An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

Whole-School Evaluation
REPORT

Clonkeen College
Blackrock, County Dublin
Roll number: 60092U

Date of inspection: 30 November 2010
WHOLE-SCHOOL EVALUATION

A whole-school evaluation of Clonkeen College was undertaken in November, 2010. This report presents the findings of the evaluation and makes recommendations for improvement. During the evaluation, the quality of teaching and learning in three subjects was evaluated in detail and a Transition Year (TY) evaluation was carried out in advance. Separate reports are available on these subject inspections and on the TY evaluation. The board of management was given an opportunity to comment in writing on the findings and recommendations of the report, and the response of the board will be found in the appendix of this report.

INTRODUCTION

Clonkeen College is a non fee-paying voluntary secondary school for boys and was founded by the Christian Brothers in 1967. Students are enrolled from primary schools located in the surrounding areas of Cabinteely, Foxrock and Blackrock and from further afield. The main feeder primary school is Our Lady of Good Counsel National School. Enrolment has remained quite consistent over recent years with a current mainstream enrolment of 516 students.

The college is located on a spacious campus in south County Dublin. With increasing enrolment, the college has been extended over the years. Ongoing infrastructural improvements include a major upgrade of the playing pitches and the installation of ramps and a lift to enable wheelchair access to the college. Improvement of the physical environment has been prioritised by accessing funding through recent Summer Works Schemes. The college is in the process of finalising arrangements for the development of an all-weather playing pitch.

1. QUALITY OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT

1.1 Characteristic spirit of the school

Clonkeen College is under the trusteeship of the Edmund Rice Schools’ Trust (ERST), which through its charter fosters worthy values including Christian spirituality, excellence in teaching and learning, partnership in the school community, a caring school community and transformational leadership. The ERST ethos is well maintained by the trustees through representation on the board of management, by providing training and support to school management and staff and by providing a network of personnel to support the college in its many initiatives. An information pack is provided for each board member and induction training is facilitated for new board members. The trustees expressed confidence in the expertise of the current board and characterised the board of Clonkeen College as one with a strong sense of community.

In line with this ERST philosophy, the mission statement of Clonkeen College encourages and facilitates each individual and group within the school community “to contribute to the creation of a caring, supportive and inclusive educational environment conducive to developing the diverse talents of all the participants.” There was clear evidence from observation in the course of the evaluation and from discussions with members of the school community that the college endeavoured to live out this mission statement in the many aspects of school life.

Respect and courtesy of students and staff were evident throughout the evaluation. Moral values in the Edmund Rice tradition of caring for the poor are promoted in line with the
stated ethos through the annual Third World Appeal. The dedication and commitment of many students and staff to this cause were evident. The work of the Third World Support Group in raising funds for worthy projects in Africa also bears testament to the ethos of the college. It is a credit to the characteristic spirit of the college that strong bonds between the college and past pupils exist. Sport plays an important part in maintaining the college ethos and the college is justifiably proud of its many successes in Gaelic, soccer and other sports.

The college has a very proud tradition of providing for students of all abilities, and is inclusive. Students are well cared for, and school policies and practices reflect this caring ethos. Staff are open and friendly and are dedicated and committed to creating a positive learning environment. New teachers are made welcome and they expressed their satisfaction with the structures in place to support them.

The visual appearance of the college is enhanced by pieces of artwork on display including those produced by students and staff of the college. The commitment of the whole school community to prioritising the enhancement of the school environment was evident in many ways.

1.2 School ownership and management

The ERST provides a useful support structure to the board of management, when appropriate and necessary. The board manages the college on behalf of the trustees and takes on responsibility for the financial administration of the college. A financial report is provided at every board meeting. The members of the board of management bring a complementary range of experiences and skills to their work and their diverse experiences contribute to the board’s effectiveness. There is a very good awareness of roles and responsibilities by board members and these roles are carried out effectively. Board members expressed a commitment to building upon the caring atmosphere in the college and to promoting the ethos of the college. The board is consultative, adaptable in its outlook and has developed a strong profile in the school community. ERST receives a copy of the board minutes and regular reports from the board on the work of the college.

The present board commenced its term of office in 2009 and is properly constituted. The principal, in his role as secretary to the board, reports on school activities and school issues to the board. The board meets once per month on average during the academic year in order to carry out its duties. The frequency of their meeting is praiseworthy indeed and demonstrates loyalty and purposeful engagement. On occasion, additional building programme meetings are convened. Minutes of meetings examined during the whole school evaluation provided good evidence of the board’s commitment to the continued development and success of the college.

The board’s current priorities have mainly an infrastructural focus. Many projects have been admirably completed while others are in the development or planning stages. For example, an upgrade of the playing pitch is almost complete and a considerable amount of board business is now dedicated to the main school extension and refurbishment project. The commitment of the board to this work is exemplary.

Examples of the board’s educational priorities include a review of the school plan and a review of identified school policies, the production of a new school prospectus and the development of the school website. The board expressed an awareness of some shortcomings in current curricular provision. It is recommended that there should be a parallel focus on educational priorities together with infrastructural priorities. This would support the provision of a good educational experience for students. The board is aware of its role in discipline procedures and has admirably met its obligations in this regard. For
example, the code of behaviour was recently reviewed to include an increased focus on positive behaviour in accordance with the school ethos.

Policy review, development and enactment have been prioritised. The board has met legislative requirements regarding policy formation. An examination of policies developed by the board shows that the board seeks to reflect openness, inclusiveness and respect for the individual in its policy development. The board needs to ensure progress in the development of new policies and updating older policies, where necessary.

An agreed written statement is communicated to the teaching staff and parents following each board meeting. Consultation with students and parents underpins relevant policies and the board values consultation with the school community very highly. The admissions policy, for example, is grounded in the principles of inclusion and diversity and this policy is administered in a fair and equitable way. However, the board should provide more focused reporting to parents on how the voluntary contribution is utilised in enhancing educational provision in the college.

1.3 In-school management

The principal and deputy principal display complementary skills and work effectively as a senior management team with a clear shared vision and understanding of the developmental priorities for the college. Senior management described their leadership role as ‘people-focused stewardship’ where a central mission of teaching and learning is fostered in all aspects of school life. Both members of the management team have leadership qualities which have contributed to the strong sense of community and commitment among the staff and students in the college. Communication is open and transparent and management is consistently approachable, flexible and realistic in its approach to staff, students and the whole community. For example, staff meetings, which take place on four to five occasions per year, are consultative and democratic and the staff is kept well informed of school developments.

The principal and deputy principal collaboratively manage the college very effectively on a daily basis and have an active presence in the college. The administration of the school discipline system, liaison with board members on matters of school business, the ongoing management of the school finances, communication with parents, as well as the constant management of students and their learning achievements and difficulties are but some of the responsibilities carried out very effectively by senior management on a daily and weekly basis. The principal and deputy principal take on some individual responsibilities, for example the principal takes responsibility for the construction of the school timetable while the deputy principal plays a key role in the duty of care to staff and students and in the school development planning process. Affirmation of student achievement plays a key role in implementing the school ethos. For example, letters are sent to parents to acknowledge particular achievements. This is a very praiseworthy initiative.

The school community has embraced ownership of the shared vision of providing an educational environment in which the highest quality teaching and learning can take place and of implementing improvements. Continuous professional development (CPD) is encouraged and supported in order to maintain high standards and has been enthusiastically embraced across some subject and programme areas. Mentoring is valued as a means of passing on staff expertise. A culture of self-review and self-evaluation is being fostered by school management especially through the school development planning process. This is central to the shared vision for the college and it is recommended that this process continues and strengthens. School self-review in the immediate future should focus on prioritised areas including the management of change, the operation and functioning of
subject departments and the professional development of teachers so that all students are sufficiently challenged and can achieve to their ability. Senior management has the capacity to lead change and should act decisively, in consultation with staff, to work towards achieving the tasks set out above.

Delegation of responsibilities by senior management is effective in ensuring the ongoing smooth operation of the college. In the main, meaningful roles are distributed to post holders. The important role of year head is delegated to special duties teachers (SDT) and to assistant principals (AP). Year heads work closely with class tutors in the administration of the care and discipline systems in the college and undertake an important role in the effective management of students. Their duties are both disciplinary and pastoral. It is recommended that the consultative remit of middle management be developed, so that effective consultation can develop beyond the crucial areas of care and discipline to all aspects of school life.

APs who do not carry year head duties and the SDTs have a wide range of responsibilities which contribute to the operation of the college. The duties associated with the posts are carried out effectively. Some posts carry more weight and responsibility than others. It is recommended that an overall review and restructuring of posts be undertaken so that college needs can continue to be best met whilst ensuring an equitable distribution of responsibilities. Duties assigned should be commensurate with the level and remuneration at which each post is pitched. It is imperative that the time and responsibility element of each post be evaluated during any effective review process. Such a review would also provide the opportunity to explore the possibilities for meeting the needs of the college into the future.

Partnership with parents is central to the school ethos. Parents endeavour to play an active part in the life of the college and are involved in college activities in many ways through the active and representative parents’ association (PA), which is affiliated to the national body. A member of senior management attends parent association meetings. The association praised the college for its level of care for students, the commitment of staff and what the PA described as an excellent level of communication. The parents’ association is consulted on relevant policies and it contributed to four school policies in the current year. The association supports the college in many ways including the organisation of careers evenings, social events, sponsored talks and the development of healthy eating options. The college newsletter and website highlight the important work undertaken.

The college has a good system of communication with the diversity of parents in relation to student progress and achievement. The college newsletter and website inform parents of school activities, events and student achievements. Individual letters, newsletters and the school website are some of the means of communication and means of celebration of student achievement with parents and the wider community.

Well established links have been forged between the college and the community through the wide range of co-curricular and extracurricular activities on offer and through the outreach aspects of the TY programme.

Eighteen student council members are elected by staff and students from fifth year and one student council member is then assigned to each class group. Elected class representatives, who are not student council members, attend student council meetings on occasions. Student interests in the college are effectively communicated to school management, staff and parents. The council is engaged in areas such as lost property, the organisation of some school functions, fund-raising and the induction of first-year students. The council is currently proposing the development of a lunchroom block for sixth-year students. The council is consulted on relevant policies and has made important contributions to the
formulation of key policies in the college, including a review of the code of behaviour. Student council meetings take place regularly and the liaison teacher attends in a consultative role. In addition, a member of senior management may attend council meetings. The effectiveness of the present system is acknowledged, nevertheless, in the interests of best practice, consideration should be given to the formation of a student council with directly elected representatives from each class group as outlined in Student Councils: A Voice for Students, a joint Department of Education and Skills and Office of the Minister for Children resource, which can be accessed at www.studentcouncil.ie. In this way, the interests of all class groups may be forwarded directly and therefore the effectiveness of the representation enhanced.

1.4 Management of resources

Clonkeen College has a teaching allocation of 26.47 whole-time equivalent (WTE) teachers which includes the ex-quota positions of principal, deputy principal and guidance counsellor. The college also receives allocations for learning support (0.7 WTE) special educational needs (2.51 WTEs), the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP) (0.88 WTEs) and curricular concessions (0.36 WTEs). Two wholetime equivalents are allocated for special needs assistants (SNAs).

Systems of communication within the college include posting relevant notices on the staff notice board, regular staff meetings throughout the year and constant liaising with subject departments and individual teachers. These systems are efficient and have proven to be successful. Staff may contribute items for the agenda of staff meetings and many staff meetings are also used for planning and for the provision of CPD. Senior management promotes the development of a professional learning community. In relation to the introduction of RSE at senior cycle, it is recommended that teachers should engage with the Social, Personal and Health Education support service, to develop professional capacity for teaching Relationships and Sexuality Education. The emphasis on assessment for learning (AfL) strategies, with which staff has recently engaged, has paid dividends in terms of monitoring and motivating students in their learning. Future professional development should prioritise key areas such as subject and programme planning, effective classroom strategies and the integration of ICT in the classroom.

New teachers are well supported through a very good induction programme. A school information pack, containing the comprehensive staff handbook, is given to new teachers. The school discipline system is clearly outlined. All staff play an active part in supporting new teachers in the college and subject department personnel diligently support new teachers in their subject specialism. This is very good practice, consolidates staff collegiality and continues the concept of stewardship endorsed by senior management.

The commitment of the college support staff, including the office staff, the caretaker, canteen staff and cleaners is commended. They all make an appropriate and effective contribution to the life of the college and carry out their duties efficiently and effectively. Senior management has developed the roles of support staff in recent years to better address the immediate needs of the college.

Teaching staff are deployed according to their competencies and experiences. Job-sharing opportunities are facilitated by the board, when and where possible. The pattern of teacher deployment for English tends not to support the delivery of the English curriculum as a continuum of knowledge and skills development from first year to sixth. This should be addressed. In relation to Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE), every effort is made to ensure that teachers remain with their class groups for the three-year cycle and this is commended. It allows a culture of trust and openness to develop over time between
students and their teacher. However, only two members of the history subject team have responsibility for teaching the Leaving Certificate class groups and the introduction of a rota that would increase the capacity within the subject team to teach the Leaving Certificate history curricular coursework is recommended. In relation to English, the same issue occurs and it is recommended that all teachers with a significant English teaching load should have the opportunity to teach the subject to the full range of years, programmes and levels.

The school timetable is drawn up by the principal in consultation with staff. The allocation of time in terms of the number of class periods assigned to subjects is generally good. However, time allocation to Physical Education at senior cycle should be addressed in accordance with Rules and Programme for Secondary Schools. Timetabled provision for the LCVP should also be addressed. An increase in the number of lesson periods in English in first year is recommended. Management should endeavour to address these issues in planning for the timetable in future years. A substantial number of teachers are not currently deployed to teach for maximum twenty-two hours. The allocation of teaching hours and teachers by senior management should be better utilised in order to maximise provision for students.

The school buildings and grounds are maintained to a high standard. Specialist rooms are consistently used for their designated purpose. Classrooms are predominantly student-based and many contained lively displays of visual and print materials and examples of students’ recent work. As is evident from earlier sections of this report, school management is fully aware of accommodation needs and has taken proactive measures to plan and provide for new campus facilities in line with the strategic vision for the college and the changing needs of students including curricular needs. A future extension to include enhanced facilities, specialist classrooms, a sports hall and additional general classrooms is in the planning process. This much needed enhancement to school facilities will increase the college’s capacity for enrolment in future years and for broadening the curriculum.

Computer facilities in the college have been recently upgraded and are progressively being enhanced with the planned provision of a fixed data projector in every classroom. Consideration should also be given to enhancing ICT facilities in TY classrooms. The computer room is very well utilised in the provision of the European Computer Driving Licence (ECDL) to students. However, access to this facility is limited and should be addressed. Laptop computers and data projectors are also available for mobile use. It is commendable that this provision has begun to impact very positively in some lessons. The widespread use of ICT in general classrooms, as a tool for teaching and learning has yet to be fully developed. An ICT development plan should be drawn up with its main aim to thoroughly integrate ICT into the curriculum. Staff training should form an essential component of this plan. The role of ICT co-ordinator should be developed in facilitating the dissemination of best practice on ICT to staff, and in the development of an ICT policy. Audiovisual equipment is also available in the form of CD players, televisions and DVD players but access to this equipment for some lessons is limited.

The health and safety statement is outdated and requires review, updating and enactment following a full school health and safety audit and extensive staff consultation. Once ratified by the board, this policy should be updated annually.

2. QUALITY OF SCHOOL PLANNING

2.1 The school plan
Whole-school planning is led by the shared vision and leadership of senior management. The philosophy of stewardship espoused by senior management is clearly laid out in a reflective joint document produced by the principal and deputy principal in 2008. Key goals for school development are prioritised by senior management and a commitment is given to constantly monitor and evaluate the planning process while listening to the voice of the whole school community.

The college has welcomed facilitation of the planning process by the school development planning initiative (SDPI) which was instrumental in initiating planning in the college. The process is collaborative and consultative with all members of the school community enabled appropriately to contribute ideas, express concerns and make suggestions in an open and constructive way.

All staff members have shown a willingness to contribute effectively to school development planning by taking an active part in the formulation of action plans for prioritised school development, with almost all staff participating in at least one planning group. The themes for planning groups frequently come from the staff and have included classroom management, special needs, professional best practice, staff support and collegiality, health and nutrition lifestyle, sport and infrastructure developments and the green school project. Prioritised staff development needs are brought to the board following a comprehensive survey of staff. This is very good practice. School review of the findings of previous planning groups has ensured that staff is aware of the important outcomes which resulted from the dedicated effort and commitment of those groups. It has also consolidated a culture of self-evaluation in the college. For example, as a result of this process more positive reinforcement systems were established within the code of behaviour, a staff handbook was completed, a booklet for special educational needs was produced and staff support systems were identified and strengthened with a focus on collegiality. Both management and staff are commended and acknowledged for their focused planning activity.

The draft school plan includes both permanent and developmental sections and policy statements reflect the college’s mission and ethos. This is very good practice. The college has clearly outlined development needs into the future. The school operates the good practice of publishing its policies in the student journal, the staff handbook, the handbook for parents of incoming students and on the college website www.clonkeencollege.ie. All policies required by legislation are in place. There is an acute awareness among senior management of the need to revise certain policies. There is a commitment in the current year to review policies that were last reviewed in 2004. These include the ICT policy, the Religious Education policy and the Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) policy. The need for new policies in key areas has been identified and draft policies have been devised. These include critical incident policy, child protection policy, equality policy and environment policy. The college has been proactive in updating identified policies in 2010 with a recent update of the admissions policy, the student code of behaviour, subject and subject level choice policy and the substance misuse policy.

It is now timely that renewed staff development in whole-school planning and in subject department planning takes place. Reference should be made to the website of the SDPI for further information and support, www.sdpi.ie. Delegation of some responsibility for planning from senior management to a steering committee chaired by a school development planning co-ordinator is good practice and is therefore recommended. Good linkages should be established between the steering committee and planning groups in such a way that members of the steering committee chair the planning groups. In advance of this process, the college should carry out a needs analysis to consider its key priorities for the next five years. While infrastructural developments are underway, it is vitally important that current student needs are prioritised. Areas worthy of consideration for the establishment of
planning groups should include: post of responsibility review, curricular reform, creation of leaders in subject planning, timetable review and teacher professional development with a more overt focus on teaching and learning.

Planning is prioritised at staff meetings. Evidence from minutes of staff meetings and board of management minutes demonstrate how clear and achievable priorities have been identified and supported. Improvements for the whole school community are now evident as a result of focused and prioritised planning. Successful development planning is evident. For example, the study skills and the evening study programmes demonstrate how school planning has enhanced support for students and their parents. The college art plan in collaboration with past pupils has succeeded in its worthy goal of changing the school environment through a sustained and committed effort.

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 Skills, 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 college offers a broad academic curriculum at junior cycle and senior cycle. A wide range of subjects, programmes and levels is offered to serve the needs of students and in an effort to fulfil the stated mission of developing the diverse talents of all students. TY students are enabled to build on their academic achievements and to gain confidence and maturity through participation in the numerous activities offered. LCVP students have an opportunity to develop their interpersonal, vocational and communication skills.

School management ensures that review of curriculum provision is prioritised and is commended for its great efforts to introduce new subjects and programmes that will further support different students in their curricular needs. The recent introduction of the LCVP is a very good example of this. Through the ongoing commitment of staff, students are also afforded the opportunity to study an additional subject for Leaving Certificate outside of the timetabled curriculum. Currently, the subjects on offer in this way to students are Applied Mathematics and Classical Studies.

Junior-cycle students study all subjects offered in the school at that level. The college operates a system of mixed-ability class groups in junior cycle but applies a system of setting in Irish and Mathematics in second and third years. The decision to allocate places in Irish and Mathematics is taken by subject department teachers in accordance with school policy. In order to better meet student needs and to provide further balance within the curriculum it is recommended that the range of subjects currently provided should be reviewed. Consideration should be given to introducing an element of choice into the junior-cycle curriculum. For example, subjects such as Technical Graphics, Home Economics or Music could be introduced as part of an options band. Such an arrangement would also require the school to identify a set of core subjects which would be taken by all junior-cycle students.
3.2 Arrangements for students’ choice of subjects and programmes

The range of programmes offered by the college includes the Junior Certificate, TY, the LCVP and the Leaving Certificate established. TY in Clonkeen College is offered as a compulsory programme. In exceptional circumstances, students may apply to the board of management for permission to enter fifth year directly having completed the Junior Certificate.

Students entering the senior cycle are, in the main, well supported regarding subject choice. Subject bands are developed from student preferences. Students receive the opportunity to sample many subjects in the course of TY and are supported in making their choices by the guidance department, subject specialist teachers and senior management. To strengthen this process and to further consolidate links with parents, it is recommended that, in advance of making a final choice, TY students and parents should be invited to an information evening regarding programme and subject choices in senior cycle. Subject choices could be addressed at these meetings by senior management, the guidance department and, optimally, the relevant subject teachers.

The compulsory TY programme is effectively co-ordinated. A whole-school approach to the planning, development, and promotion of TY is fostered by senior management. Clonkeen College has a policy on admission to TY in place, which is published in the student journal. The policy clearly outlines the compulsory nature of TY and the school’s selection procedure should the college be unable to form TY classes for all students in the future. This is good practice.

There are currently nineteen senior-cycle students who have chosen the required subjects to enable them to participate in the LCVP. In addition to their guidance provision, LCVP students receive a single period per week in the Link Modules, preparation for the World of Work and Enterprise Education. This falls short of the recommended time allocation for delivery of the Link Modules. It is recommended that the college implements more suitable timetabling arrangements in terms of time and position on the timetable for the Link Modules. Work experience is organised by the students themselves with little input from the college. It is recommended that the college plays an active part in co-ordinating the work experience module of the programme and that this work be focused on career sampling. Co-ordination of LCVP is currently assigned to a SDT post and the current co-ordinator has received training and attended workshops on enterprise education.

Providing for a broad range of programmes and subjects imposes a number of demands on the timetable. The impact and restraints on curricular provision of operating a forty-period week were discussed at the time of the evaluation. Providing for a forty-two period week should be explored further by senior management. In this context, the timetabling of Link Modules and appropriate Physical Education (PE) at senior cycle should be addressed. The college also needs to address its policy regarding the uptake of subject levels for some subjects particularly at junior cycle. Recommendations in this regard were made in previous subject inspection reports and have yet to be implemented.

3.3 Co-curricular and extra-curricular provision

Clonkeen College offers a myriad of co-curricular and extracurricular activities in line with its stated mission. Positive relationships between students and teachers are developed in this context. Parents are very supportive of these activities and valuable links have been established with the school community. The vast majority of students partake in some form
of activity from a wide range on offer in the college. Many co-curricular activities impact positively on students’ experiences of the subject.

The college provides many opportunities for students including sporting, music and drama events and activities. Sport plays a very important role in the lives of students. The major sports include Gaelic football and hurling, soccer, athletics and basketball. Good links with local sports clubs have been established. The advent of new and enhanced facilities on site will benefit the whole school community. The achievement of the college in many of these activities is noteworthy.

Co-curricular activities include in-house and inter-schools debating, quizzes, public speaking, visiting speakers and competitions in Science, Applied Mathematics and Mathematics. Many students have achieved outstanding success in many of these competitions. Students help contribute to worthy causes by fundraising through a music CD project. Students also have many opportunities to go on a range of educational trips organised by the college. A multitude of other activities enhance student experiences. These activities include the annual talent competition. In addition, many TY students take the Gaisce challenge. The provision of co-curricular activities is commended, as it provides students with enjoyable learning experiences and ensures that each subject maintains a high profile in the college. It is also commendable that a number of activities are provided at a recreational level as these provide students, who may not be competitively orientated, with ample opportunities to engage in some form of physical activity for its intrinsic value.

4. QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN SUBJECTS

4.1 Planning and preparation

Subject department planning is facilitated by school management as part of the calendar of meetings scheduled throughout the school year. Staff is facilitated to hold subject department meetings three times a year, and the records show that they may take place more often for a specific purpose. Each department is required to keep up-to-date records of subject planning. The culture of self-review requires significant further development within many subject departments. Planning should be a record of collaborative thinking of the department and reflect a discussion of what subject teachers want from their students and to achieve with their students. Therefore, attendance of the full complement of the subject team at the subject departmental meetings is an issue which needs to be addressed across subject departments to support effective collaborative planning. In order to provide the infrastructure that will sustain collaborative planning in the long-term, the appointment of a subject convenor or co-ordinator in each subject department is recommended.

The subject development plans that have been compiled contain details of the aims and objectives underpinning the teaching and study of subjects in the school, curricular planning, homework, assessment and reporting procedures, strategies to promote the profile of the subject and a range of subject-related matters. Plans also include schemes of work for each of the six years, giving the specific texts to be covered and referring in general terms to topics and skills. The year plans indicate timeframes for the coverage of the planned courses and reflect substantial programmes of work. Subject departments are acknowledged and praised for the work completed to date on subject plans.

A written current TY plan was available for all subjects evaluated in the course of the TY inspection and the taught programme reflected the school’s plan for the programme. School management outlined some self-evaluation measures for TY which include a dedicated staff meeting for this purpose. A number of key recommendations regarding TY provision were made at the time of the TY evaluation. Many key recommendations have been addressed.
while others are planned for implementation in the near future. Arrangements have been put in place for the school year 2011-12 which will provide tuition for TY students to the end of the school year. The introduction of parent-teacher meetings for TY is under consideration with the college considering a customised format for these meetings. The duties attached to the post of programme co-ordinator have been reviewed as recommended. The development of TY subject plans and an overall TY plan in line with Department guidelines has yet to be realised and is planned for the next academic year. The college has recently acquired grant allocations which will enable it to provide enhanced ICT facilities in the TY base classrooms and in this way the further integration of ICT into TY students’ learning experiences can be realised.

A common programme for SPHE has been developed and it schedules each of the ten modules to be covered each year. Handouts, materials and practical equipment were ready in advance of lessons for the subjects evaluated and this good level of advance planning for lessons led to effective student learning. In addition, well-thought-out strategies contributed to enhanced student learning. In relation to the actual content of the subject plans, recommendations are made by the inspectors in the individual subject inspection reports appended. The setting up of a shared electronic planning folder for History is a very worthwhile initiative and an example of meaningful collaborative planning. This initiative could be broadened out to all subject departments. Equally, ongoing development and review of the subject plan is an important element which is already in some plans and should be incorporated into all plans.

4.2 Learning and teaching

There was good teaching practice and evidence of authoritative and committed teaching in most of the lessons observed. Lessons had a clear purpose and were well structured. During the initial phase of the lessons, the teachers engaged their students in a variety of different ways which facilitated their introduction to new material. Teaching was most effective when teachers shared their enthusiasm for the subject with students and encouraged them to respond. Individual teachers informed their students of the focus and the intended learning outcomes of the lesson at the outset. It is recommended that this practice be universally adopted in order that the students are provided with a clear understanding of the purpose of lessons.

Teachers successfully generated a secure, inclusive and positive learning environment during all the lessons observed. A variety of tasks were integrated into the structure of lessons including opportunities for self-reflection. While in the main lessons were set at an appropriate pace and level for each group of students, inspectors noted a lack of challenge on occasions which should be explored by subject departments. In English lessons, the materials used were generally appropriate to the class and the syllabus, and balanced accessibility and challenge. In History lessons, the variety of teaching and learning methodologies employed was effective in providing the students with an informed understanding of their lesson topic. There was good though limited use made of visual resources to impact on student learning, for example, ICT was used very well in a senior-cycle lesson in English. With a view to keeping motivation and interest levels high among students and teachers, teachers are encouraged to vary the types of resources used in lessons.

Across all the subjects evaluated, teachers provided students with frequent opportunities to develop skills and confidence through well-planned group-work and pair-work activities. However, in some lessons there was excessive emphasis on examination preparation and students did not receive the learning experiences or the breadth of syllabus coverage possible. SPHE lessons were delivered in a way which maximised student participation and
in all lessons there was a very good balance between teacher and student input. In English lessons, some effective pair and group work was noted also, but sometimes students assigned to work in pairs actually worked independently. Greater use of discovery learning approaches was also suggested during the evaluation as a means of encouraging students to work through key concepts themselves.

Teachers guided and supported student learning throughout the lessons. The students contributed to the quality of the lessons through the interest they displayed in the study of their lesson topics and their participation in the lessons. It is recommended that the subject departments review the range of teaching methods employed and consider how they might encourage more active student participation in senior-cycle lessons. Teachers’ questions were often probing and encouraged students towards more thoughtful and reasoned responses.

During the TY lessons observed, students’ confidence was developed and reinforced in line with TY guidelines through many active-learning experiences. Students developed important skills in data collection and analysis, in oral language development, in comprehension and in understanding aspects of the legal system. The skills developed are in line with TY aims. Practical activities and development of research skills was the focus of some lessons evaluated. Teachers were knowledgeable, enthusiastic and innovative. Concepts were explained with clarity and students demonstrated positive attitudes to learning. In the case of some TY subjects evaluated, it is recommended that innovative materials, ideas and methodologies be introduced into the subject, in line with TY guidelines, to make it a more stimulating experience for students. Teachers have high expectations of students and students responded positively to these expectations in the lessons observed. Relationships in the classroom were very good and student learning was enhanced as a result.

4.3 Assessment

A number of students’ copybooks and folders were examined during the course of the evaluation. These reflected a substantial volume of work and the regular setting of assignments. Credit is due to the teaching teams for the emphasis placed on extended writing tasks, and the very good guidance given to students as to how to improve their work in some of the subjects inspected. Very full written feedback affirmed students’ efforts in English and also presented a challenge where appropriate, in the case of able students who had not yet realised their potential.

At the time of the inspection visit the use of written, constructive, feedback comment on students’ homework assignments varied in the sample of copybooks and student work examined and among the members of the subject teams. It is recommended that teachers make more frequent use of comment-based feedback, with a focus on the implementation of AfL principles. While homework was assigned in some lessons, all teachers need to be vigilant in relation to student work ethic and application.

Teachers appeared to know the students very well, and there was evidence that appropriately high expectations and standards are communicated to students. There is a consistently high uptake of higher-level papers in both the Junior and Leaving Certificate examinations and the levels of success achieved by the students are commended. It is, however, suggested that the suitability of the higher-level history examination paper for a small number of junior-cycle students in recent years be discussed at departmental level.

In the assessment of SPHE, teachers are strongly encouraged to look at developing the range of assessment modes for the subject and consider the merits of introducing portfolio
assessment. To strengthen the assessment process in TY and to introduce a balance to the examination process, it is recommended that students be required to maintain a portfolio and that a portfolio interview forms part of students’ overall end-of-year assessment of TY.

5. **Quality of Support for Students**

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

The college has developed, in line with its ethos, required policies on the admission, enrolment and participation of students with special educational needs. The draft Special Education Needs policy draws on Department of Education and Skills guidelines. The draft policy emphasises many key aspects of learning support and resource provision including the assessment of student needs upon entry to the college. The learning support and resource allocation is used for its intended purpose with individual students receiving their allocated support.

Individual education programmes (IEPs) are drawn up by the learning support team. Target setting and means of mapping progress of students with additional needs should be a key feature of such plans in future and students should be encouraged to take ownership of their own learning by agreement on specific learning targets.

Learning support is provided by withdrawing the student from timetabled class following consultation with the student, parents and subject teacher. Students who are exempt from Irish receive individual tuition in literacy and numeracy. School management is encouraged to organise, following widespread consultation, for the Special Educational Needs policy to be finalised and enacted by the board of management.

A partnership approach is promoted between senior management, mainstream teachers, learning support teachers and parents in planning and implementing support teaching programmes. Communication with parents is very good with a meeting organised with parents before the student is enrolled and a good level of consultation on an ongoing basis thereafter.

The college values the importance of monitoring progress and liaising with parents on an ongoing basis and has produced a learning support and Special Education Needs booklet as a support to parents, students and teachers. An inclusive approach is promoted. This is good practice. This booklet provides a valuable insight into learning support and resource provision at the college and includes useful background information on special needs. The role of parents is outlined and the booklet endeavours to answer common questions parents may ask regarding special needs education. However, it is suggested that when this booklet is reviewed, the key role of the college and its responsibility to provide support to students should be clearer. In addition, modified sections of this booklet should be incorporated into the final Special Educational Needs policy document.

The learning support and resource department is led by a small dedicated team of professional personnel some of whom have taken courses to update their knowledge and skills in this area. The way in which school management has supported training and staff development in this important area is commended. Resource teaching is provided by a small team of teachers. This is good practice. Planning takes place in a focused way as evidenced through minutes of meetings. It is recommended that a co-ordinator of learning support be put in place to provide further focus to the special needs’ provision, planning and target setting and assessment of students. It is praiseworthy that the college has appropriately qualified staff to enable this appointment.
A designated additional needs room has been established with good ICT provision and appropriate educational software and teaching resources. In addition appropriate textbooks, games and examination material is available. Record keeping is good and appropriate links have been built up with outside referral agencies.

5.2 Guidance and student support in the whole-school context

Guidance and care are provided to students by the school’s guidance department, together with senior management, year heads, class tutors, teachers, senior students and parents. Guidance and counselling are delivered by a team with a broad range of skills and experience and by professionally qualified personnel.

The guidance plan is comprehensive and well structured in its approach to providing support to each year group. The guidance policy sets out aims, content and the roles and responsibilities regarding guidance and counselling of each support group within the college. The policy also commits to review and monitor the implementation aspect of guidance provision. The planned enhancement of ICT facilities in the college will enable improved access to ICT for students who wish to research guidance issues. Access to the guidance office is somewhat restricted and its location should be reviewed to enable this facility to be used more extensively by students.

The guidance counsellor plays an active part in the first-year induction programme and together with the nominated year head for the relevant first year group visits feeder primary schools to gather information regarding incoming students. This information is used together with the assessment results to decide the level of supports needed and to inform year heads and class tutors regarding the incoming student’s ability to cope with the transition to post-primary. This is commended.

Students in all year groups receive some guidance support. Timetabled guidance is provided in TY. Individual appointments are allocated to all sixth-year students and requests for appointments from all students are accommodated. A timetabled module of guidance in sixth year would further focus and enhance provision at this key stage when students make important decisions concerning their future. Students who indicate that they are discontinuing a subject or changing a subject level from higher to ordinary are referred to the guidance counsellor. It is recommended that guidance provision be developed by focusing support at key points of student transition, when students move from primary to post-primary school and from TY to fifth year. It is also recommended that the overall guidance provision should be reviewed in order to ensure that the college makes optimal use of the ex-quota hours to provide personal, educational and vocational guidance.

Student care and support are prioritised through the SPHE and Religious Education (RE) programmes. All parents should be informed of the programme content of SPHE and consulted on the development of the RSE programme at senior cycle. There is good integration between these teams. In addition, good links have been established with parents, the wider community, work experience employers, National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) and external counsellors. Efforts are made to achieve maximum benefit from external agencies. A very effective system is in place for contacting parents. Counselling is a key part of any school guidance provision and this aspect needs to be expanded and utilised more fully as a key element of support to students.

SPHE is provided on the timetable for all junior-cycle students for one period per week during first, second and third years. No formal timetabling of SPHE or RSE is provided for Transition Year, fifth year or sixth year students. In this context, the introduction of a personal development module into the TY programme is recommended. The provision of
RSE at senior cycle should be formalised and provided by teachers who have availed of training in this field. The SPHE and RSE policies should be updated and reviewed. The college does not have a pastoral policy in place at the moment. Therefore, it is recommended that a policy be developed in this area.

The encouragement and support for positive student behaviour is a key strength of the college’s code of behaviour which has received the support of parents. The graduated discipline system is administered in a fair and balanced way. The code of behaviour is an evolving policy which is constantly revised and updated as the college changes, to support the ongoing needs of students and to meet external changes in society. While the college has put a successful detention system in place, it is praiseworthy that there is also a very good awards system which supports student achievement in key areas. The positive behaviour initiative in first year and second year is an example of a very successful programme to reward positive behaviour and to put an enhanced emphasis on affirmation rather than sanction. The expansion of this initiative will further support this worthy outcome.

The roles of year head and class tutor encompass pastoral and discipline responsibilities. They have developed an administrative, disciplinary and caring role and work with students to maintain a positive school environment. The college has developed a caring atmosphere in line with its ethos and mission. The role of year head should be expanded to include the monitoring of academic progress including the uptake of levels at junior and senior cycle on a more formal and systematic basis. The outcome of such academic monitoring should further inform the board, senior management and subject departments of academic trends in the college and also indicate the appropriateness of the level at which some students sit certificate examinations.

Retention of students from junior cycle to senior cycle and throughout senior cycle is good. However, attendance at school by some students is a cause for concern and systems to ensure the constant monitoring of, and attention to, student punctuality and attendance have been introduced. While these were observed to be effective, they will require ongoing vigilance by senior management and staff.

6. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT

The following are the main strengths identified in the evaluation:

- Through its mission, the college encourages each member of the school community to contribute to the creation of a caring, supportive and inclusive environment. There was clear evidence that the mission was being lived out in all aspects of school life.
- Members of the board of management bring a complementary range of experiences and skills to their work and have a very good awareness of their roles and responsibilities. The board is consultative, adaptable in its outlook and has developed a strong profile in the school community. It is committed to the continued development and success of the college.
- The principal and deputy principal display complementary skills and present as a very effective senior management team with a clear and shared vision and understanding of the developmental priorities for the college.
- Both members of the senior management team have commendable leadership qualities which have contributed to the good sense of community and commitment among the staff and students. Communication is open and transparent.
• Delegation of responsibilities by senior management is effective in ensuring the ongoing operation of the college. Year heads work closely with class tutors in the administration of the care and discipline systems of the college.
• Key goals for school development are prioritised and a commitment is given to constantly monitor and evaluate the planning process.
• The college offers access to a wide range of subjects, programmes and levels.
• There was evidence of authoritative and committed teaching in most of the lessons observed. Lessons had a clear purpose and were well structured.
• Teachers successfully generated a secure, inclusive and positive learning environment during all the lessons observed.
• Across all the subjects evaluated, teachers provided students with frequent opportunities to develop skills and confidence through well-planned group-work and pair-work activities.
• The learning support and resource department is led by a small dedicated team of professional personnel.
• Class tutors, year heads and senior management administer the code of behaviour with consistency and fairness. The encouragement and support for positive student behaviour is a key strength of the school’s discipline policy.

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

• Senior management should act decisively, in consultation with staff, to work towards the reform of management structures and responsibilities and towards the development of the consultative remit of middle management.
• Senior management should address the optimum deployment of teachers and teaching hours in order to maximise provision for students and to alleviate the constraints of the timetable.
• An ICT development plan should be drawn up with its main aim to thoroughly integrate ICT into the curriculum. Staff training should form an essential component of this plan.
• All subject departments should review the range of teaching methods employed to encourage more active student participation in lessons, particularly at senior cycle, greater use of discovery learning approaches and providing breadth of learning experiences and of syllabus coverage for students.
• Teachers should make more frequent use of comment-based feedback, with a focus on the implementation of AfL principles. All teachers need to be vigilant in relation to student work ethic and application with particular reference to TY.
• A co-ordinator of learning support should be put in place to provide further focus to special needs provision, planning, target setting and assessment of students.
• Guidance provision should be developed to ensure that a balance across personal, educational and vocational guidance is achieved. Provision should include focussed support at key points of student transition and a timetabled module of guidance in sixth year and counselling.

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

7. RELATED SUBJECT INSPECTION REPORTS

The following related Subject Inspection and Programme Evaluation reports are available:
• Programme Evaluation of Transition Year – 14 April 2010
• Subject Inspection of History – 25 November 2010
• Subject Inspection of English – 29 November 2010
• Subject Inspection of Social Personal and Health Education – 7 December 2010.

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Appendix

School response to the report

Submitted by the Board of Management

Area 1: Observations on the content of the inspection report

Clonkeen College welcomes this Whole School Evaluation Report. We believe that it confirms our own shared and considered view that our school community is a safe, caring and nurturing educational environment for our students. The Report indicates that our shared focus, from the Board of Management to Senior Management, from teaching and support staff to parents and the wider community, is on realising the ERST philosophy that cherishes the gifts, and fosters the potential, of our students.

We believe that this WSE Report substantiates the ‘lived out’ reality of our Mission Statement, and bears out the sentiment and authenticity of our shared Edmund Rice ethos. The Report identifies the many significant and welcome improvements, from infrastructural to curricular, efforts and achievements of our senior management team and staff in creating ‘secure, inclusive and positive’ conditions where ‘authoritative and committed’ teaching and learning can and does occur. The Report also recognises the ‘very good’ spirit of Christian partnership and mutual respect that defines the relationships between parents, staff, senior management and students within our learning community.

We wish to thank the Inspection Team for this opportunity to reflect on our professional achievements and work practices. Their own professionalism and courtesy was particularly welcome and they helped to make the entire process a very positive and beneficial experience.

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 Report makes important recommendations which, when implemented, can build on the many fine aspects of school life already present in Clonkeen College. It is our intention to examine these recommendations strategically and incrementally in order to introduce further improvement and progress to our school community. With this in mind, senior management has decided to include the implementation of the WSE as an item on the agenda for all BOM and staff meetings for the school year 2011/2012.
The College has already implemented a number of recommendations included in the Report:

A major classroom ICT up-grade project (operational from September 2011) has been carried out since the visit of the Inspection Team. This significantly enhances the ICT teaching and learning methodologies already available in the College.

The integrity of the School Year has already been addressed in the School Calendar for 2011/2012. SPHE (which includes RSE) has been timetabled for 4th Year and 5th Year for the academic year 2011/2012 and will be introduced to 6th Year in 2012/2013. A Parent/Teacher meeting has been introduced for 4th Year from now on and more integrated templates for Subject Planning have been devised.

Clonkeen College intends these changes, in conjunction with other planned developments, will help to further enhance the quality of school management, planning, curriculum provision, teaching and learning and support for students in the school.