Wood), Technical Graphics, Business, Home Economics and Metalwork are provided as half-year modules. First-year students take a half-term of French and of German and choose between the two languages at Christmas.

The school has trialled and reviewed a number of different approaches to the implementation of a subject-sampling system for first year. The parents and students expressed a high level of satisfaction with the subject-sampling system in the current first year, but students stated it could be shorter. Parents stated that the broad curriculum in first year facilitated the development of organisational skills and responsibility among students. At this stage, a review of the experiences of the last three years should be undertaken. This review should include input from management, subject teachers, parents and students. The review should also weigh up the advantages and disadvantages of the different possibilities. Due consideration should be given to the impact on the total teaching time available for a subject and the negatives attached to students having to continue with subjects they have decided to give up after first year. The constraints imposed by timetabling should also be considered. A subject-sampling system is in operation in Transition Year. This is in line with the TY guidelines. There is commitment from management and staff to maintaining this approach.

Subject blocks for optional subjects in both the Junior and the Leaving Certificate are devised using students' preferences. This is very good practice. In line with this, consideration could be given to obtaining students' input on the choice of vocational specialisms, elective modules and modern languages in LCA, taking cognisance of available resources and of school policy.

Parents are fully included in the programme and subject choice systems that operate in the school and students and their parents are well supported when making choices. This support includes information evenings with relevant presentations, information packs home, guidance support for each whole-class group and individual guidance as necessary. The provision of additional support and advice to the parents of prospective students of the Aonad lán-Ghaeilge in advance of the open evening is a good strategy

3.3 Co-curricular and extracurricular provision

A significant level of co-curricular and extracurricular activities is provided in the school. The activities that are organised for the students and the opportunities offered to them are very wide-ranging, seeking to provide for the artistic, cultural, spiritual, social and sporting interests of the students. Many members of staff give of their time generously to afford students the opportunity to participate in these experiences. The teachers are highly commended for their commitment and dedication in this regard.

Students can participate in a range of sports on both a competitive and non-competitive basis. These sporting activities are well organised. Sports personnel meet at the beginning of each year to agree a timetable for the various sports in order that students may, if they so wish, participate in a number of sports. The range of team sports includes camogie, ladies football, hurling, soccer, football, rugby, golf, basketball and equestrian sports. Individual sports such as athletics are also facilitated.

Management and staff also encourage and facilitate students' participation in other co-curricular activities. These activities include drama, debating, public speaking, the school choir and trips to the theatre. Experiential learning is also promoted through for example entries to a robotics competition, science quizzes and the Young Scientist and Technology Exhibition. The production of musicals such as *Mamma Mia* allow students to utilise a range of skills including acting, singing, orchestral, cosmetics and organisational skills. The provision of these experiences for students is highly commended. Of particular note is the chess club, which was initially formed to meet the needs of a small minority of students and participation now extends beyond that group of students. Students are encouraged to engage in a variety of competitions that enrich their learning across a range of pursuits and disciplines.

Cultural activities include participation in Scléip, Comórtas na Gaelscoileanna, Siamsa and visits to the Gaeltacht. French week and Seachtain na Gaeilge endeavour to enhance language learning with relevant cultural activities. The development of leadership skills among TY students has been facilitated through for example, the organisation of first-year soccer competitions. This is also commended.

Spiritual development and the development of community awareness are noteworthy features of the work of the school. School Masses and retreats are organised and opportunities are provided for students to go as helpers on the annual diocesan pilgrimage to Lourdes and on a missionary visit to South Africa. The current development of a reflection garden and the school's chapel are testament to the importance attributed to facilitating this aspect of students' development.

Newsletters and notice boards acknowledge, and promote these additional school activities and this very important feature of school life. Staff, parents and students are very aware of the positive impact of the co-curricular and extracurricular provision which add significantly to the experience and development of students. Teachers and management are highly commended on the excellent level of provision and on their commitment, enthusiasm and voluntary contributions in terms of time to this very valuable aspect of education in Pobalscoil na Tríonóide.

4. QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN SUBJECTS

4.1 Planning and preparation

Teachers engage enthusiastically in the development and delivery of their subjects. They plan collaboratively and work effectively together to implement the plans. Formal meetings of subject departments are facilitated by school management approximately once per term. Agenda are set in advance and computer-written records of meetings are maintained.

Co-ordination of subject departments is well structured. Subject co-ordinators are appointed by agreement on an annual basis. In TY, the co-ordinator and assistant co-ordinator are highly visible in the day-to-day operation of the programme and co-ordination of the programme is excellent. The guidance department very effectively co-ordinates a guidance perspective throughout the school in collaboration with the well-constituted whole-school guidance planning team.

Very good progress is reported in the development of agreed long-term, comprehensive plans for the teaching of the subjects inspected, including the TY plan and the guidance programme. The efforts of teachers in this regard deserve particular recognition. Some recommendations are made in separate evaluation reports regarding the direction of further development of the plans. These include linking relevant teaching methods to specific content of programmes of work and including the good practice already in place for meeting students' special educational needs. In one instance, it is also suggested that the agreed role of the co-ordinator be included in the plan.

There is widespread evidence of collaborative reflection and review of the plans, and of changes in the plans and their implementation, in response to needs as they are identified. This process of review is identified and acknowledged as good practice in the report on MTW and CS, with the recommendation that it be further strengthened.

Subject-department planning documentation provides a description of the work to be completed within subject areas and this supports short-term planning by individual teachers. While these programmes of work are generally in line with the requirements of the respective syllabuses, recommendations are made in relation to their further development in a number of instances. For example, in one subject it was recommended that the TY plan should be clearly distinguished from the Leaving Certificate syllabus. In general, more emphasis should be placed in plans on stating and clarifying the learning objectives and outcomes to be achieved by students. These stated learning objectives and outcomes should inform classroom practice and planning for all lessons. Incorporation in the schemes of work of the teacher's evaluation criteria and progress made in achieving learning outcomes are commended. The suggestions made in the subject plan for strategies to support students with special educational needs and subject planning for a culturally diverse society are also commended.

A common recommendation in the subject inspection reports is that there is need for a greater focus on teaching and learning strategies in the review and discussion of subject plans. In this context, teaching and learning strategies for specific year groups should be discussed. As relevant, subject departments should also concentrate on teaching approaches and methodologies appropriate to a changed syllabus. The sharing and implementation of high-quality professional practice should also form part of ongoing discussions.

There is consistent evidence of good, and often very good, individual planning and preparation by teachers for lessons which reflected the respective subject and module plans. Individual and collaborative planning in each of the subject departments inspected led to the provision of very good resources which were almost always used very effectively in the lessons observed. The good practice encountered with regard to sharing of teaching resources is commended in the reports. The resources prepared by subject teachers and departments included ICT elements and it is suggested in one case that the more efficient sharing of these should be arranged by means of the computer network in the school.

4.2 Learning and teaching

The quality of teaching and learning observed was good in the main. In almost all lessons, students were engaged by the use of resources, a range of methodologies and by the planned learning. Lessons were coherent in structure and appropriately paced. Smooth transitions between stages and continuity from previous lessons helped maintain students' interest. Lessons progressed at an appropriate pace and effective use was made of time.

Planning and preparation for the lessons observed was generally good. Lessons were well structured and in a majority of instances, lessons had clear aims which were communicated to students at the outset. Where this was not the case it is recommended that teachers explicitly share the learning objectives of the lesson with students. These learning outcomes could then be used to inform appropriate teaching methodologies and assessment strategies.

Resources were used effectively and included visual stimulus materials, appropriate video clips, student presentations and ICT. High-quality demonstrations involving clear board work were observed in many lessons. Whole-class teaching was the approach generally adopted. This was often complemented by individual interaction between teachers and students as assigned work was being completed following teacher inputs. Excellent examples of project work, group work and individual engagement in learning were observed in some lessons and the use of these approaches should be investigated and adopted in all lessons.

Questioning was commonly used to explore students' knowledge in preparation for the lesson content being introduced and to reinforce learning during lessons. There were also, in line with good practice, some good examples of teachers using questioning to challenge students, extend understanding and encourage the expression of ideas in clear language. Further development of this very good practice should focus on framing both challenging and differentiated questions to suit the individual abilities and knowledge of students. It is recommended that full advantage be taken of such questioning throughout lessons as a means of reinforcing students' knowledge and understanding in addition to providing assurance of learning success. A further strategy should involve giving students the responsibility for asking questions of each other which can lead to a move away from teacher-directed questioning to the use of a greater variety of questioning techniques.

It was evident that good relationships had been established with students that facilitated the transfer of information and students' receptiveness to direction and questions. The atmosphere in the classes visited was relaxed and positive. There was a good rapport between the teacher and students, efforts were affirmed and encouraged and corrections were given sensitively. There were good examples of teachers having high expectations of students' capabilities and students responded in line with this. There were also examples of the effective use of class time to provide assistance to individual students.

In some instances examples of students' work and commercial posters were displayed in the rooms together with a range of other subject-related materials combining to provide an attractive and stimulating learning environment. The appropriate use of such displays is recommended in all classrooms.

Effective learning was in evidence in a majority of lessons observed relating to the knowledge, understanding and skills arising in the subjects examined. Students displayed appropriate knowledge and understanding. However, while some students displayed great confidence in their answers, others were more hesitant and were slow to respond.

4.3 Assessment

A range of assessment modes is used across the subject areas. Ongoing assessment of students' learning takes place through questioning in class, the assignment and correction of homework and regular topic tests. This is good practice. In some instances, the type of assessment used is varied. For example, the preparation of posters may be a component of assessment at first-year level while projects and portfolios form part of the TY assessment. This commendable practice of using different modes of assessment to ascertain students' learning should be utilised to a greater extent.

Formal assessment of learning is carried out for all students in November and for non-certificate examination classes in March and summer. Junior Certificate and Leaving Certificate classes sit their pre-certificate examinations in spring. Common examinations are set in some cases. It is urged that the setting of common examinations become the norm in all subjects as appropriate, as this would ensure standardisation across year groups.

In one instance the range of assessment modes used is consistent with the approach in the certificate examinations and this is noted as good practice. In another subject it is recommended that end-of-term examination marks be aggregated with marks from continuous assessment to arrive at overall term results in order that the elements of coursework assessment and the summative assessment are combined in line with certificate examination practices.

In some cases, good practice was evident where teachers, through the use of positive comments, encouraged students' efforts and directed them on ways to improve their work. This is an effective strategy. It is therefore recommended that every opportunity be taken to provide meaningful written feedback to students in the annotation of homework and class work as a support to their learning.

Commendably homework and assessment policies have been devised. Records of students' attendance and progress are maintained. These records are communicated to parents at annual parent-teacher meetings. Communication with parents is further maintained by means of written reports home following term examinations and the students' journals.

The analysis of certificate examination results, which takes place in some subject areas, is recommended across all subjects. This practice would support the school's policy of review and inform subject planning.

5. QUALITY OF SUPPORT FOR STUDENTS

5.1 Inclusion of students with additional educational needs

The school is committed to the care and provision for students with special educational needs. It is noteworthy that a core team, which is co-ordinated effectively, leads the delivery and provision of special support in the school. In accordance with the school's custom, the special-educational-needs team reviews its procedures from time to time. The commitment and dedication of the core team is evident by its willingness to supplement formal meetings with a large number of informal meetings. It is a particular strength that the members of the co-ordinating team and a number of resource teachers are appropriately qualified and have significant experience.

The core team is supplemented to a great extent by other members of staff who are involved in the delivery of support. However, this team, currently comprising twenty-nine teachers, is very large. A positive development, in accordance with best practice, would be to reduce the number of teachers involved in the delivery of learning support and resource

hours as this would strengthen the work of the department and more easily facilitate communication among those involved. Ideally, this team should be composed of interested teachers, who are committed to obtaining the necessary training and qualifications designed to assist and support them in their work. A team that is representative of a cross section of subjects offered in a school is considered best practice, and this is currently the case. The smaller team would also facilitate optimum use of the trained personnel and thus enhance the experience for the students.

Despite the large size of the teaching team, the co-ordinating team successfully endeavours to communicate in an effective manner with the teachers who provide additional support and with the staff as a whole. Attendance by all members of the special educational-needs department is not possible at formal meetings, given the large size of the teaching team and the fact that formal meetings are concurrently timetabled with a number of other departments. This supports the rationale that a smaller teaching team would be more appropriate. The co-ordinator also liaises with subjects teachers. In addition, the co-ordinator is a core member of the pastoral care team. The regular meetings of this team provide a formal forum for communication with senior management, year heads, the guidance counsellors and the chaplain. This is very good practice. Good links are also maintained with external organisations such as the special-educational-needs organiser and the National Psychological Support Service (NEPS). To provide senior management with a complete overview of the year's work, consideration should be given to furnishing a short annual report from the team to management that would review progress, outline successful activities and identify the priorities for the subsequent year.

Early identification of students' needs is a significant feature of the support provided. Strong links have been developed with the feeder primary schools. Effective communication between the principals of the primary schools and senior management in Pobalscoil na Tríonóide, and between the special-educational-needs co-ordinator and the appropriate teachers in the primary schools ensure that pertinent information is relayed. The co-ordinator meets the parents of all enrolled students prior to entry. This is very good practice as it initiates the development of home-school relationships and provides an opportunity to identify further the requirements of each student and to allay any concerns parents might have. Support for the students is based on identified needs. Class groups for all first-year students are devised based on assessments in the March prior to entry. This ensures that the classes are of mixed ability. To confirm students' requirements for learning support, further diagnostic testing takes place in the September after entry. Formal re-testing occurs twice a year. The ongoing screening process includes collaboration with the guidance counsellors, year heads, teachers involved in delivery of support, parents and other personnel as appropriate. This is commended.

The types of support currently operating in the school include small groups and one-to-one subject-specific support as appropriate. Timetabling learning support in the option blocks is not best practice. It is recommended that the school examines other models and methods of delivery of additional support, including in-class supports such as team teaching with a view to using a combination of these which would best meet the students' needs. It is recommended that management consults with the education-support team during the timetable construction process with regard to maximising the benefits that would accrue from the best use of the hours allocated for students with special-educational needs. The timetabling needs of the special-educational-needs department should be identified early in the preceding year in consultation with the core team. This would facilitate the timetabling of the additional hours provided in tandem with the construction of the main timetable and would result in the school being able to provide a more consistent, cohesive and structured sequence of lessons across the school week and from year-to-year.

The Department's allocation for learning support and resource hours is used in the main for the educational needs of identified students. However, the creation of smaller classes across year groups for any particular subject is not appropriate use of these hours. This practice should be not be used in future timetabling.

As a support for a minority of students, behaviour modification classes were introduced last year on a needs basis in an effort to promote the understanding of the consequences of specific behaviours and ultimately bring about improvement in behaviour. This is a good strategy and the approach will be further developed this year. Care should be taken that inclusion in this programme is in accordance with the additional resources allocated to the students. It is recommended that the school explores the availability of support from the National Behavioural Support Service, www.nbss.ie and the Special Education Support Service, www.sess.ie in relation to the operation of this programme.

The special-educational-needs assistants (SNAs) actively support students' learning. Their work is well co-ordinated by the special-educational-needs co-ordinator who meets them on a regular basis. As is appropriate, the co-ordinating team actively seeks additional material resources and reasonable accommodations in the certificate examinations to meet the physical and educational requirements of students with special educational needs.

The accommodation allocated to the delivery of additional support is appropriate. Two designated rooms with notice boards and poster displays provide a print-rich stimulating environment. The department is well resourced with books, worksheets, computers and relevant software which facilitate students' learning.

A comprehensive special-educational-needs folder has been compiled. Commendably, a draft special-needs policy has been collaboratively devised. It outlines the roles of the board of management, senior management and the special educational-needs team. This policy should be extended to include the roles of subject teachers, parents, students and SNAs. In line with the Departmental publication *Inclusion of Students with Special Educational Needs Post-Primary Guidelines (Department of Education and Science, 2007)*, the written policy should specify circumstances in which the various types of support are provided. In addition the school's arrangements for allocating teachers and the teaching and learning strategies should also be incorporated. The policy could also include the methods for tracking students' achievement of learning outcomes.

To date, some whole-staff CPD, for example on the role of the SNA, has been provided. It is suggested that the expertise of the special educational-needs department be shared among the staff, perhaps using short inputs at staff meetings on teaching and learning strategies that can be used in the main-stream classroom. Occasional inputs on effective teaching and learning methodologies could also take place at subject department meetings.

The development of student profiles is commended and the sharing of this information with appropriate personnel is good practice. The school is urged to begin extending this good work towards the development of individualised educational plans in line with the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) guidelines and the advice of the Special Education Support Service (SESS).

Support for students with English as an additional language is co-ordinated by the special educational needs department. Support is provided by means of withdrawal from Irish in the main. Identification of students for this support should be in line with Circular Letter 15/09. To further support a whole-school approach to literacy and numeracy, it is recommended that a whole-school policy is devised. Consideration should also be given to the development of a school policy for English as an additional language.

5.2 Guidance and student support in the whole-school context

The ex-quota allocation for Guidance by the Department of Education and Science is fifty-five hours per week. This allocation is used efficiently by the guidance department, of which there are three members. The guidance department works collaboratively with management and staff in the provision of a comprehensive programme that includes a counselling service available to all students in need of career, educational or personal support. The guidance department programme also includes inputs to class groups on a planned intermittent basis in addition to timetabled contacts.

The guidance counsellors have clearly defined roles. These include roles relating to the induction of new students, the provision of information and support in subject and career choice, the arrangement of visiting speakers, often in collaboration with other subject departments, such as the Religious Education (RE) and SPHE departments, and preparations for participation in external events. The guidance department also co-ordinates a bi-annual careers exhibition that makes extensive use of the network of links that have been established with the local and regional community. This is commended.

The facilities for Guidance and for the chaplaincy are very good. Well-equipped offices are provided that are located appropriately and are suited to the various purposes, such as counselling, for which they are used.

It is characteristic of the guidance department, and of the school, that activity is planned, both with consideration for its implications for other departments and with a view to working collaboratively with those departments. A task group has been established to direct the whole-school planning of supports for students. This approach has led to the formation of a positive, forward-looking environment that facilitates collaboration in the interests of students, staff and the community. The school is commended for having responded positively to the recommendations of the inspection report on the quality of provision in Guidance that was conducted in November 2008.

The school has the services of a full-time chaplain. It is clear that the chaplaincy is integral to the life and spirit of the school and to the local community. As a member of the student support and management team, the chaplain works closely with staff and the local parish in maintaining the school's ethos of pastoral care. This is well developed on a whole-school level and includes a system of class tutors who have strong links with year heads whose roles are more administrative and managerial. In addition to meeting students and staff individually and in groups, the responsibilities of the chaplaincy include the organisation of the annual cycle of liturgical events and retreats and collaboration with the RE department in the delivery of the religious education programme. The process of development of the school's basic values and mission is highly commended, showing openness to continuing development and to creative interventions by outside agencies.

The curricular elements of the whole-school guidance programme are delivered by various subject departments and, in particular, by the SPHE department, co-ordinated by a member of the guidance team. SPHE is recognised as contributing to students' personal and social development. Priorities for 2009-2010 include the establishment of a core team, the progression of SPHE (RSE) into senior cycle and as previously mentioned the development of an RSE policy. It is important that the inclusion of RSE at senior cycle should be advanced in the short-term.

A high level of care by all staff members is taken of the students in Pobalscoil na Tríonóide. Year heads and assistant year heads who have a dual pastoral and disciplinary role, exhibit interest in and commitment to their students. The policy of moving with the year group throughout junior cycle and again for Leaving Certificate enhances their

knowledge of and relationship with the students in their care. The continuing development of the roles of year head, assistant year head and class tutor as part of the integrated support system is highly commended. The care team of a particular year group meets a number of times a year to discuss issues pertinent to the group. This is very good practice. In co-operation with the year head and assistant year head, a student's class tutor plays a very important role in the management of many aspects of his or her life in the school, including focusing on discipline and academic progress. The evolution of the class-tutor role has resulted in closer communication with the year head and this is commended. The class-tutor period is considered to have a key role in communicating with students. The commitment of the class tutors who undertake this caring and administrative role in a voluntary capacity is highly praised. As an additional support for the students, arrangements are put in place for the class tutor to meet his or her class group at a different period each fortnight.

A student support and management team operates very effectively in the identification of students in need of suitable interventions to deal with those needs. The composition of this team is a further example of good joined-up practice. It comprises representatives of senior management, the chaplaincy, guidance and special educational-needs departments and year heads. Effective links have been developed with outside agencies to which the school may turn when outside intervention is warranted both to deal with the needs of students and to support staff in dealing with those needs. It is a commendable feature of the student support team that there is a strong emphasis on professional ethical behaviour in dealing with cases.

Students and their parents are well supported by *the muinteoir i bhfeighil*, the *ceann soisearach* and other staff in advance of entering the school in developing an understanding of the operation of the Aonad lán-Ghaeilge. In addition, the school has devised a *Foclóir na Gaelscoile*, which contains subject-specific terms in Irish for many subjects. The work in this regard is commended and should be further developed to include all subjects.

Other supports for students include the induction programme for first-year students, the use of peer mentors as previously mentioned and the homework club. The informal care role played by all staff, teaching and non-teaching in the lives of the students is acknowledged and affirmed.

6. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT

The following are the main strengths identified in the evaluation:

- The board of management is a vibrant effective board with a very good knowledge of the school; it is active in its support and direction of school affairs and it maintains good links with the trustees.
- The principal and deputy principal have developed a strong sense of team spirit; they work very much in a supportive partnership and promote a collaborative management style involving all the stakeholders.
- The middle-management team takes full responsibility for assigned tasks and duties. These duties are carried out in a professional manner and the post holders show a high level of commitment to the school.
- Innovative structures have been identified to further develop existing practices of whole-staff collaborative involvement in decision making.
- The management of students is very good. Effective systems for care, discipline and monitoring of attendance are in place.
- Students are furnished with opportunities for personal development through their roles on the student council and the school's leadership programme. The members

- of the executive of the student council are enthusiastic and dedicated in their roles and demonstrated a high level of maturity, leadership and allegiance to the school.
- Parents are actively engaged in the school through the parents' association and various task groups. Parents have a significant role in policy development.
 - The school buildings and surroundings are maintained to a very high standard, a visually-rich environment has been developed and this helps to create a positive teaching and learning atmosphere.
 - A high level of collaborative planning has taken place and the processes used are very good. The process of formal subject department planning is well supported.
 - A holistic education is offered to students and this is achieved through the balance between the personal, vocational and academic elements of the curriculum and the provision of a wide range of co-curricular and extracurricular activities.
 - Access to the widest possible range of subjects and levels within the various subject disciplines is offered in order to serve the needs, interests and abilities of all students.
 - The co-ordination of and the level of planning in TY, LCA and LCVP is very good. Resources are made available to enable the effective co-ordination of each programme.
 - The school endeavours to provide as much of the curriculum as possible through the medium of Irish for students in the Aonad lán-Ghaeilge. The TY programme is provided to separate class groups using either Irish or English as the medium of instruction. All students are encouraged to use the opportunity of TY to improve their oral and written Irish by completing the programme through Irish.
 - A dedicated adult-education department offers a programme of innovative evening classes catering for adults.
 - The operation of a subject sampling programme in first-year and in TY facilitates students in making informed subject choices.
 - Students' input is used in determining the optional subjects to be provided and in organising how they will be offered.
 - A significant level of co-curricular and extracurricular activities is provided.
 - Systems are in place to deliver on the school's commitment to the care and provision for students with special educational needs.
 - Care for students permeates all aspects of school life.

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

- It is recommended that an annual report on the operations and performance of the school be published each year. As an aid to this work, the principal should also furnish a written annual report to the board.
- The school's planned review of the duties attached to the posts of responsibility should include an audit of the needs of the school and prioritisation of the schedule of duties.
- It is recommended that all teachers are timetabled for, at least, the weekly minimum number of hours outlined in relevant circular letters and all are timetabled in accordance with their qualifications.
- To integrate and direct all aspects of planning and to advance the development of the whole-school guidance plan, a representative school planning staff group should be put in place which would support the work of the co-ordinator.
- The school should proceed with the development of an RSE policy and the inclusion of RSE at senior cycle should be advanced in the short-term.

- All junior cycle students should be provided with the appropriate instruction time for SPHE in accordance with the requirements of CL M11/03.
- Core teams should be created for LCA and LCVP. These teams would assist the co-ordinator in planning the programmes. A co-ordinated approach to work experience should be devised.
- A smaller core teaching team which maximises the use of trained personnel should be put in place to enhance the experience for students with special educational needs.
- A combination of models and methods of delivery of additional support, including in-class supports should be used in order to best meet the requirements of students with additional needs.

The post-evaluation meetings were held with the principal, deputy principal, staff and board of management when the draft findings and recommendations of the evaluation were presented and discussed.

7. RELATED SUBJECT INSPECTION REPORTS

The following related Subject Inspection reports are available:

- Programme evaluation of Transition Year – 7 May 2009
- Subject Inspection of Guidance – 6 November 2008
- Subject Inspection of French – 21 October 2009
- Subject Inspection of Mathematics – 20 October 2009
- Subject Inspection of Material Technology Wood and Construction Studies – 22 October 2009

Appendix

SCHOOL RESPONSE TO THE REPORT

Submitted by the Board of Management

Area 1 Observations on the content of the inspection report

Firstly, the Board of Management wishes to acknowledge the professionalism and courtesy of the inspectorate in carrying out the Whole School Evaluation.

We say thanks for the support, work and role of the ACCS, Trustees, Staff, Students and Parents during the WSE.

Specifically we welcome positive affirmation re;

- a) Teaching and Learning in the school.
- b) The effectiveness and knowledge of the Board of Management.
- c) The collaborative management style involving all the stake holders.
- d) The professionalism of the middle-management team.
- e) The whole staff involvement in decision making.
- f) The effective systems for care of students, discipline and attendance monitoring.
- g) The dedication, enthusiasm, maturity and allegiance to the school of the Student Council and School Leaders.
- h) The active and significant role played by the Parents' Association in Policy development.
- i) The high standard, visually-rich school buildings and surroundings.
- j) The collaborative planning of the subject departments.
- k) The holistic education on offer; a broad curriculum, co-curricular and extra curricular programme.
- l) The wide range of subjects and levels on offer.
- m) The standard of co-ordination of LCA and LCVP and TY programmes.
- n) The curriculum on offer through the medium of Irish.
- o) The innovative Adult Education Programme on offer.
- p) The provision of subject sampling in first year and TY.
- q) The 'student choice based' range of subjects on offer in the school.
- r) The commitment to students with special educational needs.
- s) The care for students that permeates all aspects of school life.

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) A target date (31 May) has been set for the publication of an annual report.
- b) A review of duties of Post Holders is planned for completion not later than 22 October 2010.
- c) All teachers are timetabled for weekly minimum number of hours for the 2010 – 2011 school year, and with regard to their qualifications.
- d) A school planning staff group has been put in place.
- e) RSE has been introduced at senior cycle, and plans are in place to finalise an RSE Policy.
- f) All junior cycle students study SPHE, first, second and third year.
- g) LCA and LCVP core teams have been set up, from 2010/11 school year.
- h) A special education needs team has been set up in the school, and models of delivery will be reviewed on an ongoing basis.