

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

**Whole-School Evaluation
REPORT**

**Saint Clement's College
South Circular Road, Limerick
Roll number: 64220A**

Date of inspection: 10 February 2012



**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 St Clement's College was undertaken in February 2012. 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 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

St Clement's College is a Roman Catholic secondary school for boys under the trusteeship of the Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer (C.Ss.R.), the Redemptorists. In 2008 a new, fully equipped school building was opened adjacent to the original school.

The school is situated close to the centre of Limerick City. It participates in the Common Application System in Limerick and the student body is representative of the diversity of social backgrounds and educational needs that present amongst students in the adjacent areas of Limerick City and County. The current enrolment is 470.

The inclusiveness of the student intake is a strength to be maintained as the school continues to grow and develop within the transformed facilities of the new school building.

1. QUALITY OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT

1.1 Characteristic spirit of the school

The trustees' vision for St Clement's College is encapsulated in their Ethos Statement which provides clear descriptions of the respective roles of trustees, students, parents, staff and board of management. The school is supported in the implementation of its mission by this well-defined vision. The characteristic spirit is explicit in the school's mission statement. The stated aim of the school is to facilitate the full academic, personal, spiritual and social development of each student in a Catholic, caring, respectful and safe environment.

The members of the Trust Board, appointed by the Redemptorist Congregation, have wide-ranging educational and managerial experience and skills. This board is the executive body charged with executing the role of the trustees. It maintains links with other trustee organisations and is an active participant in the Association of Trustees of Catholic Schools (ATCS). The Trust Board fulfils its role effectively, providing the school with clear guidance and support. The trustees visit the school annually in a formal capacity and maintain regular contact with the school to inform the implementation of their clearly stated vision. Additional supports for students and their families provided by the Redemptorist Congregation, including a pastoral outreach worker, bear testament to the trustees' commitment to the care of their students.

While many of the school's policies and procedures are explicitly based on the stated characteristic spirit as expressed in the mission statement, it is suggested that clear links to the mission statement be provided in all policy documents as these are reviewed. The

school's ongoing success in implementing its mission was particularly evident to the evaluation team in the welcoming, calm and positive atmosphere of the school.

1.2 School ownership and management

The board of management is properly constituted. The board maintains close contact with the trustees. An annual report is furnished to the Trust Board by the board of management. This report tends to be wide ranging, providing the context in which long-term challenges are identified and actions are planned and taken by the board of management to meet them. The opportunity presented in the annual report to explicitly and comprehensively link school development plans to the guiding philosophy of the trust board should be more fully explored and embraced.

Training for board members is provided in collaboration with the Trust Board. While the training is specific to members of this board of management, it is closely linked to the training provided by other trust organisations. The wide experience of the trust board members is brought to bear on the guidance and training of the board. The training forms a solid basis for the effective operation of the board.

The board demonstrates a good awareness of its responsibilities, including its statutory obligations, and it discharges its functions effectively. Regular meetings are held for which agenda and minutes are provided. The most recent minutes include the report for parents and teachers agreed at the end of the meeting. The agreed report clarifies those matters to be relayed to interest groups while maintaining essential confidentiality. This is good reporting practice that supports effective communication between the board and its nominating partners and should continue in all future board meetings.

The board has engaged with senior management, the teaching staff, parents and students in the development of school policy in specific instances. The recent adoption of an amended code of behaviour, with an arrangement for its review after one year, is an instance of such a well structured approach to policy development. In developing an overall school-policy review and ratification procedure a register of policies should be compiled. A rolling-review approach, that would spread the work load from year to year, should also be adopted. The overall procedure should be collaborative and should transparently involve the board, senior management, teachers, parents and, as appropriate, students. The reviewed and amended enrolment policy seen in the course of the evaluation should now be presented to the board for ratification as a matter of urgency.

Successive boards of management have prioritised the building of the new school and this, followed by a smooth transfer of activities to the new building, has been very successfully accomplished. The care of students, inclusion, staff development, literacy and numeracy strategies, chaplaincy and outreach ministry were identified by the board as priority areas for development. These priorities should now be crystallised by the board of management to provide a clear statement of direction at whole-school level.

1.3 In-school management

Effective school leadership has led to successful development in a range of areas in recent years including adapting to the new building, expanding the curriculum and developing a mixed-ability approach to class formation. Stability through this time of development has been helped by a high level of continuity within the staff team, in particular within the middle-management team. A challenge for effective leadership is now presented by the need to rebalance management structures and duties at a time of increased staff turnover

and reduced resources. Reorganisation of management is at a crucial stage. Current and imminent staff retirements and emerging school needs provide opportunities for renewal and growth that need to be seized and managed effectively.

The principal and deputy principal work very well together to provide coherence and consistency as a senior-management team. There is clarity surrounding their joint and individual roles. A current challenge for senior management is the need to ensure that any changes to their functions that come about as a result of the need to reassign some middle-management duties are balanced and serve to distribute leadership to other staff members in an appropriate way.

There is an urgent need to review the duties attached to all management positions. A review of the duties of post-holders, last completed three years ago, is planned and this review should be thorough and collaborative, involving all teachers and management staff. The review should be based initially on a comprehensive audit of the essential requirements of the school. The process should then lead to a fair, proportionate and appropriate assignment of duties. A schedule of duties of senior and middle management, and of other teachers who can support the effective functioning and development of the school, should then be agreed. A level of formality should be introduced to target setting and performance review related to allocated post-of-responsibility duties. This more formal process should inform ongoing management of staff resources and planning for meeting school needs.

Senior management faces the urgent challenge of leading the school through a period of unprecedented change and reorganisation. Success in meeting this challenge depends on a timely and clear response by the school as a whole, so that the engagement and collaboration of the whole staff, the board and the trustees can be channelled effectively to maintain essential supports for students. Full advantage should be taken of innovation in administration, such as the planned roll-out of computer-based systems for attendance recording and tracking. Such innovation should be harnessed for the redeployment of some staff resources to other duties, including teaching duties where required.

Communication between senior and middle management now takes place principally in an informal context. Year heads meet the principal on a one-to-one basis as the need arises. While such communication can be effective in maintaining a sense of common purpose, it does not provide an efficient means of collaboration for growth and development at this level.

Communication is also supported by regular meetings of the whole staff during centrally-agreed planning time. These meetings are being used for a range of purposes and have to a great extent replaced other meetings, such as the weekly student care meetings which were part of the student care structure in the past. Care should be taken to ensure that effective and context-appropriate communication is maintained within teams involved in student care. While the need to rationalise the amount of time devoted to meetings is acknowledged, consideration should be given to reinstating adequate regular meeting times for student care and special educational needs co-ordination purposes outside of the staff-meeting context. These team meetings would contribute to increases efficiency in whole-staff meetings as well as supporting team communication and effectiveness in the provision for students.

The staff handbook has been a very useful document to communicate information on school structures and roles. Now as the school enters a period of rapid change it is particularly important that the handbook be updated to reflect current procedures, practices, roles and responsibilities as these emerge from the planning process and necessary reviews.

Continuing professional development (CPD) has been provided both by external providers and from within the staff covering areas such as assessment for learning and provision for exceptionally able students. Planning for such CPD is conducted centrally under the guidance of the school planning co-ordinator. Records of these inputs show the good work that has been done to provide an effective model of staff development to be followed as the school grows. In light of the imminent changes within middle management, a particular focus should now be placed on CPD to support teachers about to undertake specific new duties. The school may wish again to consider applying for a place on the Post Graduate Diploma in Special Educational Needs (PGDSEN) course as suggested in the earlier inspection report on special educational needs.

St Clement's is inclusive in its intake and very good practice is followed with regard to admissions. This is in line with the commitment of the trustees to welcome and cherish diversity. The text of the admissions policy, which is currently under review, should reflect practice in the school more precisely. A clear statement that students who may have special educational needs are welcomed to the school should be considered for inclusion.

The student council is organised effectively and comprises class captains elected by the students and school captains selected by the staff. This structure maintains the tradition of appointed captains in the school with an added democratic element. Junior cycle class captains are elected by a straight vote system in various lessons. Consideration should be given to the organisation of suitably structured elections for class captains within civic, social and political education (CSPE) lessons in all classes in junior cycle. This would add to the educational value of the experience for students. The possibility of all members of the student council being elected should also be considered as a more accurate modelling of democracy in society. The student council is involved in the life of the school in significant and wide-ranging ways. Consideration should be given to providing regularly updated space for the student council on the school website.

The school has a coherent attendance strategy which seeks to encourage responsibility among students and provides parents with a continuous record of attendance. The strategy is presented clearly and concisely in the student journal. Students' absences are recorded and passed to the deputy principal and the year heads in the first period of the day. The system has developed in response to the needs of the school. The feasibility of replacing the present paper-based attendance tracking and recording system with computer-based logging by teachers is being investigated. This development has the potential to increase efficiency and free administrative and managerial resources for other essential duties. It should be prioritised as part of school development. The existing text-messaging service for communication with parents should be considered as part of the planned electronic system for monitoring lateness and attendance.

Successful interventions to improve attendance and time-keeping were outlined in the course of the evaluation. The effectiveness of such interventions should be systematically measured. Baseline data should be recorded and regularly reviewed to establish the effectiveness of the attendance strategy. This approach should be used to quantify and track the impact of specific interventions on targeted patterns of absence or late-coming.

There is an active, properly constituted parents' council, affiliated to the National Parents' Council Post-primary (NPCpp), which is well established and effective in fulfilling its functions. The parents' council works closely and collaboratively with management, staff and students in many activities and functions in the school. Members of the executive committee of the council have undergone training with the NPCpp and ongoing contact with that organisation, as reported to the evaluation team, is a source of valuable advice. Every effort is made to ensure balance, including gender balance, on the executive which has eighteen elected members. Regular executive meetings are held, always attended by a

representative of senior management with whom the parents report very good communication. It is suggested, as a means of improving communication between the board of management and the parents' council, that the parents' representatives on the board should be made ex-officio members of the executive committee of the council.

Communication of the parents' council executive with parents is maintained principally through verbal reporting as the opportunity arises. Some space has been provided for the parents' council on the well-developed school website. As a further development, consideration should be given to regular updating of the parents' council space, perhaps by parents skilled in the use of information and communication technology (ICT), as an added support for communication with parents.

The parents' council is informed in relation to school policy, particularly in areas of policy that most directly impact on their sons' experience of school such as the code of behaviour, the child protection policy and the anti-bullying policy. There is an awareness of the council's role in channelling parents' views on school policy issues to senior management and the board of management. This level of involvement of the council should be further strengthened, however, to provide a formal role in policy development and review. The parents' council should liaise with the school planning co-ordinator to clarify and further develop its ongoing role in policy development.

The school forges links with the community in positive ways. Following agreement with the board of management, the Polish community makes use of the facilities of the school to provide weekend lessons following the Polish curriculum. A small number of students from the school who come from a Polish background also avail of these lessons. There is scope to explore possible links at staff and student level between St Clement's College and the weekend school. Through such links the educational and cultural formation of all students might be advanced.

The school management and staff encourage and support positive community awareness and involvement as a formative influence on students. This aspect of the school gives practical expression to engagement in the community and the search for social justice, values clearly stated by the trustees in the published Ethos Statement. Students' involvement in the organisation of an annual Christmas dinner for senior citizens of the locality is one example of such involvement.

The gymnasium and other sports facilities are made available to community and sports groups. The further expansion of links with the wider community is recognised by the board as an area for development. The school maintains effective links with relevant agencies including the National Education Welfare Board (NEWB), the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) and the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS).

1.4 Management of resources

The school fulfils its responsibilities with regard to providing students with the teaching time expected under the rules of the Department and under the terms of Circular Letter 0034/2011, *Standardisation of the School Year*. The number of teaching days provided is in line with the required minimum provision of 167 days. The timetable provides for twenty-eight hours of instruction per week.

The total allocation of teaching staff at the time of the evaluation is 33.12 including ex-quota allocations of one whole-time equivalent (WTE) for principal, 0.77 WTE for guidance counsellor, 0.7 WTE for learning support and 1 WTE for resource. This teaching staff is appropriately deployed for the intended purpose. Teachers are timetabled in line with their qualifications and interests. Teachers are usually assigned to teach each of their

qualified subjects in rotation. Such rotation allows for greater flexibility in the assignment of teachers, developing and maintaining a wider distribution of skills across a subject department. Additional human resources provided by the trustees and the school are a pastoral outreach worker and a laboratory assistant who is shared with a neighbouring school.

The school enjoys an exceptionally well designed and constructed building, ancillary facilities and surroundings. The high standard of management and maintenance indicates commitment and dedication by the caretaking staff, management and the whole school. Students and parents express their sense of pride and satisfaction regarding the facilities, which are utilised well to provide effective learning spaces in classrooms, practical rooms, physical education areas and common areas.

The installation and commissioning of information and communication technology (ICT) equipment throughout the school has been well managed and its use for teaching and learning and administration is well advanced. Co-ordination of development in ICT and innovation in the introduction of software has successfully supported the staff in deriving increasing benefit from the ICT infrastructure.

Management and staff take an active approach to the management of health and safety which includes regular risk assessments and effective reporting and record keeping. As the safety documentation is reviewed, the *Guidelines for Managing Safety and Health in Post-Primary Schools* should be consulted using the tools and templates provided in Part Two. Use of the Guidelines will build on the good work already done and will help to streamline and validate the procedures and practices already in place.

Environmental awareness is high in the school, encouraged by student involvement in activities such as the Green Schools Programme where they hope to complete the litter and waste theme this year and aim for the energy theme next year. The student council leads students, by example and spot checks, in achieving these goals. It is reported by the students and management that there has been a great improvement in the control of litter and this was confirmed by the inspectors' observation of the school and its environs. A sense of responsibility in environmental matters permeates the life of the school.

2. QUALITY OF SCHOOL PLANNING

2.1 The school plan

Some good work has been done in planning, led in many instances by the planning co-ordinator, who has been proactive in identifying specific areas for development. The programme co-ordinator and the ICT co-ordinator, among others, have also provided leadership in planning in their areas of interest. The planning co-ordinator has been proactive in initiating examination of the provision for exceptionally able students. A number of teachers have undertaken related on-line training with the Institute of Child Education and Psychology (ICEP). The planning co-ordinator also provides a link to the *Equality of Challenge Initiative* run under the auspices of the Special Education Support Service (SESS).

The planning process has been collaborative, with small effective planning groups being formed for specific purposes that maintain wide consultation with other teachers. The sustained development of a comprehensive, coherent, and productive ICT plan provides an instance of very effective planning practice. Initially, ICT planning involved collaboration between the teachers of Guidance, Technology and Art and the ICT co-ordinator. Following completion of a relevant National Centre for Technology in Education (NCTE)

on-line course, the co-ordinator invited interested teachers to form the e-learning team. The e-learning plan being developed and implemented by this team has specific, clearly stated, realisable targets and timeframes for their achievement based on the NCTE template.

The planning co-ordinator reports to teachers at regular whole-staff meetings. Efficiencies should be gained, however, by defining the role of the planning co-ordinator more clearly and by forming a small representative overarching planning group to work with the co-ordinator. The role of the planning co-ordinator and the proposed overarching planning group would be more clearly focussed on co-ordinating planning tasks being undertaken by various groups, subject departments, programme teams and policy-review groups. The co-ordinator should also act to monitor, and where necessary to initiate, contact between the various groups and partners involved in reviewing and proposing amendments to draft documents, including the board of management, the parents' council and the student council.

Among areas for development identified during discussions in the course of the evaluation was the provision of a whole-school plan for learning and teaching. This plan is being initiated at present to meet the educational needs of exceptionally able students, students with additional educational needs and all other students. This is a very positive development in the school that might be broadened to constitute a school improvement plan. The provision of such a school improvement plan will be in line with proposed further developments in school planning.

The school is reflective in its practice and aware that its work has achieved positive outcomes for its students. It has a commendably balanced focus on the outcomes for students, in terms of achievement in certificate examinations and also in developing their full potential in all other areas. In the context of the changes taking place at present, additional opportunities are presented for self-review and self-evaluation. The development of these opportunities should form an integral part of planning, to be repeated in each school planning cycle. Areas to be addressed might be drawn from student achievement, attendance, retention, literacy and numeracy, educational progression of students and partnership with parents and others. Taking a school improvement focus to aspects of school life, as required under the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategy, is advised. Planning at whole-school and subject level should set targets and implement action plans to address issues. Success in school self-evaluation will depend on the further development of systems for gathering quantitative data and such systems should be put in place in each area to be addressed.

Confirmation was provided that the board of management has formally adopted the *Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools* without modification and that the school is compliant with the requirements of the *Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools*.

3. QUALITY OF CURRICULUM PROVISION

3.1 Curriculum planning and organisation

The range of curricular programmes provided fully supports the needs of the students. The school has shown commitment to maintaining programmes, in particular the Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) programme. This is in line with its philosophy of inclusion.

The subject range is broad and the school has actively engaged with further development of the curriculum. Physical Education is timetabled for all classes. Technology is offered in both junior cycle and senior cycle and in the Transition Year (TY) programme. Its success

in the school is testament to earlier successes in planning for diversification of the curriculum. Other areas of development in the curriculum in recent years were the introduction, for a time, of Applied Mathematics and a second European language, German. Applied Mathematics continues to be offered to TY students and this may enable its reintroduction to examination level. Music has been offered at senior cycle for a number of years.

Students currently in first year are all assigned to mixed-ability class groups and it is intended to continue this practice throughout junior cycle. This is a positive development for which school management is commended. Effective leadership and planning are now needed to investigate the implications of mixed-ability class formation in all subjects, to make a clear statement of policy in this regard and to implement the agreed policy in each subject department. The introduction of mixed-ability class formation should be considered in TY in line with the philosophy of the trustees, the conviction of the board and the principles of the TY programme.

Curriculum planning has been actively pursued under the direct leadership of the principal. It is suggested that a curriculum planning group of teachers who express a particular interest in the task, interested parents and perhaps students should be formed to explore the possibilities for further development of the curriculum and to report to the planning team, staff and management.

The new school building provides exceptionally good facilities for the teaching of Home Economics, Technical Graphics and Design and Communication Graphics but these subjects are not provided in the existing curriculum. Parents and students expressed interest during the evaluation in the use of these facilities. While a major extension of the curriculum under present circumstances can only be a longer-term aim, it is urged that planning continue to explore all possibilities, particularly within TY where a cookery module has been provided successfully in the past. The possibility of initiating mutually beneficial sharing of resources with the neighbouring schools should also continue to be explored on an ongoing basis.

The school timetable is well designed to meet the needs of students and the requirements of the subjects and programmes currently being provided.

3.2 Arrangements for students' choice of subjects and programmes

It is the policy of the school that all students undertake TY. It is evident that some students may be finding the TY programme overly challenging. In these circumstances the special educational needs department should provide suitable supports, perhaps adopting a team-teaching approach, to ensure that all students can benefit fully from the TY programme.

At senior cycle students choose between LCA and the established Leaving Certificate programme. The programme co-ordinator consults with teachers when the students are in TY to identify students for whom LCA may be the preferred choice. Parents are then consulted and the implications of the decision are discussed. The availability of LCA is presented in school information from the initial contact with parents before enrolment. The procedures in place for consultation with parents and support of students regarding programme choice are effective.

The procedure and process of subject choice is fair and transparent and where parents or students bring problems to the attention of management measures are taken, where possible, to meet their needs and subject preferences. Students in junior cycle choose one from the optional subjects of Art, Technology and Music. Experience of each of the subjects is provided through a short taster period at the beginning of first year. Further

support for subject choice is provided by subject teachers, class teachers and year heads. In senior cycle, subject option bands are designed to suit the preferences expressed by the students towards the end of TY. Following an initial open choice, students are presented with subject option bands from which they choose. Students are supported in making choices by experience of all the optional subjects in TY modules. In the course of TY guidance lessons and one-to-one meetings with the guidance counsellor, arranged by means of self-referral forms, provide additional advice and support.

3.3 Co-curricular and extracurricular provision

There is a wide variety of extracurricular activities available to students. The long sporting tradition of the school is well represented in the range of sports provided which includes individual athletics disciplines such as shot put, discus and javelin, as well as team sports including rugby, soccer, hurling, Gaelic football, badminton and basketball. Students express their satisfaction at the ease with which all those who wish to play on a team can get a game. It is a positive reflection on the school that it sees its provision for sport as a means of enhancing its inclusiveness. The generous involvement of teachers in training and supporting teams is supplemented by senior students who coach first year teams as part of their *Gaisce* award activities. Among the range of other activities that support and enhance learning are drama sessions for second and third year students and debating and public speaking for senior students. Teachers also give generously of their time in providing these activities for their students.

4. QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN SUBJECTS

4.1 Planning and preparation

Subject planning is well established in the school. In addition to formal planning meetings held by each department there is also regular informal contact between subject teachers to offer support and share resources. Each department has a subject convenor and it is advised, where not already the case, that this role rotate periodically, perhaps annually or biennially, within the subject department. When subject teachers meet formally, opportunities should be provided for individual teachers to present a resource or strategy they use in their practice or have gained from further study.

During the evaluation, there was a consistency of good practice across departments with in respect to individual lesson planning. Short-term lesson planning was seen to be comprehensive and teachers had prepared many additional resources that were well used to support students' learning. There were also some good examples of the use of ICT both as an aid to teaching and in providing additional materials to support students in their learning.

Some progress has been made in subject department planning. However, there was scope for further development of programmes of work which should, where relevant, be common for each year group and should be developed beyond a list of content. These programmes should also provide a focus on learning outcomes and methodologies to support differentiation. The accessibility of the school's computer network provides a good resource for ongoing work on the programmes of work and central storage of resources as already seen in business subjects.

Following on from the analysis of certificate examination outcomes, which is undertaken annually, subject departments should carefully monitor learning outcomes for different year groups ensuring that students' skills are developed in an integrated and incremental manner. Lesson materials should be differentiated to facilitate higher and ordinary level candidates and should also focus on students' literacy development.

Based on the findings and recommendations concerning TY modules included in the subject inspections, it is recommended that the TY programme and subject modules be reviewed. The review should focus on increasing students' practical involvement with subjects and further differentiating their learning experiences in this year from those in fifth year and sixth year.

4.2 Learning and teaching

The overall standard of learning and teaching in the lessons observed was good, ranging from fair in a few cases to very good. Student learning was enhanced by the positive atmosphere and affirmative environment created by means of very good classroom management.

Positive features of the methodologies employed included some good examples of linking lesson content to the everyday life experiences of students and the use of visual aids and of ICT to support learning. In a number of lessons, the intended learning outcomes were written on the board and shared with students at the outset before being reviewed at the end. This strategy should be used in all lessons to evaluate and consolidate learning.

Students' enjoyment and engagement were most evident when they were active participants in the learning process. This was facilitated through pair work, discussions, written work, and experiential learning opportunities. More consistent use of pair work and of other co-operative learning strategies is recommended across all subject areas.

Strategies that supported the development of students' literacy skills included a good focus on developing students' understanding of key terms and on encouraging students to record them in some lessons. The creation of print-rich environments also supported learning in some cases. It is recommended that subject departments agree consistent approaches to developing literacy skills within the teaching of their subjects. Areas for discussion should include setting departmental expectations about the layout and presentation of student work, teaching note-making as well as note-taking, and supporting the development of extended written answers, possibly through teacher modelling using ICT. It is also recommended that subject departments compile glossaries of subject-specific terms for each year of study for use by the additional educational needs department, while working with that department to identify additional strategies for supporting students' learning within the mainstream setting are also recommended.

4.3 Assessment

Summative assessment takes place through in-house examinations at Christmas and in the summer. Mock examinations are held in the spring for students taking the certificate examinations. Feedback is provided to parents by means of twice-yearly reports and at scheduled parent-teacher meetings. The student journal is also used to communicate information on students' progress, when necessary.

The good practice of administering common end-of-term assessments is in place in some subject departments. This practice should be further extended to monitor consistency in learning across all year groups. In some subject areas the modes of assessment have been broadened and end-of-term examination marks are aggregated with marks from assessment of students' practical work, written work and other tasks completed during the term. This is good practice as it acknowledges achievement across a wider range of students' work.

Formative assessment of students' progress was an ongoing feature of lessons. Questioning formed an integral part of assessment. Best practice was observed where a mix of

questioning strategies, including lower-order questions and higher-order questions, was used. There was scope for increased integration of higher-order questions in some cases, to extend students' analysis of topics and to develop higher-order thinking skills. Homework is regularly set, and generally is well monitored, with some excellent written feedback given in some cases. Further development of such formative feedback is recommended.

5. QUALITY OF SUPPORT FOR STUDENTS

5.1 Inclusion of students with additional educational needs

The care of all students is given a high priority by management, staff and the whole-school community. This caring approach is to be seen in the policies implemented for the inclusion of students with additional educational needs. The school atmosphere reflects a high level of interpersonal respect and consideration that supports effective student care. However, at the time of the evaluation there was a level of uncertainty regarding how current some of the special educational needs policy documentation was. This indicates a need for urgent review of the policy documents. This review should coincide and be consistent with the current work on the admissions policy, reflecting the guiding philosophy of the trustees. It should be the aim of the review to reflect more accurately the reality of student support in the school which was observed by the evaluation team to follow good practice. This review also presents a timely opportunity to monitor the special educational needs provision as the student care structures respond to the current changes in personnel and rationalisation of resources.

The encouragement of positive student behaviour is a major focus of school documentation. Students are presented with a compelling case for positive behaviour in the code of behaviour. Consideration should be given to including an extended statement of short-term rewards for good behaviour when the code is being reviewed.

The needs of students for learning support are identified by the administration of standardised tests following enrolment, by referrals from teachers and parents and by monitoring of in-school test results. The allocation of learning support responds to the changing needs of individual students. The withdrawal of students from lessons, where this is required, is arranged in consultation with students and parents.

Teachers involved in the delivery of learning support meet with the special educational needs and resource co-ordinator at the beginning of the year and again at the beginning of the second term. Consideration should be given to arranging more regular meetings of the co-ordinator and a core special educational needs team. Such regular meetings, with tight agenda focussed on planning for and meeting students' learning support needs, may be essential to provide for effective planning and development in the special educational needs department.

The resources allocated for special educational needs are deployed effectively and for the intended purpose. The learning support provided is most often in the form of small group withdrawal with some team-teaching also taking place. The extended use of team-teaching, encouraged in an inspection report of special educational needs two years ago, is a positive development. The maintenance of a register of students in receipt of additional support, also mentioned in the earlier report, should be used to assist in tracking the effectiveness of the increased use of team teaching and overall effectiveness in the delivery of special educational needs support.

The special educational needs team is well integrated with the staff in general and its members represent a good range of subject specialisms. This supports a good level of

informal communication across the staff and with other subject departments. In conjunction with the changes of personnel currently taking place in the special educational needs and resource department, the opportunity should be taken to clarify once more the structure and roles of the core special educational needs team and co-ordinator and to bring a level of formality to the systems of communication between the department and the whole staff and also to communication with parents.

The need for increased profiling of students' additional educational needs has been identified by learning support teachers as an area for development. It was reported by the special educational needs department that this has been discussed at staff meeting level. There is need for more developed systems to test and re-test students' progress and to capture information to aid planning. These are areas that should be addressed in planning at the level of the special educational needs department as a matter of urgency.

The school is committed to the support of all its students including those who may be experiencing disadvantage. The broader needs of such students are identified and appropriate steps are taken to meet them. The school employs a chef and maintains well appointed canteen facilities for the benefit of all the students. As part of student care and in line with the inclusiveness of the school, these facilities are used discreetly to provide additional support for a small number of students in need.

The year heads play a central role in identifying needs and bringing these to the attention of the principal. The pastoral outreach worker has an important role to play in providing a link between the school and the home in relation to this aspect of the school's work. The school's approach is one of inclusion and it is successfully implemented. Leadership is provided at each level of school management for the achievement of a fully inclusive school. The provision for students for whom English is an additional language (EAL) is delivered effectively by a coherent team of teachers and the EAL co-ordinator.

5.2 Guidance and student support in the whole-school context

Planning by the guidance counsellor is of a high standard. The guidance counsellor's department plan and programmes of work cover all aspects of the work of the guidance department in comprehensive detail making reference to the whole-school guidance plan.

While some initial steps have been taken towards the development of the required whole-school guidance plan, this work should now be given priority. A representative task group should be formed to provide a draft for consideration by senior management, the teaching staff, parents and the board of management as soon as possible. One important aspect of the whole-school guidance plan is to define the roles of various teachers in the delivery of guidance, including, for example, subject teachers, tutors, year heads, the special educational needs team and the student support team including the pastoral outreach worker. Much of the work of defining these roles has been initiated in the guidance counsellor's department plan. The completion of the whole-school guidance plan has particular importance as the school considers how best to maintain its guidance provision in the light of recent changes to its ex-quota allocation and also considers how a chaplaincy service is to be provided. The consideration being given by management and the board to these matters should also influence the drafting of the whole-school guidance plan.

Guidance is supported to a significant extent by the work of the pastoral outreach worker who fulfils a very effective function in communicating with the homes of students, often visiting outside of normal school hours. This is a major positive intervention for the support and welfare of students. Liaison between the guidance counsellor and the pastoral outreach worker ensures efficiency.

There is a high level of awareness on a practical level of the importance of guidance and support of students. The school secretary, in addition to being indispensable for communication and administration, provides a human point of contact and care for students on a daily basis. The special needs assistants are also an integral and highly motivated part of the caring structure of the school. There is an effective buddy system in place to support first year students, co-ordinated by the guidance and religious education departments. Senior student volunteers, who have previously taken part in *Anois*, a residential leadership training programme for students in transition year run by the Limerick diocese, are invited to be buddies.

6. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT

The following are the main strengths identified in the evaluation:

- Additional resources provided by the trustees, including the pastoral outreach worker, are testament of commitment to the care of students.
- The board discharges its responsibilities effectively and provides a wide-ranging written annual report to the trustees.
- Effective school leadership has been well demonstrated in recent times, most notably in the areas of adapting to the new building, expanding the curriculum and developing a mixed-ability approach to class formation.
- The challenges being presented due to changes in personnel and emerging priorities in meeting students' needs provide opportunities for renewal and growth.
- St Clement's College is an inclusive school that encourages positive behaviour and success across a wide range of endeavour among its students
- The school's exceptionally good facilities for teaching and sport are managed and maintained to the highest standard.
- School planning and staff development are supported by productive general whole-staff meetings.
- The subject range is broad and the school has engaged actively with further development of the curriculum.
- The introduction of mixed-ability class formation in junior cycle is a positive development which now requires further planning and an agreed policy in each subject department.
- Generous involvement by teachers supports a wide variety of sporting and other extra-curricular provision.
- The standard of learning and teaching was found to be generally good, particularly when students were active participants in the learning process through pair work, discussions, written work, and experiential learning opportunities.
- The teaching approaches observed had many positive features including the linking of content to the students' life experiences and the effective use of ICT and other resources to enhance learning.
- Student care is a high priority for management, staff and the whole-school community and this generates an atmosphere of interpersonal respect and consideration that supports effective learning.

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

- A structured approach should be adopted by the board with regard to the review and ratification of all relevant school policies.
- The roles and responsibilities of management, including the schedule of duties assigned to post-of-responsibility holders, should be reviewed.

- Advantage should be taken of innovation in administration and the introduction of computer-based systems to allow some staff time to be assigned to other duties, including teaching duties where required.
- Co-operative teaching strategies should be used more consistently.
- Subject departments should agree consistent approaches for the further development of students' literacy skills, including more consistent provision of written formative feedback on their work.
- Arrangements should be made to facilitate regular meetings of student support teams in pastoral care and special educational needs outside of the staff-meeting context.
- The school's special educational needs policy documentation should be reviewed.

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 – 8 February 2012
- Subject Inspection of English – 31 January 2012
- Subject Inspection of Geography – 24 February 2012
- Subject Inspection of Science and Chemistry – 17 February 2011: published June 2011

Appendix

SCHOOL RESPONSE TO THE REPORT

Submitted by the Board of Management

Area 1 Observations on the content of the inspection report

The Board of Management welcomes the report and appreciates its positive tone and its acknowledgment of all the hard work and effort invested in St Clement's by the Trustees, Board of Management, management team and staff over the years.

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

We have already begun implementing some of the recommendations (e.g. resumption of weekly care meetings, review of posts of responsibility) and will, where practicable and where resources permit, continue implementing the other recommendations.