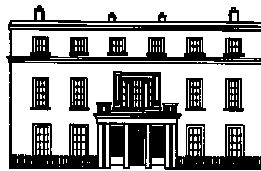


An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Whole-School Evaluation
REPORT

De La Salle College
Waterford
Roll number: 649500

Date of inspection: 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 De La Salle College Waterford 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 five subjects was evaluated in detail: Business Studies; Irish; Mathematics; Physical Education; Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE). A subject inspection of French, carried out in November 2011, has also been included in the suite of subject inspections associated with this evaluation. Separate reports are available on these subjects. (See section 7 for details).

INTRODUCTION

De La Salle College was established in Waterford in 1891, originally as a teacher training college, from 1949 as a day and boarding school for boys, and in 1991 as a day school only. The national schools founded by the De La Salle continue to be among the principal feeder primary schools for De La Salle College. In 2008, the first lay principal was appointed, and in the following year, 2009, the Le Chéile Schools Trust became the trustee body for the school.

The school is located in extensive grounds close to the centre of Waterford city. The substantial principal building has been largely converted to school use. Over the years, additional classrooms and specialist rooms have been built, and facilities have expanded. The school has a large mixed urban and rural catchment, extending from the city into parts of neighbouring counties. School enrolment is 1174 students and the student profile reflects the diversity of population in the catchment area, including students from migrant families. The board of management was given an opportunity to comment in writing on the findings and recommendations of the report, and the response of the board will be found in the appendix of this report.

1. QUALITY OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT

1.1 Characteristic spirit of the school

The school's mission statement is informed by the educational and spiritual principles of St Jean Baptiste De La Salle and commits the school to being "*a learning community where all students are valued and educated in preparation for a meaningful life.*" The La Sallian ethos was widely and positively referenced by staff, some of whom are past pupils and many of whom have been working in the school for many years. During the evaluation, this ethos was seen to inform the positive interactions between staff and students and the prevailing spirit of care for students. Members of the De La Salle community remain committed to and involved in different aspects of school life.

Concern was nevertheless raised during the evaluation that the school's founding ethos is no longer as prominent as it should be in guiding school development priorities. Some of the recent costly refurbishments have little educational purpose, and staff expressed the view that they departed from the school tradition of prioritising supports for needy students. The trustees should note this concern and consider how best to engage with staff with a view to ensuring that initiatives and developments are underpinned by the founding principles, are educationally beneficial and have the broadest possible staff support. In this regard, it is pertinent to refer to the La Sallian maxim "together and by association", which is quoted on the Le Chéile web site and expresses the founder's belief in education as a collaborative enterprise. This is all the more important at a time of considerable change in the ownership and management of the school.

1.2 School ownership and management

Le Chéile provides training for its schools' boards of management and organises conferences with a focus on ethos and Catholic education. In addition to these general supports, there has been considerable contact between Le Chéile and school management in De La Salle College. The board described its relationship with the trustees as excellent. Le Chéile has worked with the board of management and the Joint Managerial Body (JMB) to address difficulties within the school's senior management team, which were evident to the inspection team and are elaborated upon later in this report. The trustees have also discussed the school's enrolment policy and practice with school management in the context of the school's increasing numbers and have brought a broader trustee perspective to this issue, seeking a cap on the first-year intake in line with the school's capacity and that of other educational providers in the area.

The current board of management is properly constituted and is midway through its three-year term. The board meets about five times a year. This schedule does not give the board sufficient opportunity to effectively cover its extensive programme of work: addressing a range of organisational, policy and management issues that naturally arise in such a large school, particularly where significant changes in school management have recently occurred. In the *JMB Manual for Boards of Management*, a board meeting once a month during the school year is indicated. The board is encouraged to reflect on how regularly it needs to meet and on how best to manage its work programme.

Some anomalies in relation to the board's way of working came to the inspectors' attention in the course of the evaluation. Many teachers expressed dissatisfaction at the level of communication and contact between themselves and the board. The board should be made aware of all correspondence received so that its functioning as a body corporate is safeguarded. The present board's confidentiality declaration lists the principal among the board members, and describes the minutes' secretary as the principal's minutes' secretary, rather than the board's. This is incorrect and the chairperson of the board agreed that these points needed to be addressed.

Minutes of board meetings indicate a focus on infrastructural development and financial management. Minutes also record the policies that have been agreed and ratified. While minutes referred to disciplinary issues leading to suspension, there was no record of detailed discussion of individual cases. Furthermore, the board was not aware of areas in which the school was not compliant with legal requirements, including the obligation on school management to make quarterly and annual returns to the National Educational and Welfare Board (NEWB) regarding attendance, suspension and expulsion of students. Statutorily, it is the board's responsibility to ensure that the annual return is made, as stated in the Education (Welfare Act) 2000. These legal requirements should be complied with as a matter of urgency.

In line with standard practice, the principal acts as secretary to the board and presents a principal's report at each meeting. The principal also drafts the agreed report of each board meeting. However, there needs to be absolute clarity as to when decisions can be described as having been approved by the board. Matters that had been discussed at the board but not yet finalised were presented by the principal as decisions in documentation to the inspection team. The board should at all times ensure the clear accountability of the principal to the board when he exercises the functions the board devolves to him.

While continuing to provide all proper support to the principal, the board of De La Salle College is strongly urged to fulfil its managerial role and function independently, ensuring balanced and inclusive discussion of all issues prior to all board decisions.

The educational leadership role of the board has not been a focus of its work to date. Factors that have deflected the board from its work include the lack of balanced

representation to support the spirit of partnership and a lack of full awareness of the important issues that needed to be addressed. The board was described by its chairperson as adopting an 'arm's length' stance, and it is therefore not highly visible at school functions. However, the board has considerable capacity to deliver educational leadership; among the trustee nominees are former school principals who have much experience of managing large and diverse schools. Its capacity to fulfil this role will be of vital importance to the school, not only in addressing issues of compliance but also in leading the school forward, defining its mission and overseeing a strategic school development planning process.

In conclusion, there are significant issues regarding compliance with regulations, communication, relationships, educational leadership, and strategic planning which the board, supported by the trustees, needs to address.

1.3 In-school management

The senior management team comprises the principal, appointed in 2008, and two deputy principals who have served in this capacity for a number of years. The appointment of the first lay principal was undoubtedly a moment of significant change for the school. The principal sees his role as that of decision-maker. The deputy principals' view is that consultation and involvement in decision-making are essential to their effective participation in school management. The principal no longer holds senior management team meetings, but meets separately with each deputy to deal with specific matters as they arise. All three members acknowledged that they do not function as a senior management team. An externally facilitated process aimed at addressing the functioning of the senior staff as a team came to an end in March 2011, concluding that no further progress could be made.

The absence of collaboration and communication between the members of the senior management team has militated against strategic planning and precludes the development of a shared vision by which to lead the school community. It is possible that it will also have a negative impact on the teaching and learning of students, despite teachers' evident commitment to their welfare. Rather than focussing on the past, the emphasis of this report is to point to a way forward for the benefit of students, teachers and school management. This will require changes in approach within the senior management team, in the first instance on the part of the principal as the prime agent of change and having the key leadership role. Many teachers reported that they had welcomed change and innovation, recognising the need for the school to evolve. It is regrettable therefore that the nature and management of change has led to a loss of support from many teachers, and caused division and tension not only within the senior management team but among the teaching staff as a whole.

The principal has a responsibility and challenge as leader to manage change in a way that motivates and empowers the teaching staff as a whole. Meeting this challenge successfully will require the active participation of the full senior management team. Each member of the team needs to participate in confronting and resolving these differences in an objective and professional manner. A senior management team that has the support of the whole staff and has agreed educational goals can create the positive dynamic necessary to effect constructive change and development.

The school has a large complement of posts of responsibility, even after the moratorium and a number of retirements, with seven assistant principal positions and seventeen special duties posts. All but six of these posts entail year head, assistant year head or examinations duties. The programme co-ordination post, which is outside the regular post schedule and has specific conditions and allowances, requires review. In the context of the impact of the moratorium, an organisational matrix, mapping priority areas and line management responsibilities, has been created. The potential within it to create leadership roles and

effective systems has not been developed. Therefore, while significant responsibility lies with a number of post-holders, in particular the year heads, the extent to which this constitutes distributed leadership is limited, as this matrix does not reflect a shared vision.

A review of posts was carried out in early 2009, and the senior management team reported that it was a positive exercise, facilitated externally and conducted in a consultative manner. Top priorities identified in the review, which included such valuable duties as the mentoring of new teachers and the co-ordination of supports for migrant students, did not carry through to the post schedule created or were subsequently discontinued. In the present schedule, a very task-orientated approach has been taken; for example, the role of assistant year head accounts for ten special duties posts, focusing on attendance and uniform checking. This is an ineffective use of the resource, and this view was shared by a number of the post-holders concerned.

It is recommended that the current schedule of posts be reconsidered in the light of the findings of this evaluation, the experience of post-holders and a thorough discussion of the school's present and evolving needs. The proposed review of posts should have a developmental focus and should encompass where necessary a redefining of existing roles to increase their effectiveness.

The management of students is an area of responsibility largely discharged by the year heads, traditionally known in the school as year masters, although it may be timely to change this title. These have assistant principal posts, reflecting their level of responsibility and the standing accorded the role. They move with their year groups from first year to sixth and presented as experienced and hardworking. The year heads draw on the group's collective wisdom to help them in making fair and consistent decisions. While year heads were of the view that students receive a very good level of care, they also expressed concern at the increasing size of the school and its implications for the management of students and the delivery of the curriculum.

A principal's meeting with the year heads, one of whom is also the school guidance counsellor, the deputy principals and the chaplain takes place weekly. The meeting observed during the evaluation had both a disciplinary and pastoral focus. As this is the only scheduled weekly meeting of a group with a designated role in the school, there are many items on the agenda, for example the issue of the timing and format of in-house examinations, and not all can be given the consideration they merit. A greater emphasis on the monitoring of students' educational progress would underpin the year heads' role in leading learning and is therefore recommended.

In the course of the evaluation, inspectors noted serious lapses in relation to the recording of attendance and the failure of school management to make the required returns to NEWB. The year heads reported that a full attendance register is not being maintained. The 'swipe' system in place can be bypassed by students and, while the assistant year heads carry out attendance checks during the school week, this onerous task does not prevent truancy. Poor attendance was noted as an issue, with some high rates of absence in lessons observed, and was also mentioned by teachers. This area merits urgent attention, to comply with legal requirements regarding attendance returns and to ensure the safety of students. An in-class attendance system using ePortal should be investigated.

The school's code of behaviour is made available to all students and their parents, and key points drawn from it are contained in the student journal. The students interviewed felt that they were treated fairly on the whole, and the observed interactions between teachers and students were positive and respectful. Many of the procedures contained in the code of behaviour were observed in practice and suggest that there is an appropriate emphasis on positive behaviour and a measured approach to sanctions by the year heads. A review of the

code to reflect observed practice is recommended, as the code is presented in a legalistic manner. While decisions to suspend are ratified by the board and files are kept, cases are not discussed at length. A record of suspensions examined during the evaluation indicated that some students' cumulative days' suspension are very high. Returns to NEWB should provide a record of such cases and the board must attend promptly to this matter and should reconsider its policy on suspension.

The student council has representatives from each year and they were articulate and well-disposed to the school. As a council, they represent students' interests and lead initiatives of various kinds, including fundraising for specific charities. Some impressive examples of leadership opportunities for students were noted. Students felt that they were included in the consultation process for policies in development. They were, however, disappointed about the closing of the tuck-shop and would have welcomed an opportunity to express their views. The principal attends many of their meetings. The principal should perhaps be the last rather than the first 'port of call' when the council is channelling the views of students to school management. In the context of the recommended review of posts, a liaison teacher role should be considered. The formation of an international student council is a positive initiative to support the specific needs of these students; a careful focus on integration should be maintained.

The parents' association officers see their role as supporting the school's educational provision and the quality of their sons' experience of the school. They expressed the view that parents' participation in school events and in supporting teams and choirs at competitions is more valued by the school than any fundraising role. While they reported low enough attendance at AGMs, attendance and involvement for other school functions was very good. The parents' association has been consulted on a number of policies and reported good links with the board. In seeking to increase the level of parental involvement in the association, the officers might consider using the college web site not only for the generic information it contains relating to parents' associations, but also for more local and specific inputs on their activities and on matters of direct relevance to parents in the area.

1.4 Management of resources

The weekly timetable provides students with the required minimum of twenty-eight hours of instruction time. However, the 2011/12 school year has been eroded to some extent by the staggered return to school at the beginning of the year and by some closures not recorded in the calendar. The early ending of the school year for TY students makes a significant inroad to their time in school. The board should ensure that the minimum school year of 167 days is adhered to for all students. Individual teacher timetables are generally compliant with requirements; however, some permanent teachers' timetables fall below the minimum of eighteen hours of class contact time, where no time allowance is applicable, and this shortfall should be made good to comply with contractual obligations. The school has a total allocation of 74.93 wholetime teacher equivalents (WTEs) from the Department. The principal has secured for the school its full allocation including all relevant concessionary hours efficiently.

An extensive refurbishment programme has been undertaken which has seen significant development of many facilities. These include a fine canteen and a smoothie bar serving nutritious food, and the considerable upgrading of specialist rooms for Art and computing. Overall, the provision of specialist classrooms varies from excellent to inadequate. Designated spaces for Materials Technology are under-provided and, although the refurbished computer room is very impressive, the decision to reduce ICT provision from two computer rooms to one has resulted in limited access. The prudent and strategic use of much more limited funding is now required. In the area of ICT, the provision of a laptop and data projector for every classroom deserves priority. In addition, the inspection team raised some health and safety concerns, including the storage of dangerous materials.

School management should deal very promptly with recommendations and advice from a Health and Safety Authority inspection.

The school buildings are well maintained. The daily task of cleaning is very considerable and the student council members identified a need for greater environmental awareness among their peers, particularly as regards littering. The planned involvement in the Green School initiative is to be welcomed.

2. QUALITY OF SCHOOL PLANNING

2.1 The school plan

The school has engaged with school development planning over the years. Consultation has taken place in relation to a number of policies. The parents' association and student council reported that they have considered the draft CCTV policy, for example. However, the extent to which a consultative system for policy development is embedded was unclear, as conflicting views on this were expressed during the evaluation. The lack of policies in crucial areas such as curriculum development has also led to a situation where *ad hoc* decisions are being made. Recent policy development has been more reactive than proactive. For example, concerns raised over the placing of cameras led to the drafting of a CCTV policy. The evidence of strategic and proactive policy development is limited. However, the occasion where one of the deputy principals presented an input on school self-evaluation at a recent staff meeting is one example of whole-school planning with a qualitative focus. A well-informed policy on provision for students with special educational needs is also in development. A 'Dignity at work' policy has been developed and the training of designated contact persons should be expedited.

Most of the statutory policies are in place, and the board has ratified a number of policies during its term of office. The fact that the board approved an admissions policy capping the 2012 first-year intake in October 2011, yet set the policy aside in December 2011, is cause for disquiet. It is imperative that all statutory policies go through a rigorous consultation and drafting process to ensure their clarity and fitness for purpose.

However, the range of policies has not been gathered into a permanent school plan. The elements of the school plan should be brought together into a cohesive overarching document, which will articulate the school's educational mission and vision. A cycle of development, implementation and review within a consultative structure should be firmly established. A robust admissions policy with specific and soundly-based enrolment criteria should be developed and implemented as a matter of priority. This policy should be informed through consultation with all the stakeholders, including the teaching staff and the trustees.

Overall, a strategic and proactive approach to school development planning should be cultivated; to this end, responsibility for school development planning incorporating school self-evaluation should be among the responsibilities assigned by the board within the allocation of posts of responsibility available to the school. The potentially valuable work on school self-evaluation should be progressed in a timely and measured manner. A continued focus on analysing student outcomes in state examinations as a means of informing teaching and learning practice and curriculum development is desirable. Such matters could be more fully dealt with by an advisory board of studies, and the setting up of such a board is recommended.

An advisory board of studies would clearly have an important role in leading developments in planning curriculum provision. Among the areas that it could consider are school policy in relation to modern language provision; the possible introduction of programmes such as

the LCVP; the timing and nature of in-school examinations; and present and future staffing needs to deliver the curriculum.

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 most of the requirements of the *Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools*. The names of the designated liaison person (DLP) and the deputy DLP should be clearly displayed at the entrance to the school.

3. QUALITY OF CURRICULUM PROVISION

3.1 Curriculum planning and organisation

The school offers a generally broad and balanced curriculum, with a wide range of subjects across almost all curricular areas. Five curricular programmes are offered. In the junior cycle, in addition to the Junior Certificate, one discrete class group in each year follows the Junior Certificate School Programme. In the senior cycle, an optional Transition Year is provided, and students may opt to take the Leaving Certificate Applied programme, although almost all take the established Leaving Certificate, and currently no students are taking LCA. While the school's junior cycle curriculum and some of the TY modules offered would support entry to the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme, LCVP is not offered in the school. The proposed advisory board of studies could consider the suitability of this programme to the needs of students as part of medium-term planning.

Junior cycle provision of subjects, with one serious exception, is satisfactory in most respects. A generally good core curriculum is offered, including Business Studies and a double period of Physical Education. However, the omission from the core curriculum of SPHE including Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE), which is a mandatory junior cycle subject, is a grave issue of non-compliance with Department regulations and requires the most urgent action. At present, SPHE is available only to JCSP class groups and to second-year students. This partial provision militates against the building of the necessary expertise in the teaching and learning methods appropriate to the subject, and the development of an effective subject department. A review of provision of modern languages is also recommended. The study of a modern language is optional from the beginning of first year. Given the modern language requirement for entry to many third-level institutions and courses, an advisory board of studies could evaluate school policy in this area.

The JCSP class in each year has a separate timetable that includes a wider range of practical subjects. JCSP students do not study a modern language, although some would like to. All JCSP students have less class contact time with English and Mathematics than their peers and this is not a satisfactory situation, given the literacy and numeracy support that is relevant to these students. It is recommended that JCSP Mathematics classes be included in the banding arrangement for junior cycle Mathematics, so that JCSP students can access the subject at whatever level is best suited to their individual abilities. The validity of a discrete JCSP class rather than an integrated delivery model should be regularly assessed.

The TY programme offers a good balance of core and optional subjects and a wide range of modules. The design and delivery of some of the TY modules, such as the business module, were commended; all subject departments, especially core subjects, should ensure that their TY planning and practices support the aims of the programme. Modern languages class groups in TY include students who have not studied the language in junior cycle and those who have; this is not satisfactory for either category and should be reviewed by school management and the subject departments.

Leaving Certificate students have five core subjects including Physical Education, and there is good timetable provision for all core subjects. A wide range of optional subjects is on offer, notably in business subjects, sciences and practical subjects. However, the provision and uptake of modern languages merits attention, as the majority of Leaving Certificate students do not take a modern language. RSE is not currently included in the senior cycle curriculum and this non-compliance issue must be urgently addressed, in tandem with the proper provision of SPHE in the junior cycle.

There is an evident pattern of deployment of teachers outside their subject specialisms. In all the subject inspections that took place during the whole-school evaluation, inspectors consistently reported on the ineffective way in which teachers were deployed to deliver the curriculum, and teachers also raised specific instances with the inspection team. The prevalence of the deployment of teachers to curricular areas other than the subjects in which they are qualified and registered is one of the most serious negative findings of the subject inspection reports. This is especially, but by no means exclusively, applicable to first year. An analysis of the first-year timetable indicates that more than a quarter of first-year lessons in any week involve teachers who are teaching subjects other than their degree subjects. It was clear during the evaluation that the disregard for subject specialisms was having a demoralising effect on teachers.

Such deployment impacts on curriculum planning and organisation in different ways. Many teachers teach a subject to only one or two class groups. This creates large subject departments that militate against the development of a core team of subject teachers who are able to develop and deepen their subject expertise, which is especially relevant at a time of imminent curricular reform. The unnecessarily large size of some subject departments makes collaborative planning almost impossible and militates against the frequency and effectiveness of subject department meetings. Poor deployment practice is also limiting the extent to which students retain the same teacher for a subject throughout a cycle.

Deployment of teachers is a key responsibility of school management. The board needs to review current arrangements and to develop a policy based on sound educational principles to inform future practice in the deployment of teachers. Management's role as instructional leaders requires a strategic use of the qualified personnel available to strengthen teachers' subject expertise, to support and affirm teachers' professional standing and to assure the quality of teaching and learning.

In some instances, timetable clashes have compromised class groups' access to facilities. More strategic timetabling to avoid clashes and maximise access to specialist rooms is necessary, as well as the adaptation of existing space to make it suitable for the teaching of technology subjects.

3.2 Arrangements for students' choice of subjects and programmes

Prior to entry, first-year students and their parents are offered a menu of seven optional subjects. From this they choose four in order of preference, of which two will be offered to them. While students reported general satisfaction with the optional subjects they were offered, the demand for certain subjects is placing considerable strain on available resources and the timetable, and may require a more carefully worked-out option system. Some optional subjects are in less demand, and students commented that choices were sometimes made without sufficient knowledge of the subject. The school makes efforts to accommodate students who wish to change subjects. While this is good, the possibility of offering some form of sampling programme could be investigated.

Incoming first-year students are identified as suitable for the JCSP class through reports from primary schools; psychological reports; results from the assessments carried out post-

enrolment but before students enter; and sometimes parental request, especially where placement in a small class group is seen as desirable. The programme is effectively co-ordinated, recently on a more formal basis, although the co-ordinator role does not include selection of students. While JCSP students receive a good level of individual attention which may help them to remain in school and progress to the senior cycle, the curriculum offered to them is somewhat restricted. More clearly defined criteria for selection and greater flexibility in choice of subjects and levels are indicated.

A senior cycle options night is held each February and was observed during the evaluation. Presentations from programme co-ordinators and the guidance counsellor provided detailed information on TY, LCA and the full range of Leaving Certificate subjects offered.

The optional TY programme is increasing in popularity and has been ably co-ordinated and developed. In 2010, provision was increased from two class groups to four. This is a positive development. At the time of the evaluation, it was clear that there was considerable interest in the programme for next year among the third-year cohort, although there was some doubt as to the numbers that would be admitted. TY provision should, as far as possible, allow access to all students wishing to take the programme.

Last year, too few students opted for LCA to make running the programme feasible. School management suggested that more students now felt able to cope with the established Leaving Certificate. It would be useful to investigate the reasons for the declining uptake, as there was some concern among teachers about the progression of certain students from junior to senior cycle.

Parents and students receive helpful information about Leaving Certificate subject requirements for third-level courses before making subject choices. Information on individual subjects comes from subject departments and varies in detail. All subject departments should ensure that students are given a good insight into all of the optional subjects through detailed and attractive descriptions. Students are asked to nominate five optional subjects, of which four will be offered through a 'best fit' model. Students reported satisfaction with this system.

3.3 Co-curricular and extra-curricular provision

A notable strength of the school is the quality and variety of extracurricular activities available. Sport has long been a defining characteristic of the school, and it has a particularly strong reputation in hurling with many notable successes at provincial and national level. The school has shown great willingness to increase the variety of sports offered, with the recent introduction of rugby and growing interest in cricket. It is an aspect of school life greatly valued by the students. Music has also been a traditional feature of school life and the two choirs show an impressive dedication and desire for excellence which has led them to prestigious awards and national recognition. It is a great credit to the whole school community that such different areas of accomplishment are supported and valued, and that participation levels are very high.

Students noted that both formally and informally the school supported their involvement in a wide range of activities, clubs and competitions, many of a co-curricular nature, including debating, drama and various school tours. It was pleasing to see their recognition of the teachers' commitment to them in providing these opportunities. In order to extend the benefits of these activities, subject departments could look at the range of available co-curricular activities relevant to their areas and seek to integrate them, where possible, into their curricular planning.

Through the student council and other means, students have been involved in supporting various charitable causes, often relating to the work of the De La Salle order in the developing world.

4. QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN SUBJECTS

Subject inspections in French, Mathematics, Irish, Business Studies and Business in TY, Physical Education, and SPHE form the evidence base for this section. In all, fifty-four lessons were observed, involving all years, levels and programmes. Teaching and learning processes were of a good quality in a majority of the lessons observed, and very good or exemplary practice was noted in some lessons in many subject areas. In all subject areas, there were lessons where weaknesses were noted, especially in very large subject departments.

4.1 Planning and preparation

Subject co-ordinators are in place in most of the subject areas evaluated. However, the role of the co-ordinator is often not clearly defined. A role description that encompasses development as well as organisation of the subject department should be agreed and included in all subject plans. The good practice of rotating the co-ordinator role occurs in a number of departments, and all departments should aim to rotate the role among the main teachers of the subject. The subject co-ordinator role should have a focus on subject development, whereby meetings have a focus on developing and sharing good teaching and learning practices, and are not confined to organisational matters. Where subject departments were well established, good records of meetings were usually available. The unnecessarily large size of some subject departments also militated against the frequency and effectiveness of subject department meetings.

Most, but not all, subject areas evaluated had subject plans in place. The good work completed to date was commended and some subject plans were described as quite detailed. In all subject areas evaluated, however, inspectors recommended development of the subject plans to include more specific attention to learning outcomes, appropriate teaching and learning methods, literacy and numeracy strategies, and modes of assessment. All subject plans should show the steps taken by the subject department to support the learning of students with additional educational needs. Articulating learning outcomes in terms of what students must, should and could accomplish would be a helpful support for students across the range of abilities.

There were generally positive findings on individual planning and preparation for the lessons observed. In many instances teachers had developed their own schemes of work and accompanying teaching resources. While this is commended, it is desirable that schemes of work and resources are developed on a shared basis to ensure that all students have an experience of the subject that is consistently good.

4.2 Learning and teaching

In many of the lessons observed, teachers clearly stated the planned learning outcomes at the outset, thus creating a sense of purpose. Where this approach was combined with appropriate pacing and the use of participative and active methods, lessons were engaging and productive. Good preparation and use of materials contributed to a positive learning environment in these instances. The least effective practice was noted where there was little use of approaches to challenge or engage students, and where teachers' own subject-specific competence was deficient. In Irish and Mathematics, the delivery of the subjects to ordinary level or lower-ability class groups was poor at times.

Where teachers consistently modelled good use of the target language in Irish and French, this was commended, especially when noted in combination with learning activities that gave students opportunities to use the language themselves in meaningful ways. Some very good examples of an integrated approach to language skills and of purposeful pair and group work were observed. Poor practice was also noted, and the need for teachers to raise their own linguistic competence was pointed out in some instances.

The methodologies praised in other subjects included effective use of the experiential learning cycle in some SPHE lessons; good sequencing of tasks to support incremental learning in Physical Education; class debates and student presentations in business lessons; and discovery learning that gave students opportunities to develop higher-order skills in Mathematics. Such student-centred approaches have wide applications across the curriculum and subject teachers in all areas are encouraged to extend their use.

Inspectors commented positively on the level of student engagement in many of the lessons observed. This was particularly noted where various active learning approaches were taken and where lesson structure gave students a sense of progress and purpose. In some instances however, a level of disengagement was noted. In addition to more active approaches, teachers are advised to employ a greater level of differentiation of tasks so that all students are challenged appropriately.

Questioning strategies were commented on favourably where a good mix of targeted and global questions was used, and especially where teachers posed higher-order questions to students and allowed them to form a considered response. Questioning that required students to reflect on their learning was noted in many subject areas and good practice in one subject area can be very effectively applied to others.

ICT was used effectively in a relatively small number of lessons and its greater and more targeted use is recommended, especially where it creates opportunities for students to engage with real-life aspects of the subject. Other resources were well chosen and used productively, but overall the creation and use of more imaginative resources should be regarded as an area for development.

Inspectors commented positively on the prevailing positive rapport between students and teachers. Classroom management was effective and students were generally co-operative and very well-behaved. Most teachers have their own base classrooms and there was considerable variety in the extent to which these had been developed as learning environments. Very good practice was noted in some classrooms where a visually stimulating and print-rich environment had been created. This good practice should be extended within subject departments, and supported by school management.

There was good evidence of student learning in a majority of the lessons observed. Students' responses and participation showed an understanding of topics and students demonstrated the required skills. Where strategies that encouraged students to engage with their own learning and that developed self-confidence were used, students were observed to respond and make progress. In a significant minority of lessons, there was scope for development with regard to levels of learning. A more structured approach to achieving the learning outcome for all lessons and to ensuring that learning is consolidated is indicated. Students' responsibility for their own progress should also be reinforced through further opportunities for independent learning.

4.3 Assessment

Teachers monitored students' work and participation in lessons, and provided regular clarification and correction. More careful attention to accuracy in grammar and pronunciation is recommended in some language lessons, and this should be done with due

sensitivity. Students received oral feedback on their classwork and homework in many lessons, and this was most effective where it gave clear advice on development and improvement, as well as affirmation of effort and achievement.

Practice with regard to written work and feedback varied widely, even within the same subject departments. In the non-examination subjects evaluated, greater structure, consistency and developmental focus with regard to assessment were especially recommended, as was the need to record and report on students' progress. Scope for development of assessment practices was identified in all subject areas evaluated, and specifically the desirability of a more considered approach to assessment as an integral component of learning.

New formal assessment practices have been introduced in the current year, including formal examinations for all years at the end of the first term. The effectiveness and appropriateness of these should be monitored, and care should be taken to ensure that class contact time is not overly compromised. The development of common papers and assessment tasks provides a good opportunity to consolidate collaboration within subject departments and to identify and agree criteria for assessment, which should be shared with the students.

A school self-evaluation process has been initiated by one of the deputy principals and includes an analysis of outcomes in the certificate examinations. Subject departments should develop this process in order to inform subject planning and delivery, and to assist in setting targets for raising student attainment where indicated.

5. QUALITY OF SUPPORT FOR STUDENTS

5.1 Inclusion of students with additional educational needs

The school supports the inclusion of students with additional educational needs, and makes appropriate reference to the principle of inclusion in its admissions policy. A number of students with special educational needs (SEN) are currently enrolled in the school. Provision has been made to accommodate students with physical disabilities by facilitating access to almost all areas of the school and making assistive technologies available where required.

A policy on special educational needs is being drafted, indicating a more formal and co-ordinated approach to provision in recent times. It is envisaged that SEN provision will be co-ordinated jointly by two teachers with SEN qualifications. Valuable work has begun on systems for formalising the means through which students are identified for SEN support, the delivery of support and the recording of students' progress. Those currently involved in the organisation of SEN provision include one of the deputy principals and the guidance counsellor, who liaises with the educational psychologist assigned to the school and the local SEN Officer.

The school has a large allocation of teaching hours from the Department to support students with additional educational needs. In addition to a permanent allocation of 1.2 WTEs for learning support, the resource hours allocated to meet the needs of specific students total 4.7 WTEs (more than 100 hours). An allocation of 2 WTEs (44 hours) has been given to support students learning English as an additional language (EAL). Most of these resource hours could not be readily accounted for as timetabled support lessons. The good practice of documenting for verification purposes the utilisation of all resource hours should be adopted. This would also assist in measuring the effectiveness of various support interventions.

Timetabled support lessons involve small group or individual withdrawal from mainstream lessons. Other means of support including in-class support through team teaching could be considered. It was reported that the number of teachers delivering resource teaching has decreased; a smaller team allows for a more co-ordinated approach to dealing with specific learning difficulties. Fifth and sixth year students exempt from Irish have a learning support lesson timetabled in its place. This group includes both students with identified learning difficulties and EAL students. Their needs are different and require different support. The allocation for EAL support should be used in a targeted and measurable way to improve the English language proficiency of otherwise able students.

The recent development of systems and processes to identify and support students with SEN is commended. The establishing of a designated team and team structures is the next step. The proposed SEN team should meet regularly to bring together the relevant expertise from the SEN department, senior management, guidance, the EAL department and the JCSP team. SEN co-ordination activities including the assessment and retesting of students, and liaison with teachers, parents and external professionals should draw on the permanent allocation for learning support and be appropriately recorded.

A team of special needs assistants (SNAs) is deployed in a targeted way to give different forms of support to designated students. A useful SNA student information form is used to record details of the student's difficulties and appropriate means of addressing them; these forms can be consulted by the relevant teachers.

Resources to support SEN provision are expanding, for example through the acquisition of up-to-date general and diagnostic tests and a planned reading room aimed at students with literacy difficulties. Staff development days have had relevant SEN inputs both from internal and external presenters. In building the school's capacity to support students with SEN, a crucial area will be the involvement of all subject departments in liaising effectively with the SEN department to ensure a co-ordinated approach to supporting students with SEN.

5.2 Guidance and student support in the whole-school context

The school has a current *ex quota* allocation of 2.14 WTEs (47 hours) for guidance. There are two qualified guidance counsellors on the teaching staff, only one of whom is currently deployed to guidance.

The guidance counsellor draws up a guidance and counselling programme for the year, detailing the various points of contact between the guidance service and students at significant transition points, for example in first year, third year and TY. The guidance counsellor visits primary schools, administers educational assessments and meets parents of incoming students with identified needs. In-school guidance includes providing students and their parents with information on subject and programme choice, conducting aptitude assessments, and assisting students in their progression routes to third-level education or the world of work. This work is carried out very conscientiously.

Guidance lessons are timetabled as a cyclical module in TY and in sixth year. In the junior cycle, the guidance counsellor liaises as required with teachers of religious education; civic, social and political education (CSPE); and SPHE, where it is timetabled. When SPHE provision is fully compliant with Department requirements, it will provide an appropriate point of contact between junior cycle classes and the guidance service. There is scope for development of the facilities available for guidance, as the guidance office is quite small and has limited access to ICT and limited space for meetings and interviews.

The guidance counsellor's work is mainly, though not exclusively, focused on educational and vocational guidance. Personal counselling has been assigned as a responsibility to a

school counsellor post. School management should ensure that all guidance counselling, including personal counselling, is delivered by teachers with a recognised guidance counselling qualification as prescribed in the relevant Department circulars. A whole-school guidance plan is the most appropriate overarching structure in which to set out policies and procedures relating to student guidance and support. While work on such a plan was initiated some years ago, it has not been completed. It would be timely to progress this work in tandem with the other development planning that has been recommended. This would also be an appropriate framework in which to clarify counselling responsibilities. The whole-school guidance plan should contain referral and confidentiality policies.

A home-school-community liaison post existed formerly and was lost but this valuable link is being maintained through the school chaplaincy service. A qualified school chaplain who is a teacher is in place and school management is commended for supporting this position. The wider religious education department also provides support for students with personal difficulties, and holds class events and services in the newly-refurbished oratory.

Although a number of people are involved in supporting students going through personal difficulties, there is no pastoral care team, and there was evidence of some difference in approaches to student support which it would be helpful to clarify through the drawing up of agreed procedures. With the aim of streamlining and co-ordinating student support, a pastoral care team should be established. A dedicated care team meeting should be regularly scheduled once the team is convened.

6. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT

The following are the main strengths identified in the evaluation:

- Teachers showed a high level of care for their students and the interactions between students and teachers observed were positive and respectful.
- The school offers a generally broad and balanced curriculum, with a wide range of subjects across almost all curricular areas.
- A notable strength of the school is the quality and variety of extracurricular activities available and the dedication of teachers in providing them.
- Teaching and learning processes were of a good quality in a majority of the lessons observed, and very good or exemplary practice was noted in some lessons in many subject areas.
- Specific supports for students with a range of needs are in place and are being further developed.

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

- The trustees should seek to ensure that developments are educationally beneficial and are underpinned by the school's founding principles.
- The board should fulfil its managerial role and function independently and rigorously.
- The board should fulfil its statutory responsibilities in relation to annual NEWB returns; the provision of SPHE and RSE; and the ratification of all required policies.
- The principal should exercise his leadership role in a way that motivates and empowers the teaching staff as a whole.

- The senior management team should address internal difficulties in an objective and professional manner.
- The elements of the school plan should be brought together into a cohesive overarching document, which will articulate the school's educational mission and vision.
- The board should develop a policy to inform future practice in the deployment of teachers, to optimally fulfil the specialist needs of subjects.
- An advisory board of studies should be established to lead curriculum planning.
- With the aim of streamlining and co-ordinating student support, a pastoral care team should be established.

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 French – 8 November 2011
- Subject Inspection of Mathematics – 7 February 2012
- Subject Inspection of Irish – 8 February 2012
- Subject Inspection of Physical Education – 8 February 2012
- Subject Inspection of Business – 9 February 2012
- Subject Inspection of Social, Personal and Health Education – 9 February 2012

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Appendix

School response to the report

Submitted by the Manager

Area 1: Observations on the content of the inspection report

The teachers were pleased to note that their level of care for students was recognised as being of high level. Furthermore their interactions with students were observed to be positive and respectful. The on-going commitment of the De La Salle community to the school was evidenced by the involvement of De La Salle brothers in different aspects of school life. The Lasallian ethos was seen to inform the prevailing spirit of care for students.

The recognition in the report that there was good quality teaching and learning in the majority of lessons and exemplary practice in some others is very affirming for the school community.

The school welcomes the positive comments in the report regarding the quality and variety of extracurricular activities provided in the school and the key role that dedicated teachers have played in the delivery of such activities.

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

The recommendations have provided an excellent starting point to address some perceived shortcomings in the governance/management of the school. The appointment of a single manager has facilitated the setting up of structures to ensure that all relevant stakeholders can engage with the recommendations of the report. Several of the recommendations have already been addressed or are in hand. The single manager notes the openness of the school community to embrace the recommendations of the report and the commitment of staff to provide the outstanding education that is the hallmark of De La Salle College Waterford. The manager welcomes the obvious support of the Le Chéile Schools Trust, the De La Salle community, the parents' association and the entire staff to build on the recommendations of the report.