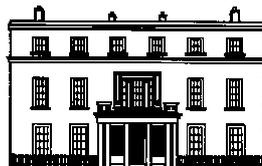


An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Whole-School Evaluation
REPORT

Lanesborough Community College
Lanesborough County Longford
Roll number: 71720L

Date of inspection: 22 October 2010



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

WHOLE-SCHOOL EVALUATION

A whole-school evaluation of Lanesborough Community College was undertaken in October 2010. This report presents the findings of the evaluation and makes recommendations for improvement. During the evaluation, the quality of teaching and learning in four subjects were evaluated in detail, and separate reports are available on these subjects. (See section 7 for details). The board of management of the school was given an opportunity to comment on the findings and recommendations of the report; the board chose to accept the report without response.

INTRODUCTION

Lanesborough Community College was founded by an amalgamation of Lanesborough Vocational School and the Convent of Mercy school in 1989. The Vocational School was established in 1961 and it amalgamated with a small secondary school in Ballyleague in 1968. Lanesborough Community College is the only post-primary school in a large rural area and it has been an important educational resource since its foundation. The fiftieth anniversary of the school's foundation is being celebrated in 2011.

Lanesborough is a small County Longford town, which including its environs, has a population of approximately 1100 people. The school serves students from both County Longford and County Roscommon and has served the local community well socially and educationally.

Current enrolment in the school is 148 and enrolment has been at this level for several years. The small size of the school is a selling point with parents who have long recognised the quality of the school's personal care and support of the individual student. The school's population is characteristically homogenous with few students from minority communities such as Traveller or newcomer backgrounds.

All subjects offered are taught to Leaving Certificate Higher Level. There are seventy post-Leaving Certificate students accommodated in successful courses that support the local community.

1. QUALITY OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT

1.1 Characteristic spirit of the school

Lanesborough Community College is a well run school. Welcoming and inclusive, it provides a nurturing framework for students of all aptitudes, abilities and interests, in the context of an effective academic, cultural, sporting and personal-development environment. The school ethos emphasises challenge, lifelong learning and responsible citizenship. This ethos is lived out in practice; the aspirations it defines are real, have a discernible effect on students' lives and are at the basis of all activity and endeavour. There has been exemplary thought applied to the holistic needs of students, both from a management and governance aspect and from the teaching staff. Being a small school in a rural environment is a defining factor in the successful achievement of the ethos in the practice of delivering a quality education.

The spirit of the school is welcoming, affirming, Christian, and is both aspirational and pragmatic. A central aspect of the college's stated mission is to make every effort to respect the uniqueness of each student and this is achieved through an effective pastoral care system and academic supports.

The board of management appreciates the level of support, expertise and commitment provided to it by the joint trustees, the Sisters of Mercy and County Longford Vocational Education Committee (VEC).

The school benefits from the collective resources of the County Longford VEC scheme. Peripatetic teachers enable the school to react to the changing demand for access to subjects and to provide smaller-demand subjects in the school; this is much appreciated by parents.

The principal and deputy principal are well attuned to the characteristics of the student intake, the aspirations inherent in the mission statement, the development needs of the school, the availability of resources from outside agencies and the qualities and potential of the teaching staff. They share a vision that is clear in its emphasis on the holistic as well as the educational development of students. Board members have a shared vision for the school. This vision has a strong community emphasis.

The characteristic spirit is reflected in policies, practices and the atmosphere of the school. Respect is a key value underpinning all actions and activities. The Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) initiative has made the school admirably and successfully student focussed, with strong support systems for them firmly and centrally in place. The policies are inclusive and strive to be fair and equitable. Having created an exemplary culture of care and support for students of all aptitudes and motivation levels, the school is now ambitious to utilise the good systems and caring ambience to encourage and inspire students to increase outcomes and attainment of the education process. The school is moving towards more proactive strategies and actions in order to improve academic attainment and outcomes.

Senior management endeavours to provide a safe and secure environment, and has very successfully promoted a strong school community that is friendly, caring and orderly. This was evident in the very positive engagement and interaction of students and teachers in and out of the classroom.

1.2 School ownership and management

Lanesborough Community College is part of the County Longford VEC's scheme, and its board has representation from the VEC and from the Sisters of Mercy. The board of management is properly constituted, committed and active in its administrative involvement. Agreed reports from board meetings are made available to the various constituent groups who are represented on the board. It is suggested that, in order to increase communication by the parents' representatives with the generality of the parent group, the school website could be used to increase dispersal of board of management information and reports of meetings. Both the VEC and the Sisters of Mercy take an active part in running the school, with the students ultimate good and the local community's needs in mind. The good co-operation between these two patrons has ensured the school's continual development since its establishment. The board is aware of its duties in relation to the provisions of the Education Act of 1998. Training provided by the VEC and the Joint Managerial Body (JMB) has been availed of by board members. The board meets regularly and keeps good records. Senior management has excellent communications and relations with the board of management. The board is supportive of senior management. The board is open to the role of the Student Council as a partner in the school community.

The board of management functions well. Good attendance at meetings and productive outcomes are notable. Ongoing business is effectively dealt with. Board members make as much time as is required available for their roles. The board is active, dedicated, professional, and in tune with the school's needs. It has proven itself to be open to ideas that can bring about school improvement. It has pursued to completion various projects that

benefited the school. A number of current projects are still works in progress, the most significant being a proposal to the Department of Education and Skills planning and building unit about building their own gymnasium.

The school building has been the focus of the board's attention and successful activity to date. The board now needs to bring their expertise to bear on education policy making. In order to support the development of an educational policy focus by the board, it is recommended that all post holders and subject departments furnish a short end-of-year report to it outlining the successes and challenges encountered and include ideas for future development. While the school has a range of policies in its school plan, it is recommended that the board now preside over the development of a strategic plan that outlines the current activities and future direction of the main aspects of the school. An outline action plan could then be developed.

The board has consulted with parents, students and patrons in the execution of its responsibilities. Policy development and adoption has been an area where such consultation has been evident. In addition the principal has been very successful in encouraging staff to be involved in the development and improvement work on the school's overall policies since his appointment.

The board are very committed to the school community, and have succeeded in surmounting the difficulties of being a small school. The school has developed a good profile through its actions and provisions and has ensured that its achievements in this regard are kept high in local consciousness by weekly publicity in the local press and media.

1.3 In-school management

Good work has been done and worthwhile goals achieved through the co-operation and collaboration of the principal and deputy principal since their appointment. Communication between them is excellent and they share a sense of joint mission.

The principal delegates management responsibility effectively. He has been successful in motivating and facilitating individuals and teams. The most important, extensive and effective link in this chain of delegation is the deputy principal, who carries a large range of tasks that define and execute the processes that have made the school such a success. In practice the principal has prioritised the operational day-to-day running of the school. The principal should now focus on developing his educational leadership role. This should enable more attention to be directed to subject planning, to monitoring curricula and syllabus delivery, to student attainment and to focus the potential of students in ways that equip them better for after-school life.

The principal manages the staff, develops the timetable and is the link with the board and parents. The deputy principal attends to the management of students and a wide and varied range of tasks. It is recommended that the duties of principal and deputy be reviewed in the interest of balance and equity. Furthermore, some of the duties of the deputy principal should be delegated to the assistant principal and special duties posts.

The principal's management style and preferences for delegation has ensured that there is collective sharing of tasks and responsibilities. As a result of the principal's work in modernising the posts, the post structure now assumes the characteristics of shared management responsibility. Good practice exists in the structure of post-holder meetings. The principal meets the post holders individually in September. Assistant principals can call a meeting to address issues in their area of responsibility.

It is recommended that post duties be further reviewed and, when possible, redefined, to allow available post resources to meet the school's needs. Attention should be focussed on the appropriateness of special duties posts and on equity between posts. It is also recommended that meetings for special duties posts are held.

The small size of the school benefits communication between senior management, post holders and staff. Communication is good in general; formal meetings are held between principal and deputy and between senior management and assistant principals and informal meetings happen as necessary. The principal habitually uses the morning break to contact teachers as the need arises. Notice boards and the staff journal are means by which indirect communication arises. Full staff meetings are generally held once a term.

It has been the policy of the board and of senior management to support staff in their continuing professional development (CPD) needs and aspirations. Regular staff days and training provided by the Second Level Support Service has been availed of. The principal and deputy principal have benefited from VEC provision of management training. Meetings organised by the chief executive officer of the VEC for the senior management of all the schools within the scheme also represent training for senior management as they learn and are influenced by their peers.

The school's admission policy is fair and equitable and this is expressed in a transparent and inclusive admissions policy document. Inclusion is supported by the annual steps the school takes to gain information from feeder primary schools, in order to be in a position to accommodate the needs and to ease the transition into the post-primary setting of incoming students. Members of the Traveller community, students with special educational needs (SEN) and newcomer students are welcomed.

The school has an unambiguous code of student behaviour and a range of procedures and practices in the application of this are in operation. Details of the code of behaviour are reproduced in the student journal and are communicated to parents at the beginning of every new academic year. There is, in practice, a successful whole-school emphasis on positive student behaviour that is maintained as the shared responsibility of all staff. Management philosophy is that promoting positive student behaviour is the key to improving student learning. High standards of courtesy and deportment are expected at all times. Good behaviour and improvement are affirmed and at the end of the school year there are awards made for a range of personal accomplishments and improvement beyond conventional academic and sporting criteria. During the period of the evaluation, the inspectors noted positive behaviour and interaction among the students themselves.

As a DEIS school, the focus on inclusion, attendance and retention has been an element driving the changes that are in place in relation to the management of students. The school goes to great lengths to ensure that suspension or exclusion is very infrequently used as a sanction. In-school exclusion is operated where appropriate whereby the student attends daily but is withdrawn from leisure activities and is carefully supervised. This successfully reduces the chances of an excluded student never returning to school.

Very good retention of students has been the norm in Lanesborough Community College, due to the supports available and the level of personal attention that is possible in the small school. Recent excellent adjustments to tracking of attendance on a twice-daily basis have resulted in more accountability and improved attendance. A range of strategies are in place to monitor attendance in every class. Parents are informed by text message if students are missing from school. Persistent unexplained absence is therefore not possible. The pastoral-care system and guidance dimension are also effective in ensuring that students' problems do not disrupt attendance. The local attendance officer monitors attendance and liaises with the National Education Welfare Board. A wide range of co-curricular and extracurricular

activities are provided to enhance the students' experience of being in school and are a strategy against early school leaving. There is a high return to senior cycle after completion of Junior Certificate. Senior management, board and staff see this as a real reflection of their efforts to be an appropriate and effective education provider for the local community.

Internal issues in Longford VEC scheme as a whole in relation to the School Completion Programme (SCP) had resulted in it being temporality suspended at the time of the whole-school evaluation. Management paid tribute to the beneficial effect the SCP had had on supporting attendance and in focussing students on punctuality and full attendance, and were hopeful that these supports would soon again be available to students.

An elected student council is in place and has been active in a range of activities and interventions such as peer support, which helps students in transition from primary school. It also acts as a point of reference for students who are stressed or socially under pressure. The effective anti-bullying procedures in place ensure security and low in-school anxiety for all and the student council representatives and the staff are ever vigilant for infringements of the code. Student council members take part annually in *Dáil na nÓg*.

Members of the student council have a clear sense of their own identity as the voice of the student body and as its leaders. A liaison teacher works with them as a facilitator. Monthly meetings are held, minutes are kept, and protocols standard in organisational life are learned and applied. Training has been accessed by some members of the council. Members are positive, pro-social and articulate, and the council is an important dimension of support for the school management and staff. However, there is no system of class representation other than the council and the council members act in a prefect-like role. Furthermore, student representatives are elected once only during first year and they then hold office as their class representative permanently for their five years in the school. This limits the number of individuals in the school who experience a leadership role and who can develop the range of skills and the personal confidence that the council provides opportunity to extend. It is recommended that the prefect-like role be taken from the council's role and that class prefects, if necessary, are a separate entity. It is strongly recommended that the election for five year representation should be discontinued and annual elections introduced for every year group.

A long established parents' association supports the school and is a resource for advice and a sounding board for senior management. It is a strong element in the communication chain between school and the diversity of parents and it also works with the student council. It is affiliated to the National Parents' Council (post-primary), meets a few times a term, and has a big input on the school's open days when members provide information for parents of prospective first years. Through the association's funding initiatives, the school has benefited from generous gifts of a basketball court and a music room, which provide breadth and balance in the activities the school can offer. It is recommended that the parents' association consider creating a page on the school website to enhance the communication with the generality of parents.

Parent-teacher meetings are held annually for all year groups and subject teachers participate to provide feedback and advice on a one-to-one basis. These meetings are well utilised as a tool for direct communication with parents in the service of improving students' attainment and outcomes. Communication beyond the formal meeting is very easily arranged and parents note that management and staff are welcoming in relation to meetings outside these times. The transfer programme from primary school is also a conduit of communication with parents and the school has surveyed parents about the programme. This was the first time a formal review with parents had been undertaken, which is very good practice.

Specially-focussed meetings are provided at key junctures of student transfer. First-year parents are welcomed to an open night and are given a full account of all the school's activities. Similarly, parents of fourth-year students transferring into senior cycle are provided with information and advice-rich presentations at a meeting designed to help in the decision-making process of the students' programmes and subjects. Parents may also easily make appointments to meet subject teachers and SEN personnel.

The home-school-community liaison (HSCL) coordinator provides a well-established conduit of communication with parents and community and frequent home visits are available. The school newsletter provides comprehensive updates on life in school and on forthcoming events for all. In addition to texting, the school corresponds with parents when appropriate by letter and telephone. The school website is increasingly important as a tool for general communication. School celebrations and an awards night provide another, more sociable, dimension of communication and contact between parents and school.

There are good links between the school and the local community. The local community is represented on the board, parents have often been students of the school themselves and both VEC representatives and parents are local. The school building itself is available on request for meetings of local groups. The school's outdoor sports facilities are similarly made available. The school's FETAC-accredited post-Leaving Certificate (PLC) courses provide an opportunity for local people to develop new skills and re-enter formal education. The local community supports the school's fund-raising activities.

The school has good and well developed links, both current and historical, with outside agencies in the locality, in County Longford and nationally for curricular support, student psychological support and drug awareness. The Health Service Executive (HSE) and *an Garda Síochána* are also resources that management relies on for information and services.

The school has, over a decade, modernised and progressed as an educational institution and the change and advancement it has achieved has been due in part to its ability and commitment to self-evaluation and review. This has been motivated by the school ethos and the need to compete for available students in the locality, as well as the strong professional and caring culture amongst staff and management, who have recorded and itemised their progress and interventions in a timeline since 2000. As outcomes of its self-review, the school introduced changes that targeted particular school issues through the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP) in 2002, School Completion Programme (SCP) in 2007, and Junior Certificate Schools Programme (JCSP) in 2007. The school's guidance programme has been developed also on an ongoing basis during that time.

Having successfully met the challenges of enrolment, student management and positive behaviour, along with attendance and retention, the school management has begun to position itself to develop strategies with a focus on the betterment of student outcomes. It now has started to analyse State Examinations Commission (SEC) results in relation to the national norms in the various subjects. It has been working on raising expectations; the flow onward to third-level or further education, which was twenty per cent in 2004, has greatly increased and the school has set its sights on increasing this further. The JCSP was introduced in order to enrich junior cycle with the long-term goal of better outcomes for more students in the terminal post-primary examination. It is standard for students to take all or nearly all subjects at higher level in the Junior Certificate examination. Parents are also kept continuously aware of the necessity of raising expectations and persisting with higher levels in junior cycle so that options are kept open throughout senior cycle and beyond. These proactive interventions and stances have begun to see fruit as a change of culture and are commended highly.

As part of an aspiration to improve outcomes, a Maths Club has been set up at lunchtime and mathematics classes for parents are available. These augment the consciousness generally of the importance of numeracy. The school has availed of in-service on motivating students, provided by the Second-Level Support Service. Supporting new students as they transfer from primary school is a key approach to giving students a good start. There is a focus on literacy and numeracy at junior cycle. The school also aspires to, and has made progress in, facilitating debate among staff on curriculum including topics such as breadth and balance, relevance and differentiation, and co-curricular activities for learning beyond the classroom.

Future priorities, self reported by the school, for improving student outcomes include the maintenance of current availability of two European languages, and the fostering of e-learning. All these are commendable and the school's sense of purpose is evident in the steps already taken in this regard. It is recommended that more detailed analysis of SEC results within the subject departments be undertaken annually with a focus on providing solutions, through planning, for content and methodology, to bring about betterment and progress. Methodology, use of information and communication technology (ICT) and assessment for learning should be further emphasised in the school's strategies to increase attainment and successful terminal-examination outcomes. It is recommended that more attention be given to learning styles and multiple intelligences and that practical steps are now taken to harness students' preferred learning styles.

1.4 Management of resources

Currently, there are eleven permanent whole-time teachers, eight teachers with contracts of indefinite duration (CID) and four part-time teachers in the school. All teachers are timetabled for full hours appropriate to their status. There are three part-time special needs assistants (SNAs) allocated to the school.

Staffing is determined centrally by the VEC. For the 2010/11 school year, the principal and a .4 whole-time equivalent (WTE) guidance counsellor are ex-quota posts, as are .7 of a learning-support post and .25 guidance enhancement initiative post. In addition, the school has one WTE disadvantaged area post, 1.25 WTE special needs post, .5 WTE co-educational single catchment area post, .94 curricular concession post and one WTE for a chaplain's post. The JCSP is provided for by a .25 WTE post and the LCVP by 2.00 WTE posts. Due to its DEIS status, the school is in receipt of these significant additional resources, which make possible the level of support the school provides to students. The actual pupil-teacher ratio for the school currently is 19.94:1.

It is important that all teachers are rotated between classes and levels so that all who are suitably qualified have the opportunity to teach subjects at both higher and ordinary level and as part of the various programmes also on offer to students.

The school is compliant with the Department of Education and Skills requirements regarding the appropriate deployment of staff and of the use of available resources. Students receive twenty-seven hours and fifty-five minutes instruction time weekly.

At present, due to contraction of the human resources, the school has no qualified PE teacher and this has had a negative impact on the schools aspiration to provide a health-promoting dimension to the students' education. Currently games classes are timetabled in lieu of PE and this facilitates junior and senior school teams to be trained for Gaelic games. This position should be reviewed as time allocated for the teaching and learning of PE is currently used for games, which is only one of six strands outlined in the PE syllabus. The school has had a part-time PE teacher for up to two day per week until recently. While this is a difficulty facing the board and senior management, it is recommended that the PE

syllabus is delivered in a more complete way when resources and opportunity allow. The VEC representatives on the board may be able to emphasise the need for support from the VEC to create an alternative to this situation.

The school is well maintained by its support staff. A full-time caretaker looks after grounds and buildings and has an appreciated informal role as liaison with the local GAA club for the school's footballers. A part-time cleaner is employed; the school is scrupulously clean. A full-time school secretary supports management, liaises with parents in times of necessity and provides administrative services across a range of functions. The school secretary shares an office with the principal as a separate office is not available currently.

The building stock of the school dates from several eras, the most recent being the new extension and the older being the original vocational school which has recently been refurbished and refitted to a high standard. There are several modern prefabricated classrooms finished to a high standard also. Nonetheless the school needs more classroom and office space and more prefabricated buildings are being sourced to create additional accommodation. The school has utilised the existing buildings well and these are well maintained. The school has an array of general-purpose classrooms and specialist rooms, along with dedicated computer facilities.

Good ICT facilities exist in the school. These have been built up over time and augmented as resources became available. There has been CPD in the use of this resource and computers are used by teachers, management, the school secretary and students for teaching, learning and administration. The communication and technical graphics learning of students is strongly mediated through ICT.

The school's current ICT resources represent a potential that has not yet impacted optimally on students' engagement and attainment. Effective deployment of ICT for learning and for delivery of courses should now be developed in association with other interventions focussed on improving attainment levels on an ongoing basis. It is recommended that senior management look closely at practical strategies to optimise the use of ICT in teaching and learning.

A school safety statement is in place and this is reviewed as is necessary or as conditions in the buildings, grounds or classrooms require.

Lanesborough Community College participates in An Taisce's *Green School* scheme and a special duties post has been allocated to promoting green activities. The school environment has been well tended and, in addition to clean and tidy grounds, their aesthetic effect has also been considered and improved. The students of the art department have produced a monumental sculpture sited attractively in the grounds, based on a story collected in Lanesborough for the Folklore Commission in the nineteen thirties, thus connecting the cultural heritage of the area with students' everyday lives.

2. QUALITY OF SCHOOL PLANNING

2.1 The school plan

Management and staff have been laudable in their efforts with the planning process over a long period and there has been quite consistent planning and policy development. Much valuable thinking has been undertaken about all aspects of the school by management, post holders and teachers as individuals or in customised groups. This has benefited the development and progression of the school and is discernible in the status and structure of the school as the modernised, changed and improved educational institution it has become.

The planning process has aided the school community in surmounting difficulties and looking towards the future. A range of policies has been developed and these function as an overarching structure that defines procedures, processes and activities in the school. Review and updating scheduled for these policies is ongoing. Subject department planning has been progressing.

Two other elements in the planning culture of the school are noted. Longford VEC requires that a five-year plan be produced by all the schools in the scheme. As a participant in DEIS, the school is required to produce and operate a three-year action plan. Both these requirements have meant that, though there is not a complete and succinct statement of its goals, the school has overlapping documentation of the considerable planning activity that has been undertaken. It is recommended that an overarching plan that covers the years of tenure of the current board is now produced and that this is seen as the plan of action that incorporates all priorities, both educational and operational, that the school will pursue within the lifetime of the particular board.

The DEIS plan has acted as a school plan because the programme has been central to the shift in practice and approach to delivery of courses and in the conceptualisation of the school's educational activities. The DEIS plan should include baseline data, and comprehensive targets and tracking as required and should be incorporated into the whole-school plan, where overall goals and policies are reviewed on a regular basis.

Commendably, there is a 2010/11 action plan with a focus on improving issues of concern in the short term which should be expanded, to subsume some of the current work in progress into a formal statement. The development of strategies to implement the draft plan should be discussed at staff meetings. Implementation of the plan should involve consultation with staff, students and parents.

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.

3. QUALITY OF CURRICULUM PROVISION

3.1 Curriculum planning and organisation

The timetable for the school is constructed by the principal. To inform this complex process, particular or contextual information and insights are proffered by the VEC, post holders, programme co-ordinator, guidance personnel and parents. Teachers are surveyed on the needs of their subject and the allocation of time required and these are taken into account where possible in setting out the timetable. Timetabling matters are given attention at staff meetings and discussed across all the various subject departments. Subjects are provided to senior cycle students on a best-fit model; and therefore the timetable varies in what it offers from year to year. Great effort has been made in Lanesborough Community College to accommodate small-demand subjects and even individuals who need a certain subject for access to a particular vocation. Despite the small enrolment, there has been a comparatively good range of subjects consistently offered to them, which offers

opportunity to study academic, practical, arts, and technological subjects as well as languages, in both junior and senior cycle, at ordinary and higher level.

In its efforts to materialise and apply the aspiration in the ethos to support the individual student's needs, the school offers several educational programmes, now well integrated into the culture of teaching and learning: Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme, Leaving Certificate (established), Junior Certificate and the Junior Certificate School Programme.

In junior cycle, all students study six core subjects, except in special circumstances: Gaeilge, English, Mathematics, French or German, Science and Civic, Social and Political Education (CSPE) and Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE). In addition, students choose several optional subjects from amongst Art, Craft and Design, Music, History, Home Economics, Geography, Religious Education (RE), Business Studies, Materials Technology (Wood), Technical Graphics, Metalwork and Computer Studies. The inclusion of a European language as core is an excellent initiative.

In senior cycle, all students study the core subjects Gaeilge, English and Mathematics and a number of choices from the following: Agricultural Science, Physics, Chemistry, Design and Communication Graphics, Biology, Home Economics Social and Scientific, German, Art, Computer Studies, History, Construction Studies, Engineering, Accounting, History, Religious Education, French, Link Modules and Geography. In late third year students are invited to choose their senior cycle subjects and every effort is made to accommodate the maximum number of students in their preferences through timetabling. Post-Leaving Certificate courses are at FETAC Level 5.

Care has been taken not to create barriers that would deny access to subjects on gender-based grounds. There is a good mix of genders in Art and Home Economics, but despite some success, traditional choices for boys and girls strongly persist. In planning subject content, it is important to be flexible and encourage uptake by ensuring that content delivered is neutralised in so far as is possible. Technology, for example, could emphasise or include equally, attention to digital technologies, plastics and non-ferrous metals to expand its appeal and update its content profile. The school should explore practical ways of improving Music uptake amongst boys. The approach to sampling in first year could be used to promote gender mainstreaming of subjects. It is recommended that gender become a focus of curricular planning and timetabling, especially at junior cycle.

The school is reviewing the LCVP in an ongoing way, with particular emphasis on the subject combinations required if students are to participate in this programme. The provision of Transition Year (TY) is under discussion, but because of school size, the fact that it would have to be an all or nothing choice militates against its introduction, even though the parents' association is in favour of it being part of the schools options for students.

3.2 Arrangements for students' choice of subjects and programmes

Very good arrangements are in place for information giving about transfer from primary school and about the requirement and mechanics of enrolment. From the outset conditions support good decision making by parents and students. Parents of incoming first years are invited to the school for an information session before they enrol their son or daughter, at which they participate in presentations, converse with subject teachers and senior management, and have opportunity to seek advice and to communicate particular information about their offspring. On entry to first year, the students are assigned to mixed-ability class groups. Some students may be identified as having special educational needs before they enrol, the school having been alerted to this by parents themselves or by information provided by feeder primary schools with which the school has forged

admirable and useful links. Other issues are identified in the course of the first term in post primary school and are catered for accordingly. This is effective and praiseworthy and the school has had considerable success in providing students with the right support and conditions that can, and do, allow them to thrive in the school context even if their needs are challenging.

In third year similar invitations to information giving about subject choices and options are available for senior cycle and, though finalising of choices may hinge on examination success, the students generally choose all their subjects prior to the Junior Certificate examination. There are good information-giving arrangements for students at key points of transfer and this has contributed to student satisfaction with the school and with increasing success in Junior Certificate in particular.

A taster programme operates for all first-year students until the end of October. To help these students make informed choices, they are all assessed over the duration of the programme. Until this year the taster ran until Christmas. It is recommended that this change is monitored for any adverse effect it may have on students' performance and engagement and that the situation be reviewed or reversed as necessary.

There is a comprehensive array of guidance procedures in senior cycle to help students with subject choice and these are commended. Subject teachers have a big influence in ascertaining the level which a student is advised to take for examination. The programmes available also create options for students at both junior and senior cycle. While the resources available for Guidance are finite, efforts have been made to ensure that these are not all focussed on senior cycle; this is commendable.

3.3 Co-curricular and extracurricular provision

The school's broad curriculum is further enhanced by the range and quality of its extracurricular and co-curricular activities. Sports, music, drama, Art, track and field, debating and participation in a range of competitions, local and national, are all part of students' habitual encounter with school life.

The leisure, scientific and cultural dimensions of extracurricular activities support and enhance learning. Educational tours abroad have been an important long-established feature of life in Lanesborough Community College, and this is continued with a London trip this year. The art department has a long-established track record of gallery and museum visits, which bring students into closer contact with visual culture. Drama is accessed locally in the Bog Lane Theatre in Ballymahon and in Dublin.

Research on the internet is also in use to support students' learning and to further and deepen their encounter with subjects in the real-world or applied context. It is recommended that all first years are set tasks in the use of this medium in order that they develop habitual engagement in relation to a wider range of topics that they source on the internet from the earliest stages of their post-primary schooling.

Students of the sciences are brought annually to NUI Maynooth to see key experiments demonstrated in an intense day of high quality exposure to the practical dimension of this core subject.

Impressive also was the work being done for a project for the *BT Young Scientist & Technology Exhibition* by two students, who had surveyed students and staff as a starting point of their investigation. The school has a good tradition of encouraging students with special interests and higher capability and aptitude.

College and university open days are attended by groups of students under the aegis of the guidance department. This is a force for motivating students to consider the widest range of vocational options possible and for broadening horizons, given a low historical tradition of further education in the area. There are well developed links with nearby Athlone Institute of Technology for various co-curricular and vocational-development activities.

4. QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN SUBJECTS

4.1 Planning and preparation

The collaborative nature of planning in the four subjects inspected as part of the WSE is commended. Good planning systems are in place in the school and subject departments are well organised. Teachers of subjects meet formally to plan their work and also confer regularly between meetings. Where appropriate (in SHPE, for example), there is also consultation with teachers of other subjects in regard to planning. In order to develop teachers' skills and to share responsibility, it is recommended that the function of subject coordinator be rotated in all subject departments as a matter of course, as happens already in most subjects.

Good work has been done in developing subject plans in the four subjects inspected. Examples of recent developments noted in some subject areas are the articulation of objectives in terms of student learning outcomes and the inclusion of strategies for the inclusion of students with special educational needs. The subject plans contain schemes of work and are generally detailed and comprehensive. They also contain lists of appropriate teaching resources. Individual teachers' short-term planning was very good in the case of the lessons observed.

To build on the very good practice in subject planning, it is recommended that the practice of writing schemes of work in terms of student learning outcomes be extended to all subjects and that all subject plans should specify teaching methodologies and assessment modes appropriate to the subject. It is also recommended that subject planning take cognisance of the differing needs and learning styles of students. In the case of languages, the subject plans should indicate how the four main language skills are to be integrated in the delivery of the syllabus.

4.2 Learning and teaching

In the great majority of lesson observed, the quality of teaching was good or very good. Lessons were well structured and had clear aims and learning outcomes, which were usually communicated to the students at the outset. Lesson content was appropriate and there was good continuity with prior learning. The teachers demonstrated a good level of competence and skill in their subject areas. In the best cases, the pace of lessons was good, students were challenged and material was differentiated to cater for the various needs of students, including the more able. In a minority of cases, the pace was pedestrian and the needs of the more able students were not being met. Students' behaviour and management was very good, the interaction between teachers and students was warm and affirming and, in most lessons observed, the students were motivated and engaged by classroom activities.

In lessons observed, students were generally active in their own learning and, in most cases the quality of student learning was very good. The work contained in students' copybooks, their responses during lessons and the performance of the majority of students in the state examinations all offer clear evidence that the students are performing adequately, in line with their aptitudes and abilities.

In building on the already good practice in teaching and learning, the following areas might usefully be the focus of school self-evaluation and continuing professional development: effective integration of ICT in the teaching and learning processes; differentiation in the delivery of lessons, especially to meet the needs of more able students; and attention to the style and type of questioning used in class.

4.3 Assessment

Practices regarding the setting and correction of homework are very good in the subjects inspected. Students' written work is diligently monitored by their teachers and the students' notebooks, copybooks and folders are very well kept.

Teachers keep records, using the standard format agreed at whole-school level, of students' performance and progress. The results of class and formal tests are monitored by student-support teachers and, if there are concerns about a student's progress, the learning-support teacher meets the class teacher to discuss the most suitable supports for the student.

Parents are kept well informed about their children's progress. Reports are issued to parents following all formal examinations. An interim report also issues to parents of first-year students in October, while parents of students in examination classes receive reports in October and following the mock examinations in February.

5. QUALITY OF SUPPORT FOR STUDENTS

5.1 Inclusion of students with additional educational needs

The recognition in the mission statement of the uniqueness of every individual member of the school community, who has potential to grow academically, spiritually and socially, establishes the agenda for much of the school's work and sets the tone for its support of students. The quality of support for students is very good and the continuing existence of this small school is in no small part a result of sensitivity, practicality and success over many years in meeting their holistic needs and in recognising that their needs and aspirations can be furthered by positive action by all parts of the school community. The aptitudes, abilities and special educational needs of students are referenced in the school's whole-school policies and conscientiously carried through in action.

The support team comprises the deputy principal, one resource teacher, three SNAs, the guidance counsellor, the HSCL [coordinator](#) and the chaplain. One of the resource teachers is at present being trained for the role, is attending a recognised course and being supervised in the work with SEN students in the school. The team are highly aware that students have only one chance to benefit from schooling and this gives them inspiration, cohesion and focus in relation to their often challenging work. There are twenty-two resource hours available to the school at present, spread between two teachers.

Good systems are in place for supporting students with special educational needs that are reactive, and have been developed, updated and grown over time. The resource teachers' role, quite apart from working directly with students, is also to resource the teachers for working with the SEN cohort, at whatever point in the five-year cycle they are encountered. This support of teachers for SEN work and participation in resource interventions is very positive and proactive and has ensured that SEN is a whole-staff responsibility. The collaboration between teaching staff and SEN personnel that has been achieved, the school's policy of inclusion and the supports available are of a high standard, have been effective and have benefited their target cohort immeasurably. The principal and deputy principal have had a huge influence in achieving the good conditions and the culture shift

that has made SEN a whole-school responsibility. All this is very much in accord with the ethos and is a practical acceptance of special educational needs, which is ultimately focussed on enabling these students to take any examination they need to during their schooldays. The school's extracurricular programmes help the SEN cohort to develop aptitudes other than the academic. The SEN team's awareness of multiple intelligences allows their focus in planning for, and delivering to, this group to be holistic.

The HSCL coordinator is part of the SEN team and has developed the transfer system from the feeder primary schools. Thus, her contact with students' homes and the primary schools allows good information in relation to students with special educational needs to be accessed. On the open night for prospective first years, their parents are enabled to discuss the special needs their children might have and if assessments have been carried out by specialists, are requested that these are made available in advance or on enrolment so that planning and accommodation of students' needs can begin. All this is good practice. Application is made to the Department for resources following enrolment. The resource teacher works with individuals or with groups and spends much time initially on improving organisational skills and confidence.

The school has been conscientious in all matters pertaining to SEN integration and support and makes every effort academically and socially to integrate the young people of the SEN cohort. Peer mentoring by fifth years, who are trained in this social support role, and the staunch anti-bullying stance of the school ensure that SEN integration comes with added help from staff and students.

The teaching staff are cognisant now that default withdrawal of students with special educational needs is not always a positive or sustainable option and the school is reluctant to withdraw these students from languages for resource teaching. No withdrawal is done in first year from core subjects or languages. RE and SPHE are timetabled when possible against English and Mathematics for parallel delivery of mainstream and support teaching. The methodologies of the JCSP, still new to the school, are now also germane to further supporting students with special educational needs and it is recommended that management take all steps necessary to ensure that these are implemented across the full range of subjects available in the school. The set of laptops and trolley, currently on-order for peripatetic access to ICT, will have the potential to enhance the SEN cohort's experience of schooling.

The school has also been sensitive and proactive to the needs of highly gifted students; this is an area that could be focussed on in a more formal way by creating opportunities for students who have higher aptitude in any area of the curriculum. It is recommended that the needs of these students are formally recognised and addressed in the school action plan and in the planning work of all the subject departments.

Currently there are few students for whom English is a second language enrolled and these all are included in the mainstream classes. Special help is available with English to these students and notes home to their parents are translated into the relevant language when necessary. The school's ethos of equity and of helping individuals to develop to the maximum of their abilities applies to all students independently of their nationality or social group. Traveller students are currently few also and the school works with the visiting teacher for Travellers (VTT) for County Longford to ensure their educational needs are fully met. The chaplain and the student council play a role in ensuring that students from minority groups are integrated socially with the student population.

There are good links, referrals and conferrals in operation in relation to SEN with appropriate outside bodies such as National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS), the

VTT and the HSE. The SEN co-ordinator, in association with senior management, is the executive dimension in the school for such interaction.

5.2 Guidance and student support in the whole-school context

Due in part to a good allocation of guidance hours and to the effective application in practice of the ethos, the school has a well-organised and effective guidance process and culture. The guidance department is assisted in planning the guidance programme by four other staff members including the deputy principal. This formalised arrangement allows particular expertise and subject knowledge to be shared. This instance of whole-school participation in aspects of Guidance is another example of the cohesive and forward-thinking culture that the school is developing and is commended.

Effective approaches to career guidance are in place. Once weekly guidance classes are focussed on information giving about courses, as well as the guidance process, and students are given access to the careers cluster inventory. The Reach Programme, an on-line tool for making vocational decisions, is also used to raise awareness and engagement. Increasingly, many students do their Central Applications Office (CAO) application online and training and practice is given for this. Differential Aptitude (DATS) tests are administered in fourth year as a preparation for doing tests in future life. All this is good practice. Higher Education Access Route (HEAR) and Disability Access Route to Education (DARE) programmes are being used to promote further education consciousness in senior cycle. Every student in the Leaving Certificate class has a formal meeting with the guidance counsellor to discuss career options. Students are expected to use their own initiative in relation to researching their vocational interests and aspirations using Qualifax and the internet, and referencing prospectuses which have been made available to them. Parents have been empowered to become, if necessary, involved in the CAO application task; some come to the counsellor's office in school to fill in the application online with the student. [The Higher Education Access Route \(HEAR\) and the Disability Access Route To Higher Education \(DARE\) are being fully availed of to ensure access and to promote participation at third level for disadvantaged students.](#)

Senior cycle Guidance is timetabled opposite games. It is recommended that this is reviewed as part of the decoupling of games from PE, again as part of increasing outcomes, as all students need full exposure to the guidance process.

Guidance is not timetabled in junior cycle though the guidance counsellor has historically gone to students during SPHE classes. First years are given the Non-Reading Intelligence Test (NRIT) and given advice about subject choice at the end of the sampling module. In third year advice on senior cycle choices is provided. The guidance counsellor is integrally active in the information-giving and advice process made available to parents on first year and senior cycle open nights.

The pastoral care team is an effective support for students and comprises the deputy principal, the chaplain, HSCL coordinator, guidance counsellor and staff members. Their main purpose is to maintain an atmosphere of care and respect for every individual student and to be a support to the entire in-school community in times of crises. The team have, on a long-term basis, supported students in a holistic way in a whole-school context. The work of the team is a practical enactment of the school's ethos and of the aspirations of the school policies. The interventions of the care team continue to make a positive impact on the lives of students and support them as they grapple with personal, social and family issues. In the fulfilment of the school's pastoral care responsibilities, there is good integration of action and purpose between senior management, guidance counsellor, post holders, HSCL coordinator, teaching staff, chaplain, outside agencies, local bodies, NEPS and a range of other support services.

The pastoral care team has four formal meetings in the year, and many other ad hoc meetings throughout the school day and term. The team is close knit and share the not inconsiderable burden and pressure of the pastoral role. Frequently, it is the school that deals with students' problems, not the outside agencies. The changed economic context of the locality has been a cause of stress and difficulty with which the school has had to engage through its pastoral response mechanisms. The team has been open to change and refinement in the way it approaches its work and is now, as always, considering strategies for improvement.

There is good communication evident in relation to the pastoral care dimension of the school. Peer mentors have been found to be an asset in the pastoral care area for observation and communication. Parents also alert the team to situations that need attention. The HSCL coordinator is a key person in the care system as she is aware of home situations, is there to support parents and to link with outside agencies, for example Longford Community Resources, who sometimes part fund the school's initiatives and provide access to expert personnel.

Pastoral care work and student support is an important part of SPHE. The care team is focussed on the motto '*support, advise, encourage*'. For two years, the development process to establish a system of teacher mentors, as a layer of pastoral care, who would act to support, advise and encourage, has been underway but has not yet been fully implemented. The mentor role is an optional role for which a teacher volunteers. To be effective, individual teachers must be comfortable with, and have personal aptitude for, the role. It is recommended that this initiative be developed further. It would be desirable to build better gender balance within the pastoral care team and the opportunity to do so through teacher mentors is to be encouraged.

Care and support are the two main aspects of pastoral work in the school. Support includes the promotion of positive behaviour. Student support is very proactive and the school is satisfied that it has good and effective mechanisms in place for this. It is one of senior management's most influential achievements that every member of staff sees themselves as responsible for supporting pastoral care work. The care team reviews its actions and activities at an end-of-year team meeting and examines what worked well and what could be improved, in order to plan for increased effectiveness the following year. All this is good practice. The student council lauded the support systems in place in the school.

6. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT

The following are the main strengths identified in the evaluation:

- Lanesborough Community College is a well-run school. It is welcoming and inclusive, and provides a nurturing framework for students of all aptitudes, abilities and interests in the context of an effective academic, cultural, sporting and personal-development environment.
- The school's ethos emphasises challenge, lifelong learning and responsible citizenship. This ethos is lived out in practice. The spirit of the school is affirming and Christian and is both aspirational and pragmatic. The characteristic spirit is reflected in policies, practices and atmosphere of the school.
- The school has well-developed and productive links with the local community and has an active parents' association and student council.
- The board of management is properly constituted, active, well organised and committed to the school.

- Senior management has demonstrated a sense of leadership and has, through its efforts, developed the school in productive and effective ways.
- Whole-school planning has been a feature of the school's activity and a range of policies are in place. Subject departments are well established.
- A broad range of subjects are available to students for junior and senior cycle, at higher and ordinary level. Commendably, French or German are core subjects for all students. The LCVP and JCSP programmes provide enhancement to the traditional academic options. Excellent co-curricular and extracurricular activities take place to support learning. An increasing number of students now proceed onwards to third-level education.
- Very good supports are in place for student support and guidance and the holistic development of students is, commendably, very important in the school's approach to education.
- The school has, over a decade, modernised and progressed as an educational institution and the change and advancement it has achieved has been due in part to its ability and commitment to self-evaluation and review.

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

- It is recommended that current school plans and policies are drawn together by an overarching long-term action plan for all key areas of school activity which covers the period of tenure of the board of management.
- It is recommended that the school's current focus on improving outcomes and attainment is further amplified and becomes the unifying underlying motivation for planning, ICT use, methodologies used in course delivery, learning styles and student guidance and support.
- It is recommended that the principal builds on his current operational achievements through developing an enhanced focus on educational leadership in his role. It is also recommended that the duties of principal and deputy be reviewed in the interest of balance and equity.
- It is recommended that a review of the duties of post holders are undertaken to ensure that the resources available are deployed in an optimal way to meet the school's current needs and priorities, and reassignments made if necessary.
- In order to support the development of an educational policy focus by the board, it is recommended that all post holders and subject departments furnish a short end-of-year report to it outlining the successes and challenges and ideas for future development.

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 Business – 21 October 2010
- Subject Inspection of Gaeilge – 20 Deireadh Fómhair 2010
- Subject Inspection of Mathematics – 8 October 2010
- Subject Inspection of SPHE – 21 October 2010

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