

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Whole-School Evaluation
REPORT

Drogheda Grammar School
Drogheda, County Louth
Roll number: 63870L

Date of inspection: 8 April 2011



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

WHOLE-SCHOOL EVALUATION

A whole-school evaluation of Drogheda Grammar School was undertaken in April, 2011. 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 and separate reports are available on these subjects. The quality of teaching and learning in one additional subject was evaluated prior to the whole-school evaluation. (See section 7 for details). The board of management was given an opportunity to comment in writing on the findings and recommendations of the report, and the response of the board will be found in the appendix of this report.

INTRODUCTION

Drogheda Grammar School is a fee-paying multi-denominational secondary school which currently caters for 263 male and female students. This figure includes eighteen students who, during the school week, are full time boarders and at weekends, are placed with host families in the locality. The school was originally founded under Royal Charter in 1669 as a boys' boarding school. The school became co-educational over fifty years ago and also began admitting day students. The number of students who board has declined gradually in recent years. Thirty-three students currently enrolled come from outside Ireland, mainly Spain, but other countries are also represented.

Until 1976, the school was located in Drogheda town centre. Today, it is located on an eighteen acre site, three kilometres outside Drogheda, beside the river Boyne. The denominational nature of the school was originally Church of Ireland but since the 1950s, the trustees are drawn from a number of religious backgrounds including the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers). The school does not offer any formal Religious Education classes. Every Monday and Wednesday, a representative of one of the local religious congregations addresses the students at a school assembly.

In addition to the students who come from outside Ireland, students come from the local primary schools in the immediate catchment area, as well as a number of other areas including Skerries, Balbriggan and Swords. In the last four years, enrolment has remained stable.

1. QUALITY OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT

1.1 Characteristic spirit of the school

According to its mission statement, the school recognises that "every individual is of value and has something to contribute". In line with this mission, the school's ethos and practices focus firmly on the development of the students in a holistic way and the school has successfully created an environment that caters well for the range of student ability. The mission statement is printed in students' journals, in the teachers' handbook and in official school documents.

In its practices, the school has created an inclusive environment where all students are genuinely welcomed: examples include the broad and balanced curriculum, the range of extracurricular and co-curricular activities, the development of a range of support structures for students, the provision of scholarships, and the welcome extended to students of all religious faiths and none. It is suggested that the school's mission statement be amended to fully reflect the commitment to inclusion which was evident during this evaluation. In

describing the characteristic spirit of the school, all who met the inspectors described the school as a happy community where a commitment to student care is paramount.

1.2 School ownership and management

Drogheda Grammar School is owned by a charitable organisation of the same name. Its operation is currently overseen by a board of directors, who are nominally the trustees of the school, and by a board of management.

Six directors, who make up the board of directors, are equal shareholders in the school. They meet twice annually to oversee all financial and budgetary matters. Five of the six directors are members of the board of management. However, the role of the board of directors in relation to the board of management is unclear. There was no evidence that the board of directors provides direction to the board of management or engages in dialogue with it regarding the operation of the school and the quality of education provided therein. It was acknowledged that the link between the two boards has diminished over time.

The board of directors receives an annual report on the operation of the school from one of its nominated representatives on the board of management. However, this does not appear to lead to any further dialogue between the two bodies. It is recommended that a report is provided to the board of management by the board of directors following all its meetings. The level of communication between the school and the board of directors should be developed and the board should play a more active role in the life of the school.

The constitution of the board of management is atypical as five of the six directors participate on the board. Moreover, the parent and teacher representatives hold a three-year term of office while the representatives of the board of directors have held been on the board for a considerable period of time.

The principal and the chairperson of the board of management meet weekly. Meetings of the board are held every month and more often if necessary: proper procedures are in place. An agenda is provided to members prior to each meeting and a verbal report on the operation of the school is provided at every meeting by the principal. Minutes of all board meetings are taken and decisions are reached by consensus. A finance sub-committee has also been established. Where necessary, a discipline sub-committee is formed to arbitrate where disagreements have arisen between senior management and students arising out of the implementation of the code of behaviour.

Currently, the board has no formal procedures in place for communicating an agreed report to staff and parents. In order to ensure effective communication between the board, staff and parents, the board should set aside time to determine the agreed feedback to be given to staff and the Parent Teacher Association (PTA). Individual members on the board have attended training in areas such as child protection and finance, but no collective training has been accessed by the full board. It is recommended that the board access all available training in order to keep fully abreast of current educational developments and policies. This will provide valuable guidance to the board, enabling it to lead the school more effectively and to become more aware of its role and responsibilities.

The board recognises that the day-to-day management of the school lies with the principal and deputy principal and it entrusts this responsibility to them. In line with legislative obligations, the board supports the planning processes in the school through, for example, consideration of draft policies. The board has ratified a number of policies. The board should now ensure that all policies are signed and dated at the time of ratification and that a timeframe for review is established.

Much of the planning that is underway in the school is led by a steering committee. This group has begun work on a three-year strategic plan. The board of management, the board of directors and the principal should engage more actively in this process. As a first step, the board should link formally with the school development planning co-ordinator, through the principal, so that a shared vision can be developed for the school.

1.3 In-school management

The senior management team consists of the principal and the deputy principal. The principal has held this position for nineteen years and the deputy principal, who was a member of the teaching staff for twenty-nine years, for five years. The deputy principal has received formal training for his role through the Leadership Development for Schools (LDS) initiative. In recent years, the principal has largely assumed an administrative role, leaving very little time for educational leadership. The deputy principal is responsible for school discipline in addition to teaching duties and other management tasks.

The senior management team meets regularly, to plan for the week and to check back on the events of the day. Apart from this, they do not set aside any dedicated times for other meetings. It is recommended that structured time be set aside for formal meetings between the two members of the senior management team to enable them to focus on issues beyond the day-to-day running of the school such as the drafting and implementation of the three-year strategic plan.

The principal has delegated leadership tasks to post holders. All of these duties are necessary to ensure the effective functioning of the school. Under his leadership, a number of positive changes have been made in the school. These include increased enrolment and a broadening of the curriculum. However, in recent years, an inappropriate amount of time has been devoted to administrative tasks, including the current building project, and this has resulted in a lack of educational leadership in the school. This situation is unsatisfactory and must be addressed as a matter of priority. It is strongly recommended that the board of management, in tandem with the board of directors, should take increased responsibility for the building and development programme in order to allow the principal to focus on his primary role as educational leader and manager of the school for the benefit of the students.

The middle management team comprises four assistant principals (AP), five special duties teachers (SD) and a programme co-ordinator. The school is also providing funding for two additional SD allowances to enable two teachers carry out additional duties. In allocating duties to teachers, it is evident that every effort has been made to match the skills of individuals to the particular requirements of the post in almost all cases. A review of the schedule of posts was carried out in the school over the course of the academic year in 2009/2010. However, the school should now review the schedule to ensure that it is meeting the current and future needs of the school. Furthermore, following collaboration with staff, it is recommended that school management draw up a job description for each post holder to ensure that there is an equitable workload attached to all posts of responsibility.

The duties assigned to each post holder are varied. Three AP posts have been allocated to year head duties where all are responsible for two year groups, while the fourth post has been allocated to school development planning. Each AP and almost all SD teachers have also been allocated additional tasks. This level of commitment by these teachers is to be commended. In theory, staff can change duties but in practice, this does not happen regularly. This position should be reviewed so that post holders are provided with the chance to broaden their skills and experiences. No opportunities are provided for staff to meet formally with senior management to discuss and review their posts nor is a written account of their work required by management. This matter should be addressed and it is

recommended that all post holders provide an annual written report to senior management and the board in a manner which will develop their capacity for self-evaluation.

In accordance with legislative requirements, the school has an admissions policy in place. At the next review, the school should ensure that the criteria for admission and enrolment to the school are clear and coherent.

Well-established systems are in place for the management of students, including a code of behaviour. The school requires all parents and students to sign a code of behaviour contract, there is a clear ladder of referral in place, and the year heads and deputy principal play a significant role in overseeing the implementation of the code. It is very evident that the school rewards students and celebrates achievement frequently.

There is much evidence to suggest that the code of behaviour is not being implemented consistently by all staff. In a minority of lessons, inspectors observed poor behaviour and/or poor punctuality on the part of some students. This went unchecked.

Student punctuality is a serious cause for concern and the school's current strategies to deal with this issue are not effective. Every day, school management permits a number of students to arrive twenty minutes late for school. While the rationale for condoning this behaviour was linked to transportation scheduling difficulties, the result is an inconsistent approach to punctuality. Throughout the week of the evaluation, a number of students were observed coming late to class. Moreover, a small number of teachers arrived late for lessons at the beginning of the school day and after breaks and in some instances this meant that students were left unattended outside classrooms: this is unacceptable. It is strongly recommended that all staff members model good timekeeping for students and be professionally responsible in this regard.

At classroom level, student attendance was monitored and a roll call was taken in every lesson; however, it is evident poor student punctuality is having a negative impact on teaching and learning in classrooms. Beginning with the board and senior management, these issues should be addressed as a matter of priority. Where necessary, parents and students should be reminded of their obligation to adhere to the rules of the school, as agreed when they signed the behaviour contract.

Student attendance is monitored each day by a teacher with a post of responsibility. All teachers take a manual roll and this information is collated by the post-holder. Currently, there is no consistent approach being taken to communicating any issues arising from poor attendance and punctuality to parents and teachers. For instance, some parents are notified by texts when their child is absent. This good practice should be applied consistently. In addition, a list of all absentees should be made available to all staff every day so that any issues regarding attendance and punctuality can be followed up more promptly. The school has the necessary infrastructure in place to track attendance using E-portal. Training should be accessed at the first available opportunity so that the systems for tracking student attendance and punctuality are more effectively implemented.

The role of year head is clearly defined and the leadership capacities of each individual in the middle management team are deployed to good effect. Normally, year heads remain with their groups for the full duration of the junior and senior cycle. In the opinion of the evaluation team, all year heads are implementing their duties effectively and there is much informal contact between them. This is partially helped by the fact that all year heads share an office. Year heads maintain records for each of the students in their care. These records are stored securely in the secretary's office.

The school has a tutor system and it is apparent that the tutors are very committed to the students in their care. However, there is no clearly defined role for tutors. In first year,

second year and TY, tutors have a timetabled tutorial class which allows them to meet regularly with the students and to follow up on any issues. Tutors from third year upwards have no such allocation. It is recommended that the school standardise the role and duties appropriate to the developmental stage of each year group to ensure consistency across the school. In addition, the school should provide all tutors with the same amount of time to meet with their group so that they can fulfil this role more effectively.

A student council has been formed and its members are democratically elected by the full student body. Regular meetings are held under the guidance of a liaison teacher and are recorded appropriately. The council takes its responsibilities very seriously and has brought issues to the attention of the principal. The board should now establish a formal link with the student council. The council has also helped organise fundraising activities with the parent teacher association (PTA). These achievements are significant and the students are commended for their efforts. In progressing the work of the council, consideration should be given to accessing the supports available through the Citizen Education Support Team (<http://cspe.slss.ie>) and Dáil na nÓg (www.dailnanog.ie) as well as documents on the websites of the Department of Education and Skills (www.education.ie) and of Student Council Support (www.studentcouncil.ie).

Student leadership is also fostered through the World Challenge Project and prefect and mentoring systems. Staff democratically elect both prefects and mentors: prefects are elected from the sixth-year students while mentors are elected from fifth-year. The role of prefect includes helping out with supervision on open day and lunchtime supervision. It is now timely for the school to revisit this role and to consider expanding it to include a wider variety of duties. Mentors are assigned to first-year students and play an integral role in their initial induction.

A parent teacher association (PTA) has been in operation in this school for ten years. The current PTA was formed in October 2010 and was democratically elected. Monthly meetings are held which are attended by the principal and three teachers. The PTA has accessed training given by the Co-operation of Minority Religion and Protestant Parents' Association (Compass) and is affiliated to this organisation. It has been actively involved in fundraising to improve facilities and resources. For example, funding was made available to the school to provide thirty new computers. In order to support this work, the PTA requests all parents to contribute €100 per annum. In addition to the report provided at its annual general meeting, it is recommended that the PTA now provide a financial report to the board of management outlining expenditure details from this contribution. The PTA sends out a newsletter to all parents and is planning to submit articles for publication on the school website which is currently being re-developed. In line with good practice, the PTA has also been consulted on key policies.

Communication systems between the school and parents are effective. The principal is available to meet parents who have prior appointments and will make exceptions if necessary. Documents made available indicated that there is ongoing communication between the school and parents. School reports, parent-teacher meetings and the students' journals are the main means of communication. Students from all year groups are invited to attend parent teacher meetings with their parents, a commendable practice. The school has also established strong links with the local community.

1.4 Management of resources

The teaching staff of Drogheda Grammar School regularly engages in continuing professional development (CPD) and the board of management provides financial support as the need arises. In most cases, teachers have the opportunity to teach their subject at all levels and in all programmes. This is good practice as it harnesses existing expertise and

builds the capacity of the relevant teachers in their subject specialism. Moreover, it facilitates future planning and ensures that subject departments do not become overly dependent on a particular member of staff. A *Staff Handbook* is provided to teachers which gives information and guidance in relation to the operation of the school. The timetabling of classes in all subjects is broadly in line with the recommendations of the syllabuses. An effective mentoring programme has been made available to new teachers. The school is currently working on formalising this provision.

The school meets its obligations with regard to the delivery of the required minimum number of instruction hours per week as set out in Circular Letter M29/95 *Time in School*. The school's staffing allocation from the Department of Education and Skills for the 2010/11 year is 20.67 whole-time teacher equivalents (WTE). This allocation also includes 0.5 WTE for Guidance and 0.79 for curricular concessions the school is also financing an additional 0.5 WTE for Guidance.

Many improvements have taken place over the years to enhance the quality of the school facilities. The school has optimised all funding available from the Department of Education and Skills. The school is at the final planning stages of a building project and work is scheduled to commence shortly. All classrooms are teacher-based and many of these contain attractive displays of students' work and subject-specific material. This is commended.

The members of the secretarial, caretaking and cleaning staffs provide effective and valuable support for the day-to-day running of the school. The cultivation of environmental awareness in students and staff is not yet a feature of Drogheda Grammar School. Consideration might now be given by the school to participating in the Green Schools award scheme to promote environmental awareness.

Regular staff meetings are held and proper procedures are in place. The staff is given prior notice of each meeting and members are invited to contribute to the agenda. The principal usually chairs the meetings. Senior management and staff communicate with each other by memo. However, many teaching staff expressed concern with communication structures in the school and identified an urgent need for improvement in this regard. Therefore, it is recommended that management and staff explore this matter with a view to improving the communication structures that already exist.

The school has acquired advanced information and communication (ICT) facilities which allows it to issue computerised reports to students. As many classrooms have now been provided with ICT facilities, this should allow the school to improve day-to-day communication such as notices, tracking attendance and student behaviour. The technology will also allow all subject departments to store planning documentation in electronic files which can be readily accessed. The school has also acquired a number of interactive whiteboards. This commitment by the school to the development of the ICT resources is commended. The work of the PTA in this regard is worthy of mention.

Part of a post of responsibility has been allocated to the area of health and safety and a co-ordinator is in place who fulfils her role meticulously. Regular fire drills are held in the school and these are logged. The school has recently undergone a health and safety audit and is systematically following up on the recommendations outlined in the report.

2. QUALITY OF SCHOOL PLANNING

2.1 The school plan

The school first engaged with the School Development Planning Initiative (SDPI) in 2003 and the school has allocated SDP duties to a co-ordinator and three post holders. The co-ordinator has attended many seminars including *Subject Department Planning* (2004) *Planning for Special Needs Students* and *Exploring Mixed Ability Teaching* (2007). The deputy principal attended a seminar on *School Self-Evaluation* in 2009. All staff have received many inputs including *Special Educational Needs* (2006) by the National Council for Special Education (NCSE), *Differentiation and Assessment* (2009) by the learning-support department in the school and *Dyslexia and Inclusion* (2009) by the SDPI. This level of engagement with the SDPI and other such organisations is commended.

The school should now adopt a strategic approach to the management of learning arising from the various inputs. In order to maximise the benefit from CPD activities, a mechanism needs to be established to share good practice within and across subject departments. An initial step in this process might be the establishment of a teaching and learning group overseen by senior management. This committee could establish targets with defined timeframes for the implementation of strategies derived from the sharing of good practice. The culture of self-evaluation throughout the school is at a very early stage. This process should be advanced by the board of management and senior management who should involve all staff, parents and students in the process. In addition, there is a need to upskill all staff in the area of assessment for learning (AfL) as part of this strategic planning.

The role of the planning co-ordinator has been clearly defined. The main objective of the role is to drive policy development and to co-ordinate planning committees in relation to policy development. Work has recently begun on the development of a three-year strategic plan and all staff members have been invited to contribute. As a first step, current needs should be identified, then targets set, strategies devised and action plans put in place. A review date should be set to measure progress. It is important that the boards, the senior management team, the PTA and students, as appropriate, are all involved in the development of this strategic plan. This process should lead to a cohesive vision for the school shared by the boards, senior management, parents, staff and students.

The process of policy planning in the school is effective and the structures that are in place are supportive. In many cases, a committee was established for the drafting of a policy before it was sent to the board of management, all staff and the students' council for consultation. The school has addressed many elements of a school plan as envisaged by the Education Act, 1998. It is evident that planning is ongoing but the outputs of this work could be organised into a more cohesive and accessible document, to include permanent and developmental sections. To support this work, a number of planning templates are readily available from the School Development Planning Initiative (SDPI) at www.sdpi.ie. Guidelines regarding the content and layout of a school plan are also available. In compiling the necessary documents, particular attention should be given to ensuring that the good practices currently in place in the school, for example the consultative structures which have been established, are systematically recorded. Any plans for future review and evaluation should also be included.

Many policies have been developed and this is commendable. The school should now establish a timeline for the development, ratification and review of all policies and record this information. The school could also optimise its website to ensure that all policies are widely available.

The quality of planning evidenced in the subject plans provided to inspectors during the evaluation varied considerably. Some subject departments presented detailed documents outlining the organisational arrangements for the subject and statements of long-term plans for the subject. The use of the SDPI template for subject department planning was used in many instances. Good practice was evident where subject planning included statements of learning outcomes as well as curricular content. In some cases, learning outcomes were linked to clearly defined timeframes, teaching methodologies, resources and assessment. Over time, this good work should be noted and implemented by all subject departments. All subject plans should be regularly reviewed and kept up to date. It is recommended that senior management adopt a more proactive leadership role in relation to planning for teaching and learning and should monitor subject plans. It was noted that recommendations made in previous subject inspection reports have largely been implemented.

The school has not yet implemented a school-wide system for the analysis of students' achievements across all departments in certificate examinations. This should be addressed and the information, as well as uptake of subjects at higher level and comparisons with national norms, should be used by all subject departments when planning. These data would provide the baseline for tracking students' progress and setting targets for improvement.

Confirmation was provided that, in compliance with Post-primary Circulars M44/05 and 0062/2006, the board of management has formally adopted the Department's *Child Protection Guidelines for Post-primary Schools* (Published September 2004). Confirmation was also provided that these child protection procedures have been brought to the attention of management, 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. However, as there was some confusion among staff, it is recommended that annual briefing sessions be held to ensure that all staff, including new members, are kept fully up-to-date.

3. QUALITY OF CURRICULUM PROVISION

3.1 Curriculum planning and organisation

Drogheda Grammar School provides the following second-level programmes: the Junior Certificate (JC), a compulsory Transition Year (TY) and the established Leaving Certificate (LC). There is also a very wide and balanced range of subjects on offer. Following completion of the junior cycle, students proceed to the compulsory TY programme. In keeping with good practice, the school should now refer to the compulsory nature of TY in its Admissions Policy.

An SPHE programme, based on the approved curriculum framework, is delivered in each of the three years of the junior cycle. A relationships and sexuality education (RSE) policy has been developed but should be reviewed to reflect current provision in the school. Collaboration between the guidance counsellor and the SPHE department in this school is very good.

TY is very well established in the school. The co-ordination of the programme is carried out in a committed way. The TY co-ordinator is supported by two tutors and the year head. Currently, there are no formal timetabled meetings for the TY team although it is acknowledged that there is much informal contact between the co-ordinator and the tutors. It is recommended that a TY planning group be established to support the work of the TY co-ordinator and that regular meetings be held. This team could include the principal,

guidance counsellor, a member of the teaching team as well as the tutors and the year head, as appropriate.

TY planning documentation contains much information including a content outline for each subject. Good practice was seen when these programmes incorporated a statement of the aims and objectives of the programme and when the learning outcomes were linked to the content. This practice should be observed by all subject departments. The TY programme provides a range of educational experiences for students including some subjects which are delivered in modular format. Many activities are organised by different teachers throughout the year in addition to the TY annual activity day.

Further attention is needed regarding the co-ordination and monitoring of work experience. For instance, all students should be required to complete a daily reflective diary and all staff timetabled for TY should be given responsibility for following up on a number of TY students with the employer. It is good that all employers fill in a written report after the students complete their work experience.

TY students receive two formal assessments each year in addition to continuous assessment. Two reports are issued and these include a grade as well as a comment regarding their personal development. As a further mode of assessment, all TY students could develop and submit a portfolio of achievement. This portfolio could contain examples of class work, projects and personal reflections on the many very good activities taking place. A graduation ceremony is held as a formal conclusion to the year when student achievement is acknowledged and celebrated.

3.2 Arrangements for students' choice of subjects and programmes

The school has in place a variety of ways to successfully support the transfer of students from primary schools and to facilitate their adjustment to post-primary education. These include visits to the primary schools by management, an open night for prospective students and parents and an orientation programme. All first-year students are met by their year head and with the guidance counsellor at the start of the school year. An effective mentoring programme is also in place.

There are very good systems in place to assist students in making subject choices. An information evening is held for parents of in-coming first-year students each October when they receive information regarding all curricular programmes and subjects. At a later stage of the academic year, all of these students are surveyed regarding their preferred subject option and bands are formed around their choices. First-year students are then provided with the opportunity to sample all subjects until Halloween when they make their final choices.

In TY, all students meet with the guidance counsellor individually to discuss possible career options. These students also take the Differential Aptitude Tests (DATs), an important support to students in making appropriate subject choices. An information evening is also held for their parents in April where the various subject options for senior cycle are explained. The guidance counsellor is available to address any queries as they arise at both events and to meet with parents and students on other occasions.

3.3 Co-curricular and extracurricular provision

Students can avail of a wide range of co-curricular and extracurricular activities. Sporting, cultural and educational activities are on offer, all contributing to the holistic development of the students. Management and staff actively encourage all students to participate in the

activities provided. These activities are managed by teachers and the success of the co-curricular and extracurricular programme is due to the commitment and dedication of staff involved. When necessary, the PTA has made some funding available to subsidise particular activities. In the next review of the school's homework policy, specific reference should be made to extracurricular activities and to the responsibility on students who miss class because of involvement in an activity to source and complete any homework assigned. Information regarding all co-curricular and extracurricular activities is posted on a notice board in the staff room. Consideration might now be given to the development of a central file detailing the names of all students and the activities in which they are involved. Such information would provide useful records for school management, and particularly year heads, when compiling student profiles such as references for entry to third-level education or for employment.

4. QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN SUBJECTS

4.1 Planning and preparation

Subject department planning structures are well established in this school. Meetings are held and minutes are recorded. Subject co-ordinators have been appointed in all subject areas and in most subject departments, where appropriate, this position is rotated. This is good practice. Subject meetings provide opportunities to share experience and expertise: future meetings should be used to focus discussion on teaching methodologies with particular emphasis on differentiation and assessment for learning.

The quality of subject department plans ranged from fair to very good. Department plans varied in detail with the majority containing all the organisational arrangements for the subject in conjunction with long-term curriculum plans. In most subjects evaluated, it was evident that the teaching team had collectively developed and agreed the programmes of work for their classes. Good practice was observed where the teaching team had adopted a common template to support the development of these programmes. Topics were linked to the desired learning outcomes, methodologies, modes of assessment and resources used. In some subjects, it was evident that teachers had evaluated programme content and this information was also included in the subject plan.

In many instances, teachers share resources and have developed common tests for year groups. In most instances, teachers maintain good records of attendance, homework and class tests which are used to report on students' progress to parents.

4.2 Learning and teaching

The quality of teaching and learning observed in the lessons visited was varied. In most instances the learning intention was shared with students either orally or noted on the board at the start of the lesson. This good practice should be adopted in all lessons. The learning intention should be revisited during and at the end of the lesson to reinforce the learning.

Teachers made good use of active learning strategies such as group work and pair work. These strategies were most effective when students were provided with a clear task, supporting materials and a clear outline of their role, and where feedback was taken in a whole-class setting. The use of peer tutoring is another strategy which could be considered for use during lessons.

Classroom management was very good in the majority of lessons. However, in a minority of instances, there were occasions where students became disengaged for part of the time.

Teachers should consistently implement the code of behaviour and also reflect on the methodologies being used.

Overall, activities were well organised and well managed. Students participated well in the lesson and regularly contributed to discussions and answered questions. In some lessons, the predominant form of questioning was direct recall. Where possible, students should be provided with opportunities to adopt a problem solving approach where appropriate or to be challenged to think analytically and critically.

In some lessons observed, there was a good focus on literacy as new terms were introduced and carefully explained. Best practice in this regard included strategies such as students reading aloud, students using mnemonics to aid recall and an appropriate emphasis on the pronunciation of new words. Differentiation was integrated into some lessons observed. Teachers had developed resources which were tailored to suit the learning needs of students. This is good practice. During planning meetings, teachers should discuss and share strategies regarding students at both extremes of the learning spectrum.

4.3 Assessment

In all lessons where appropriate, homework is given regularly and is usually corrected as part of the following lesson. Student notebooks and exercise books were examined in a number of lessons and while they contained evidence of monitoring, the quality of the presentation of student work was an area for development. In some instances, students are regularly supplied with worksheets and handouts but no system was in place for students to store these materials. It is important that students are taught the importance of organisational skills from first year onwards and this could include a lesson on folder management. By so doing, students would be enabled to access materials more readily for reflective and revision purposes.

In many lessons, students' written work is monitored and marked by teachers and constructive comments provided. This is an important principle of Assessment for Learning (AfL) and it is recommended that this practice be used by all teachers. Reports are sent home following four formal assessments during the year and parent teacher meetings are held annually for each year group.

An analysis of the results achieved by students in Certificate Examinations is carried out by some subject departments and included in their planning documentation. It is commendable that these contained comparisons with national averages at both Junior Certificate and Leaving Certificate level. A comprehensive analysis of the school's performance in the certificate examinations compared to national norms should be carried out each year for each examination subject area. This information should then be discussed by subject departments and used to inform planning for the subject.

5. QUALITY OF SUPPORT FOR STUDENTS

5.1 Inclusion of students with additional educational needs

The school has an ex-quota allocation of 0.7 whole-time equivalent (WTE) in addition to 3.63 WTE posts and four special needs assistants to provide for students assessed as having special educational needs. The evidence gathered during the evaluation suggests the resources for learning support and for SEN are being deployed for the purposes intended.

The special education needs department is co-ordinated by a member of staff. The learning-support teacher is also a year head. The duties attached to both roles are onerous and the

school should revisit current arrangements so that the teacher can perform both the planning and administrative aspects of the role more effectively. The learning support co-ordinator holds a specialist qualification in this area. In planning for the long-term development of this department, the school should explore the feasibility of up-skilling an additional teacher to ensure that they are not overly reliant on one member of staff. A small team of five teachers provide support in literacy and numeracy. Currently, there are no formal meetings scheduled for this department. It is recommended that regular meetings of this team be scheduled. Such meetings should also include the guidance counsellor and a member of the senior management team.

The school uses the resources it receives for special educational needs in a variety of ways. This takes the form of withdrawal in small groups or in-class support. At the end of September, the school reports that students are assessed to determine their ability level and to ensure that the supports being provided are suitable. Students should be regularly re-tested to track their progress and to ensure that the strategies that are in place are effective.

Planning folders were made available to the evaluation team and it is very evident that there is a level of developmental planning for students taking place. The school has begun the process of developing individual education plans (IEPs) for students. This is good practice and the special educational needs department should continue to advance this work. In addition, all subject departments should specify how they are planning for the individual needs of SEN students. During the course of the evaluation, many teachers identified the need for further support regarding suitable strategies that could be used to help students with SEN. Senior management should now conduct an audit of the training needs of all staff in this regard and address these needs in order to further equip staff with the necessary skills to work with special educational needs students in their care. This is recommended.

A draft policy on special education needs was presented to the evaluation team. This was developed following consultation by key members of the special educational needs team with senior management and the staff. Good progress has been made. It is recommended that, as the policy develops, the school consider expanding its scope and re-naming it a whole-school policy on inclusion. This would be in line with section 2.4 of the publication *Inclusion of Students with Special Educational Needs* (Department of Education and Science/Skills, 2007). This policy could then provide guidance on a whole-school response to supporting all students with additional educational needs, including newcomer students and the exceptionally able. The National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) publications *Exceptionally Able Students: Draft Guidelines for Teachers* (NCCA, 2007) and *Intercultural Education in the Post-Primary School: Guidelines for Schools* (NCCA, 2006) are also useful sources of advice.

There is a classroom dedicated to resource teaching and learning support use. This room contains some subject-related material, resources, books and storage facilities. All psychological reports are stored in a locked cabinet in the secretary's office where they can be accessed as the need arises by members of the special educational needs team. Every effort is made by the school to support exceptionally able students. Each year, students attend the Science Olympiad and the Mathematics Olympiad held in Dublin City University. Students can also enter the annual creative writing competition in the school. Furthermore, scholarships are awarded at the start of the academic year to support students for the duration of their academic career in Drogheda Grammar School. These are very good initiatives and worthy of high praise.

English as an additional language (EAL) support is provided to students following language proficiency assessments which are carried out in the school. The Post-Primary Assessment Kit (Department of Education and Skills) should also be used for this purpose. EAL support is delivered in a number of ways. For example, language lessons are timetabled against

Irish from which these students are exempt and one teacher is timetabled to deliver these lessons. The main focus of all language support is to improve students' oral and written skills. This is very good. However, there is a need to establish if the support being provided is equipping the students to fully engage with the curriculum. Establishing links with the teaching and learning committee, as suggested in Section 2:1 of this report could be a first step.

In mainstream subjects, there is a need for all subject teachers to develop particular strategies for EAL students to enable them to cope with subject-specific key words and terminology. Such strategies could include the development and display of a glossary of terminology pertinent to a specific subject area. These words could be referred to and reinforced during the course of lessons.

5.2 Guidance and student support in the whole-school context

The school receives eleven hours per week from the Department of Education and Skills for guidance. At the time of the evaluation, the full time guidance counsellor was absent on approved leave and replaced with a substitute. One period per week is given to TY, fifth-year and sixth-year classes. In junior cycle, students in need of individual counselling are withdrawn from Religious Education and SPHE.

Year heads can refer students to the guidance counsellor and students can also self-refer. It is essential that a record is made of all referrals by any staff member, including year heads. The school has developed a referral template and consistent use should be encouraged.

Guidance planning is well advanced in the school. Guidance planning to date has essentially been carried out by the guidance counsellor. In order to develop the plan and to ensure that there is a whole-school approach to guidance, it is recommended that a planning team be established which should include representatives of students, parents and the local business community. Facilities for guidance are good and include an appropriately equipped office and access to the school computer room.

It is evident that there is a strong commitment to the care of students in this school. Parents and students commented very favourably on the level of care that is provided. However, the establishment of a formal care team would be a further benefit. This could include a year head, tutor, guidance counsellor and a member of the senior management team. It might be useful to merge meetings so that junior-cycle and senior-cycle meetings take place simultaneously. In this way, year heads would be given an opportunity to collaborate and share expertise more regularly.

It is clear that there is a very strong whole-school approach to the care and support of students. Meetings held with individual teachers, with the year heads and with the guidance and learning support departments provided substantial evidence of the extent of the support and care that exists within the school. The commitment to the students by the board, the senior management team and all members of staff is very apparent and highly commended.

6. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT

The following are the main strengths identified in the evaluation:

- The school has created an inclusive environment where all students are welcomed.
- There is a clear ladder of referral in relation to discipline and the year heads and the deputy principal play a significant role in managing the process.

- The school has had a high level of engagement with the SDPI and the board is very supportive of all such activities.
- The school has in place a variety of ways to successfully support the transfer of students from primary schools and to facilitate their adjustment to post-primary education.
- There are very good systems in place in the school which enable students to make their subject choices.
- Subject department planning is well established in this school.
- In the lessons observed, teachers made good use of active learning strategies such as group work and pair work.
- It is evident that there is a strong commitment to the care of students in this school.

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

- The level of communication needs to be improved between the following partners; between the board of directors and the board of management; between the board of management and the staff and parents; and between the principal and staff.
- The board of management, senior management and all staff must work collectively and adopt a consistent approach to the implementation of the code of behaviour and pay particular attention to the improvement of punctuality among students and staff. All staff members should recognise the importance of modelling good timekeeping and be professionally responsible in this regard.
- The board of directors should play a more active role in the life of the school.
- Senior management should review the respective roles and responsibilities of both principal and deputy principal to ensure that educational leadership is prioritised as a core aspect of the principal's work.
- The board should access all available training in order to keep fully abreast of current educational developments and policies. This will enable it to lead the school more effectively and to be more aware of its role and responsibilities.
- The board should adopt a more proactive approach to planning and, through the principal, link with the planning co-ordinator so that a shared vision can be developed for the school.
- A comprehensive analysis of the school's performance in the certificate examinations against national norms should be carried out each year in each examination subject area.
- Senior management should now conduct an audit of the training needs of staff in the area of SEN and address these needs. The school should now adopt a strategic approach to the implementation of learning arising out of all CPD events.

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

7. RELATED SUBJECT INSPECTION REPORTS

The following related Subject Inspection reports are available:

- Subject Inspection of Geography – 6 April 2011
- Subject Inspection of Mathematics – 5 April 2011
- Subject Inspection of Science and Biology – 5 April 2011
- Subject Inspection of SPHE – 10 November 2010

Appendix

8. SCHOOL RESPONSE TO THE REPORT

Submitted by the Board of Management

Area 1: Observations on the content of the inspection report

Drogheda Grammar School was very pleased to have had the opportunity to co-operate with the Department's Inspectorate on a Whole School Evaluation. The comprehensive verbal report which was given a week after the whole school inspection, gave senior management and staff the opportunity to act on a number of recommendations.

The school was commended on the very inclusive environment it has where all students are genuinely welcomed and this is extended to students of all religious faiths and none. The school commitment to student care is paramount and noted.

The school is delighted that it was commended for the many policies developed, its use of ICT resources, the student leadership roles in place, support given to exceptionally able students, the high level of engagement with SDPI, the system in place for the students making subject choices and above all, the commitment to the students by the Board, Senior Management team and all the Staff.

The subjects under inspection, Mathematics, Geography, Science, Biology and SPHE were all commented on positively and teachers given much encouragement from the inspectors during the feedback sessions.

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 number of recommendations have, or are being acted upon. These include a review by senior management of the responsibilities undertaken by assistant principals and special duties teachers. TY portfolio work is now in place as is a more fully defined role for tutors. A systematic review of policies is in place and Board of Management minutes are being passed on to staff and the PTA committee.

With a lot of emphasis now on Literacy and Numeracy strategies, the school has taken positive steps in this regard. The school participated in the recent PISA programme and English and Maths teachers have attended seminars and in-service on Literacy and Numeracy topics. The school has set up sub-committees to develop policies and make recommendations to enhance student performance in these areas, which will have a benefit across all subject areas.

We are grateful to the inspectors for their forensic analysis of the school and the courteous manner in which they engaged with everyone involved at Drogheda Grammar School.